

On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, ‘Voice’ and Colonial Citizenship

ANTHROPOLOGICAL NEED

To speak of Indigeneity is to speak of colonialism and anthropology, as these are means through which Indigenous people have been known and sometimes are still known. In different moments, anthropology has imagined itself to be a voice, and in some disciplinary iterations, *the* voice of the colonised.¹ This modern interlocutory role was not self-ascribed by anthropologists, nor was it without a serious material and ideational context; it accorded with the imperatives of Empire and in this, specific technologies of rule that sought to obtain space and resources, to define and know the difference that it constructed in those spaces and to then govern those within.² Knowing and representing the “voices” within those places required more than military might, it required the methods and modalities of knowing, in particular: categorisation, ethnological comparison, linguistic translation and ethnography.

These techniques of knowing were predicated upon a profound need, as the distributions in power and possibility that made Empire also made for the heuristic and documentary requirements of a metropolitan and administrative readership, hence the required accounts of the difference that “culture” stood in for in these “new” places.³ These accounts were required for governance, but also so that those in the metropole might know themselves in a manner that accorded to the global processes underway. Like “race” in other contexts, “culture” was (and still is in some quarters) the conceptual and necessarily essentialised space that stood in for complicated bodily and exchange-based relationships that enabled and marked colonial situations in Empire: warfare, commerce, sex, trade, missionisation. “Culture” described the difference that was found in these places and marked the ontological end-game of each exchange: a difference that had been contained into neat, ethnically-defined territorial spaces that now needed to be made sense of, to be ordered, ranked, to be governed, to be possessed.⁴ This is a form of politics that is more than representational, as this was a governmental and disciplinary possession of bodies *and* territories, and in this were included existent forms of philosophy, history and social life that Empire sought to speak of and speak for.

In this article I will argue that the techniques of representation and analysis that avail themselves to us when the processes sketched out above have been accounted for make for a form of representation that may move away from “difference” and attendant containment as a unit of analysis. I am interested in the way that cultural analysis may look when difference is *not* the unit of analysis, when culture is disaggregated into narratives rather than wholes, when proximity to the territory that one is engaging in is as immediate as the self, and what this then does to questions of “voice.” I will argue that in such a context of anthropological accounting – an accounting I started to do above but will do more robustly below – “voice” is coupled with sovereignty that is evident at the level of interlocution, at the level of method and at the level of textualisation. Within Indigenous contexts, contexts that are never properly “post-colonial,” the sovereignty of the people we speak of, when speaking for themselves, interrupt anthropological portraits of timelessness, procedure and function that dominate representations of their past and, sometimes, their present.

As an anthropologist I always found such portraits of Indigenous peoples to be strange in light of the deeply resistant, self-governing and relentlessly critical people that I belong to and work with. When I started to do my work on a topic that simply matters to the Mohawks of Kahnawake – the question of who we are, and who we shall be for the future – I found that anthropological histories on the Iroquois⁵ and analytics used for cultural analysis were exceedingly ritualistic and procedural, and so much so that they privileged particular communities and peoples in ways that stressed harmony and timelessness even where there was utter opposition to and struggle against the state. Again, this is more than a representational problem, or a superficially representational problem. The people that I work with and belong to do care deeply about ceremony and tradition, but hinged those concerns to nationhood, citizenship, rights, justice, proper ways of being in the world, the best way to be in relation to one another, political recognition, invigorating the Mohawk language – they did not talk about the usual anthropological fare that dominated the prodigious amount of research upon them. They clearly had and have critiques of state power, hegemony, history and even one another that made them appear anomalous against the literature written upon them.

