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Kalman's Framing Borders: Principle and Practicality in the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory

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Book Review

Review of Kalman, Ian. 2021. *Framing Borders: Principle and Practicality in the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory*. Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press.

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In 2019, I brought a group of students from my university in southwestern Ontario, Canada—itself a borderland of American, Canadian, and Indigenous lands—to the Sonoran borderlands of the American southwest. During our visit, we were fortunate enough to receive an invitation from the Tohono O'odham people to visit their reservation. Southwest of Tucson, Arizona, the Tohono O'odham Nation reservation is approximately eleven and a half thousand square kilometers, crosses three counties in Arizona, and includes lands across the international border in Sonora, Mexico. While visiting a high school classroom on the reservation, the students were asked if they had a hostile interaction with US Border Patrol (USBP) that included a USBP agent drawing a weapon; there were two or three students in the class who did not raise their hand, indicating that the overwhelming majority experienced such encounters. This experience of the state's violent assertion of settler sovereignty, where it neither resonates nor aligns with the geographical imagination of the Indigenous peoples, was echoed as I read the pages of Ian Kalman's *Framing Borders: Principle and Practicality in the Akwesasne Territory* (2021).

Drawing on Canadian-born sociologist Erving Goffman's frame analysis, Kalman asks: "How do we account for what goes on there [at the border] and what these exchanges tell us about the relationship between Indigenous peoples and state officers? How do these interactions make the border real? How do they deny reality?" (14). Kalman focuses not only on the extent to which the border is part and parcel of what geographer John Agnew (1994) refers to as a "territorial trap" that limits our social, political and geographical imagination but also homes in on the day-to-day material exchanges that have much to instruct on relations between Indigenous peoples and state authorities, and the incessant and continual exercise of state power that is most evident in the borderlands. Engaging the dynamics of contemporary border and mobility management that speak to the experience of sovereignty's recalibration in the face of globalization, as well as sharing insight into the unique border dynamics on Indigenous lands and with Indigenous peoples, Kalman offers a rich, candid account of borders that is both universal and particular in its focus.

Kalman's analysis of the specific border in Akwesasne Mohawk Territory engages a host of themes that dominate contemporary critical border studies. Attuned to questions of identity, Kalman supports his assertion that "the border is a site through which identity is activated and the settler state manifests" (24).

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However, echoing a prevalent refrain in critical border studies (e.g., Vaughan-Williams 2009), Kalman cautions us that the border does not always take place at the border (204). As such, this activation of identity and manifestation of settler sovereignty arises in multiple sites, not least through the problematic and ubiquitous query: "where are you from?" As Kalman indicates, for some, this question is an invitation for critical engagement and the opening of a dialogue about origins, the dispossession of lands, and the scarring of Indigenous land by sovereign power and its borders; alternatively, it may illicit a simple, straightforward retort: "Fuck you!" (88).

Although theoretically astute, Kalman's analysis is, as his title suggests, principled and practical. The critical engagement with how Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) peoples negotiate the question "where are you from?" is not an invitation to a long reflection on theoretical discussions about the nature of identity, self, otherness, and so on. Instead, Kalman offers an earnest and reflexive analysis of practical interactions among peoples in the borderlands, including Border Services Officers (BSOs) at both Canadian and American ports of entry, and introspective methodological reflections about the researcher conducting such inquiries. Kalman makes a series of reflections germane to non-Indigenous researchers conducting research with Indigenous peoples and on Indigenous lands that will be of interest to a much wider audience than solely border studies scholars. Although surprising that Kalman does not focus substantively on the Jay Treaty of 1794—which granted the Indigenous Peoples in Canada the right to live and work freely in the United States and move across the border, and was of much concern in the early stages of post-9/11, US-led re-bordering efforts—Kalman's reflexive, ethnographic engagement with contemporary Indigenous borderlands squarely focuses on the social and the cultural, leaving the historical and policy focused analyses to others.

It is often said that when sovereignty is most vulnerable its behaviour is most raw, and the border can be an obvious site where such vulnerabilities are exposed. Framed by Audra Simpson (2014): 22) as "settler precariousness"—a kind of white fragility—Kalman unpacks his own situatedness in the research through a careful assessment of interactions between Indigenous peoples and BSOs at port of entries in the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory, and the ways in which there is an ongoing struggle to "put people in their place." Kalman's refreshing candor and the reflexivity that grounds his analysis in seemingly straightforward questions like "where are you from?" or the process of outsiders being "put in their place" yields deep insight into the contemporary operations of sovereign power, the negotiation of researchers in borderlands, and more specifically, the quandaries and productive possibilities related to reflexive non-Indigenous researchers on Indigenous land. The theoretical and empirical grounding of Kalman's granular engagement in the impossibility of the border in Akwesasne territory provides broader critical insight on the impossibility of sovereign borders more generally, and as such, makes this a must read for anyone interested in contemporary critical border studies, as well as those seeking insight into settler colonial borders in Indigenous lands with a reflexive methodological edge.

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