And so it was that I asked questions about the questions that mattered to us and had to write in certain ways, as these matterings sometimes were more our business than others, but clearly had import for much larger questions, questions concerning *just* forms of dominion, or sovereignty or citizenship. I want to reflect upon the dissonance between the representations that were produced by writing away from and to dominant forms of knowing and commitment to what people say (imperfectly glossed here as “voice”). I do so in order to ask what the form of knowledge might look like when such histories as the one sketched out above are accounted for in disciplinary form and analysis. And further to that, I consider what analysis will look like, or sound like, when the goals and aspirations of those we talk to inform the methods and the shape of our theorising and analysis.

PARTICULAR WAYS OF KNOWING

Unlike anthropologies of the past, accounting for Empire and colonialism and doing so in the context of “settler societies” (code for proximal-to, or once “Indigenous”) is now becoming more acceptable. This is owing to political currents, critiques and philosophical trends outside of and

within anthropology that have embedded the discipline within the history of colonialism, have highlighted ethics and form, and pluralised the places and peoples that are now considered viable for ethnographic analysis. Although more acceptable than in the past, anthropological analyses of indigeneity may still occupy the “salvage” and “documentary” slot for analysis, an elaboration of object that results from the endurance of categories that emerged in moments of colonial contact, many of which still reign supreme. In those moments, people left their own spaces of self-definition and *became* “Indigenous.” And “Indigenous” is a category that did not explicitly *state* or theorise the shared experience of having their lands alienated from them or that they would be understood in particular ways. This shared condition might be an innocent tale of differential access to power, of differing translations of events, were there a level field of interpretation within which to assert those different translations, as well as an agreed-upon vocabulary for comparison. No situation such as the one we all inherit and live within is “innocent” of a violence of form, if not content, in narrating a history or a present for ourselves. But like the law and its political formations that took things from them, there are disciplinary forms that must be contended with by Indigenous peoples. Anthropology and the “law” (both, necessarily, reified in this iteration) mark two such spaces of knowing and contention with serious implications for Indigenous peoples in the present.⁶

Aileen Moreton-Robinson links this form of differential access to power and historical knowing to an *a priori* privilege, one that is gendered⁷ and racialised by the relationships mentioned above (warfare, commerce, sex, trade, missionisation) in the exchange-based histories that became reified and thus possessive, relationships that dialectically shaped those engagements as well as colonial possibilities in the *present*. As an example Moreton-Robinson cites Captain Cook’s account of the people he first encountered in what is now Australia. It was “stated that the Indigenous people of Australia had no form of land tenure because they were uncivilised, which meant the land belonged to no-one and was available for possession under the doctrine of *terra nullius*.⁸ The legal doctrine of *terra nullius*, an “empty land,” held sway in Australia until the High Court overturned it in 1992 with the Mabo decision and offers stark testimony to the differential power of one account over another in defining not only difference but establishing *presence*, by establishing the terms of even being seen: an historical perceptibility that empowered possibilities of self- and territorial possession in the present.⁹ We see in this example how historical perceptibility is used, and is still used, to *claim*, to define capacities for self-rule, to apportion social and political possibilities, to, in effect, empower and disempower Indigenous peoples in the present. Such categorical forms of recognition and mis-recognition are indebted to deep philosophical histories of seeing and knowing; tied to legal fiat, they may enable disproportionately empowered political forms (such as “Empire,” or particular nation-states such as the United States, Canada and Australia) to come into being in a very short time, as without that category of knowing and its concomitant force land could not be wrested from those that belong to it, and those to whom it rightfully belongs.

And so it is that concepts have teeth and teeth that bite through time. By legally acknowledging the presence of Indigenous peoples in Australia, Mabo enabled Indigenous peoples there to finally claim legal title to their ancestral territories. But they could only do so after 215 years of settler occupation that coincided with 215 years of their continued presence in their own

lands. These historical and legal effacements of Indigeneity are predicated upon accounts such as Cook's: accounts that became histories which dialectically informed theories, which then emboldened the laws of nation-states. The traffic between theory and event moved colonies into nation-states. This trafficking disabled future claims of Indigenous occupation and ownership of territory because, in part, their own voices were imperceptible, or unknowable, or unimportant, or were sieved through analytics that interpreted their aspirations in ways that were not their own.¹⁰

These effective effacements rested upon ways of knowing that imbricated the ethnological, ethnographic and cartographic with social and political theory¹¹ and enabled the justification¹² of dispossession.

Cook's thinking was very much of a piece with that of political theorists such as John Locke, who argued most persuasively, it seems, that the origins of property rest only in that which has been mixed with labour, and thus, that which does not *appear* to have been mixed with labour is alienable. A panoptic view of labour here is essential as only certain forms of labour, those which are perceptible to certain viewers, will matter. But of equal import for Indigenous peoples is the conflation of property with a larger economy of social and political rank and value – "and amongst those who are *counted the civilized part of mankind* [emphasis mine], who have made and multiplied positive laws to determine property...is by the labour that removes it out of that common state nature left it in made his property who takes pains about it."¹³ This fragment from Locke's text *Of Property* enunciates the hierarchies of social value and accordant rights that were tied to the understanding of people and a social ranking within humanity. Thus property could be defined only as that which was mixed with labour and belonged to those who perceived it, in contradistinction to the living histories of Indigenous peoples in those places.¹⁴

Cultural form is critical here, recognising and apportioning out rights, and is broken down and sieved into different hierarchies of value and accordant analytics – in their contemporary forms, those of "structure," "practice" and "meaning." We must be mindful however, that in its theoretical and analytic guises "culture" is defined in anthropological terms most consistently by its proximal relationship to difference. And that difference was to be defined against the sameness and omniscience of a stable ontological core, an unquestioned "self" that defined that difference and thence "culture" for a readership, one that corresponded to a metropole and to a colony, a self and an other to define oneself proximally against.¹⁵

TERRITORIES OF THE FAMILIAR

It is in this brief context of anthropological need and political history that I will now talk about forms of analysis after such an accounting – in particular, ethnographies of the familiar, ethnographies of refusal and the making of claims and the staking of limits. The discursive appeal to the language of territory is deliberate, although the territory that I wish to talk about is the space of method, critique and construction in *contemporary* ethnographies of Native North America and, in particular, my own ethnography of Mohawk nationhood and citizenship across the borders of the United States and Canada. In a sharp move away from the ethno-historical/salvage paradigm that evacuates theory from the space of "native North American

anthropology,” and in particular the prodigious anthropology “of” the Iroquois, of whom the Mohawk is a member nation, I will talk about refusal.

It was theorised by the early American anthropologist and Indian advocate Lewis Henry Morgan that in fact the Iroquois, a once-significant military power in what is now the Northeastern United States, were (in his moments of reckoning) of such a “civilised” state that they were, in fact, ceasing to be different and thus most worthy of the trappings of civilisation: education and agriculture. This was of a piece with his political advocacy, itself an outgrowth of his “play” as an Indian and later his scientific observations and analysis of Indian culture, also an outgrowth of earlier play.¹⁶ Morgan was highly critical of the government of his time and wrote at least two well-intentioned and bold articles that some have argued were an unusual and early form of advocacy in anthropology.¹⁷ However, his explicit writings on Indian “advancement” were tied to a racialised social hierarchy that placed African-Americans at the bottom of the social order,¹⁸ as well as expressing the belief in the inevitability of Iroquois decline. Morgan advocated for Iroquois advancement because he believed them to be “ready” for and “worthy” of such a change in their legal and political status, but also because their “absorption” into the white race was inevitable and most virtuous. Their readiness for absorption was owing to their “civilised state” (*contra* the Aboriginal example cited by Moreton-Robinson above) which was tied to the perceived death of Iroquois culture – the death really, of difference – the remnants of which needed to be recorded and documented *at the same time* as he advocated for a more citizenship-worthy social status for them.¹⁹ Thus, with the assistance of Ely S Parker, a condoled Seneca Chief, he produced the highly referenced documentary ethnography, *The League of the Haudenosaunee*, which detailed the social and governmental structure of the Iroquois Confederacy – a paradigmatic text of reconstructed and salvage ethnography.²⁰

The *League* prompted many studies in its wake, and prompted as well a subfield of specialisation in North American anthropology called “Iroquois Studies.” Focusing almost exclusively upon the history of the Five and then Six Nations, Iroquois Studies quite literally took off where Morgan left off, and as such is a documentary form. Although generated within a North American anthropology informed by international currents and translations in social and cultural theory, there is no theory evident in the key texts of this subfield beyond that of Sapir, and the anthropological and historical project it embodies may be characterised as one that seeks to authenticate cultural forms rather than analyse them. This is interesting, for many reasons, but perhaps most importantly for the discussion at hand is the largely agreed-upon fact that the Six Nations are among the most strident and vociferous critics of British and French settlement and also among the most insistently and stridently sovereign Indians in North America.²¹

These sovereign articulations do not accord with the anthropologies of timeless, procedural “tradition” that form the bulk of knowledge on the Iroquois. And so it is within this particular tradition, embedded within the structures of anthropological need discussed above, that I now want to turn to a very simple thing: the living (and their nationhood) within settled places. As well, I want to turn to questions of ethics and the normative work of representing and analysing the form of their nationhood within those spaces. If we are to do analyses of such political forms, we must consider not if sovereignty matters – that should be evident enough (the salvage/ethno-historical blind spot of many aside) and central enough – but ask, does it

matter at the level of method and representation? And if so, how does that mattering manifest? Indeed, sovereignty matters, as a methodological issue in and of itself, but such mattering also engenders other ethnographic forms: namely refusal. And this form of refusal is not to operationalise nor to genuflect to recent formulations of alternative methodology such as “radical indigenism” – something that is neither radical nor indigenous but rather, in the name of “tradition,” structuring yet another expectation of a culturally “pure” indigenous subject.²² Rather, it is my proposition that to think about “sovereignty” – a construct which is always a bestowal and as such is deeply imperfect but critical for these moments in Indigenous/Settler-State relations – is to think very seriously about needs and, basically, involves a calculus ethnography of what you need to know and what I refuse to write in.

HISTORIES OF BEING REFUSED: THE INDIAN ACT IN CANADA

I was stimulated to frame my project on Mohawk nationhood and citizenship by the complete disjuncture between what was written about my own people and the things that mattered the most to us. I was interested in the unambiguous, sometimes virulent and violent boundaries that were being drawn within the reservation community of Kahnawake over the question of “membership.” At the time I started to think about my research, the elected government of the community had already devised, with some participation from the membership, a 1984 code which would require a 50% blood quantum for membership in the community. This membership code itself was stimulated by several factors, most recently an international human rights decision that made Canada amend its Indian Act and reinstate onto a federal registry previously disenfranchised Indian women and children (“Bill C-31”). Aimed at redressing the patrilineal bias in the Indian Act, Bill C-31 was passed into effect in 1984. With this legislation, Indian women who lost their status upon marriage to non-Indian men (or non-status Indian men) were put back on the federal registration list of Indians in Canada.²³ It was now up to each reserve to devise membership codes that were of their own making, and to then admit (or deny) membership to these women and their children in their own local registries.

Bill C-31 followed on the heels of a decade-long battle that saw non-status Indian women go head to head with their reserve, or band council governments, the state, and finally, international authorities. The women had unsuccessfully petitioned their band council governments to let them return, to raise their children and exercise their rights as Indians. The band council governments upheld the Indian Act and challenged the women to bring their case to the courts. The women then organised into political action groups, Equal Rights for Indian Women and the Native Women’s Association of Canada, which then brought the Canadian government to court for the inherent gender bias in the Indian Act. They lost their case. It was only when they brought the case to the United Nations that Canada was forced to amend the Indian Act and remove the bias of determining membership in Indian bands along the father’s line. Perceived as a victory for Indian women (and perhaps for all women, as there was some coalition-building between women’s organisations at the time), Bill C-31 was intended to mend the fabric of Indian societies torn apart by unjust legislation. In practice, however, matters were much different.

Kahnawake had already assimilated some tenets of the Indian Act into the social fabric of the community. The means for defining kinship and determining community belonging, the traditional means for determining descent – through the mother’s clan – was supplanted by the Indian Act and its European model of patrilineal descent as detailed above. Kahnawake had formally accepted the Indian Act in the community in 1890; however, as a reserve on Crown land, the community had been subject to elements of the Act as early as 1850. In 1850, however, Indian status was transferable to both male and female non-Indian spouses of Indians. Therefore non-Indian men or women could hold land, operate businesses and claim tax exemption on the reserve. Unwilling to accept the possibility of white men holding land in the community, Kahnawake contested this aspect of the Act and brought it to the courts so that the Act would be changed.

As detailed above, as a result of the Indian Act matrilineal descent and property holding was transferred to the father’s line. This was an unambiguously raced and gendered injustice that Indian women, disenfranchised from their Indian status across Canada, fought against. But the complex of factors – Canada’s bestowal of a right to reserves to determine membership after 100 years of living under Indian Act rules for recognition; Canada’s reinstatement of the women on a federal registry – led, in part, to the development of a blood quantum code in Kahnawake, a code that was in defiance of Canadian norms for political recognition but appeared to be “objective” and gender-neutral. The membership code was contested and defended by, it seemed, everyone within the community and sometimes all at once. Bill C-31 appeared as a most recent imposition (read by some as being told who was an Indian, *again*) and this iteration of the code reflected a century of colonial impositions, along with a desire for scientific rigour and objectivity. No one was completely happy with the code but everyone agreed that “something had to be done,” and that membership was the number one issue facing the community. In such a context, there were not only boundaries being constructed and deconstructed daily, there was a heightened awareness and deep and generalised concern over what would be the means for determining who we were – and who was not eligible to be recognised by us as being who we are.

In such a context, I knew that there were limits to what I could ask – and then what I could say – within the scope of my project on Mohawk nationhood, and those limits extended beyond any statement on ethical forms of research that either the American Anthropological Association or the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (two professional and research-regulating bodies for anthropologists in Canada and the United States) required. And so it was that I wrote an ethnography that pivoted upon refusal(s). I was interested in the larger picture, in the discursive, material and moral territory that was simultaneously historical and contemporary (this “national” space) and the ways in which *Kahnawakero:non*, the “people of Kahnawake,” had *refused* the authority of the state at almost every turn. The ways in which their formation of the initial membership code (now replaced by a lineage code and board of elders to implement the code and determine cases) was refused; the ways in which their interactions with border guards at the international boundary line were predicated upon a refusal; how refusal worked in everyday encounters to enunciate repeatedly to ourselves and to outsiders that “this is who we are, this who you are, these are my rights.”

There was no place in the existing literature for these articulations, nor was there a neat placement for them within post-colonial studies or analysis – there was not a doubleness to their consciousness, a still-colonial but striving to be “post-colonial consciousness” that denied the modern self that Fanon, Bhabha and Giddens speak of and from.²⁴ There seemed rather to be a tripleness, a quadrupleness, to consciousness and an endless play, and it went something like this: “I am me, I am what you think I am and I am who this person to the right of me thinks I am and you are all full of shit and then maybe I will tell you to your face.” There was a definite core that seemed to reveal itself at the point of refusal and that refusal was arrived at, of course, at the very limit of the discourse.

Anthropology in such a context is, I think, sometimes really funny. Others would say uncomfortable. But contemporary fieldwork with Iroquois peoples involves being pushed and pushing back, a kind of discursive wrestling. There are *multiple* sovereignties at work, all of which have worked to protect, to limit, to entrench what was already in place, an exercise of political will that generated an exception, in Agamben’s theorisation, to the liability of the subject.²⁵ To speak of limits in such a way makes some liberal thinkers uncomfortable, and may, to them, seem dangerous. When access to information, to knowledge, to the intellectual commons is controlled by the people who generate that information, it can be seen as a violation of shared standards of justice and truth. However, in the context that I have worked and still work within, history rears its head at every turn and did so through the bodily presence of white women (with Indian status), through the bodily presence of the children that they had with Indian men. These are the inheritors of colonial rules of recognition and were rendered, in some dark moments, as colonial residues and reminders. Their juridical identities spoke *not* of Eastern Woodlands Fever, an historical and contemporary transgression and erotic fantasy which a cultural analyst with the vim, vigour and verve of Spike Lee should dwell upon, but rather of something less sexy: Iroquois citizenships (a clan system) strangled and arrested by the Indian Act.

The Indian Act of 1868 recognised the union between an Indian man and a white woman as one that maintained his legal recognition as an Indian, and would transfer the same recognition to the woman in the eyes of the state. The union of an Indian woman and white man, on the other hand, would deny her legal recognition as an Indian, her status under the Indian Act, and that of her children in the eyes of the state and, sometimes, the community. These bizarre logics of recognition and residues of history structured and still structure (in part) the bodies and persons and personalities and cousins and friends and enemies that comprise my version of Kahnawake. The punctuating, juridical bestowals of settler colonialism were read, like a text, with the status designations inscribed upon each one of us – “C-31, status, non-status” – co-existing with traditional Iroquois modalities of recognition: “clan, no-clan.” Thus, historical and juridical moments were carried by us, upon our very bodies – historical moments which settled upon the body, read as rights. I saw, unfolding before me in a fleshy, Hegelian *present*, the processes of settlement and its contracting and expanding forms of recognition – in the form of the people before me who spoke endlessly, it seemed, of how we shall determine who we are and who is *not* who we are. They did so while simultaneously refusing these logics.

“NO ONE SEEMS TO KNOW”: DOING HISTORY AND ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE FAMILIAR

This question of recognition has surfaced repeatedly through time and, although completely originating in Canadian settlement and the Indian Act, its contemporary guises are most local. In the beginning of my own research on this subject, the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake placed a notice in the weekly newspaper, *The Eastern Door*. It read: “The following members of the community are housing non-natives,” with the name of the community member, their band number (number on the local Indian registry) and the name of their non-Indian guest. The concern over non-Indians in Kahnawake, I would later learn through archival research, extended back to the earliest correspondence between the Indian Agent and Ottawa. Readable now in Record Group 10, letters from the Agent documented Kahnawake’s “sensitivity” to outsiders: “To the half breed Canadians of the village. We wish to have a final decision to know if DeLormier, Giasson, Deblois, Meloche and others are masters in our Reserve. There are eight of us who write (Indians) and if you do not leave the village look out for your heads, your buildings, your cattle and take warning of what we now tell you.”²⁶ This was a warning to “half-breeds” and whites living within Kahnawake in 1878, a time of great scarcity (of firewood and land). This warning, publicly posted to the “half breeds” and “whites,” all of whom owned disproportionate amounts of property on the reserve, enunciated a still earlier anxiety over distribution of resources and power and the wrongful recognition of certain Whites as Indians in the eyes of the state.

Thus the notice in *The Eastern Door* was not without a context, and the context is the material and semiotic history from which Mohawk speak and by which they are simultaneously informed: land loss; scarcity of firewood; the one year that white men could legally obtain Indian status and buy and sell land; more encroachment; the earlier “settling” of New York State and loss of the Mohawk Valley; the end of the Indian Wars; the Riel Rebellion in Canada; the ascendancy and decline of the British in North America. I do not wish to say that managing these historical vicissitudes ethnographically and in the present is unusual for those who wish to understand sovereignty as central to the lives, and the territorial integrity and the dignity of people that we work with. But in my brief discussion of the ways in which I came to understand my project, this concern over membership is part of the anthropological and *colonial* accounting that must happen for ethnography to make sense. Recall that the Indian Act, a specific body of law that recognises Indians in a wardship status in Canada, created the categories of person and rights that served to sever Indian women from their communities upon marriage to white men. It did the reverse to Indian men – white women *gained* Indian status upon their marriage into an Indian community. This created the conditions for blood quantum and the contestation (and accordance) of it that I examined as part of my research. How does one write about this or analyse what is so clearly offensive to the anthropological sensibilities of access, of replicable results, in some ways of “fairness,” and reconcile all this with the plight of those who are struggling every day to maintain what little they have left? And when they are struggling so clearly with the languages and analytics of a foreign culture that occupies their semantic and material space, and naturalises this occupation through history-writing and the very analytics that are used to know them?

The work of understanding these issues of membership, political recognition, sovereignty and autonomy within communities requires an historical sensibility (and reckoning) that is deeply horizontal as well as vertical. While there was a hearty oral archive of the structuring logics of exclusion – of how people got to get “here,” how they married each other when they did – there was co-terminously the logic of the present that I saw and lived and suffered through and enjoyed (and still do), of tolerance and exceptions and affections – what I call in other places “feeling citizenships” that are structured in the present space of intra-community recognition, affection and care, outside of the logics of colonial and imperial rule (re: the Indian Act or blood quantum). And here I give such an example of these alternative logics from someone I interviewed, but also of a refusal, or a denial within the space of ethnography:

Q. Tell me what you think our ideal form of citizenship is...are citizenship and membership the same thing?

A. From my understanding, and whomever I ask, I get these grey, cloudy answers in return, so I am not quite sure. I am a citizen of Kahnawake but I am not a member of Kahnawake. I am not on this mysterious list that no-one seems to have any information about. So although I dearly love Kahnawake, there are many positions I will never be able to hold until this membership issue is cleared up, so I don't know much about it, other than, I don't think it to be fair – there are those who leave the community, as I said, we all come back to Kahnawake, but there are those who leave for twenty-five years and they come back and they're a member, and they will have all these opportunities that I won't, even though I've never left. I don't think that's fair.

But I think there's a distinction – one could be a citizen without being a member.

Q. Interesting, and that citizenship is based on...let me push you on that then, how is that different, explain it to me?

A. Citizenship is, as I said, you live there, you grew up there, that is the life that you know – that is who you are. Membership is more of a legislative enactment designed to keep people from obtaining the various benefits that Aboriginals can receive. So I am a citizen, I live there, that is who I am, yet I cannot be a member because of these laws, which I feel is unfair. If I had been there my whole life I should have the same opportunity to run for Council that anyone else can. Yet I cannot.

Q. Do you think that's because of public sentiment, the Indian Act, is that because o ...

A. I don't know what you know, or what others know – this is an area that I can't get straight answers from, no-one seems to know

We discussed further:

Q. What do you think the legacy of C-31 is in Kahnawake?

A. I think I really don't know much about this. There's this generation of people, myself included, who were young during that time, and we had no recollection of that time or even of these laws – as I said, I inquire, but nobody seems to know; I don't seem to get answers from anybody...

Q. But you ask people?

A. I ask people – the same thing with this traditional government movement that is happening in Kahnawake, people speak of traditional government, they speak of Bill C-31 and no one seems to know anything about it.

Q. In your personal experience, how did you come to understand C-31?

A. With what I do understand with it, I think from my mother. From what I understand, she tends to avoid speaking of this; I believe she was one of the C-31 people, but I don't know for sure.

Q. To get it [her status] back?

A. To get back on, she married my father who was a Canadian, she was taken off this list, she got back on with C-31 – and all the details I do not know.

Q. 'Cause it's unpleasant?

A. She doesn't speak of it and, as I say, I inquire, but I receive no answers, people seem to side-step it or give these very vague summaries – it's almost like it is a taboo subject.

Q. Would you like to see it discussed more openly, or to find stuff out or be able to ...

A. I would like to, out of curiosity, know a bit more about it – but if I don't, I will live my life and for the most part I don't think it will really bother me other than not being able to be on this list, I guess.²⁷

"No one seems to know" was laced through much of my informant's discussion of C-31, and of his own predicament – which I knew he spoke of indirectly, because I knew his predicament. And I also knew everyone knew, because everyone knows everyone's "predicament." This was the collective "limit" – that of knowledge and thus who we could or would not claim. So it was very interesting to me that he would tell me that "he did not know" and "no one seems to know" – to me these utterances meant, "I know you know, and you know that I know I know...so let's just not get into this." Or, "let's just not say." So I did not say, and so I did not "get into it" with him, and I won't get into it with my readers. What I am quiet about is his predicament and my predicament and the actual stuff (the math, the clans, the mess, the misrecognitions, the confusion and the clarity) – the calculus of our predicaments. And although I pushed him, hoping that there might be something explicit said from the space of

his exclusion – or more explicit than he gave me – it was enough that he said what he said. “Enough” is certainly enough. “Enough,” I realised, was when I reached the limit of my own return and our collective arrival. Can I do this and still come home; what am I revealing here and why? Where will this get us? Who benefits from this and why? And “enough” was when they shut down (or told me to turn off the recorder), or told me outright funny things like “nobody seems to know” – when everybody *does* know and talks about it *all the time*. Dominion then had to be exercised over these representations, and that was determined when enough was said. The ethnographic limit then, was reached not just when it would cause harm (or extreme discomfort) – the limit was arrived at when the representation would bite all of us and compromise the *representational* territory that we have gained for ourselves in the past 100 years, in small but deeply influential ways, with a cadre of scholars from Kahnawake whose work has reached beyond the boundaries of the community.²⁸

At the start of this paper I discussed the anthropological relationship to Empire, one that was encouraged by a need to describe the difference that was found in new places. This need precipitated certain cultural forms and modes of analysis. In this process, people became differentiated, their spaces and places possessed. “Culture” served a purpose of describing the difference (always against a norm of sameness) that was encountered in those places. Describing difference also involved the analysis of difference, one that had (and still has) serious implications for Indigenous peoples, especially in their attempts to write their own histories, to claim their own intellectual and material space and to exercise dominion over it.

The work of Indigenous scholars rests upon Empire as well, and through the vocabularies and analytics it put into play. They might, however, work from different historical vantage points and locations within the space that Empire has claimed for some peoples. In this, theirs might be the centuries of warfare, exchange, alliance-making, diplomacy, petitioning, letter-writing and, most recently, armed resistance to the settler societies that have claimed and now claim North America as their own. I argued that this may produce different forms of analysis and thereby produce some of the anthropological limits that are discussed in this paper. Rather than stops, or impediments to knowing, those limits may be expansive in what they do not tell us. I reached my own limit when the data would not contribute to our sovereignty or complicate the deeply simplified, atrophied representations of Iroquois and other Indigenous peoples that they have been mired within anthropologically.

The people I interviewed do *know* the different forms of recognition that are at play, the simultaneities of consciousness that are in work in any colonial encounter (including those with me) in the exercising of rights – and that knowledge translates into the “feeling side” of recognition, one that is not juridical, is home-grown, and dignified by local history and knowledge. What is theoretically generative about these refusals? They *account* for the history detailed above; they tell us something about the way we cradle or embed our representations and notions of sovereignty and nationhood; and they critique and move us away from statist forms of recognition. In listening and shutting off the tape recorder, in situating each subject within their own shifting historical context of the present, these refusals speak volumes, because they tell us when to stop. Whether or not we wish to share that is a matter of ethnography that can both *refuse* and also take up *refusal* in generative ways.

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