



# INDIGENOUS DIASPORA, IDENTITY, AND SETTLER COLONIAL BORDERS

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is about, in short, Indigenous life across settler borders. It is about the politics of the borders and Indigenous people, particularly the politics of Indigenous identity across borders. It is an often-remarked refrain that “we did not cross the border; the border crossed us,” and while such statements are more often made in the context of the United States’ southern border, the same sentiment may be frequently found among Indigenous peoples on both sides of its sibling boundary line to the north. Nevertheless, what does this mean in a practical sense of trans-border Indigenous identity? My family is Indigenous to the lands presently known as the US state of Wisconsin. I presently live and work in Ontario, Canada, and so I think often of my relationship with the people for whom this is their traditional territory and of what it means for me to be on this land. It is these questions that I will seek to, perhaps not answer but meditate upon in this paper in the hope of leading to further thinking.

This paper is also, at its core, an autoethnographic work. I am both an Indigenous person and an immigrant on these lands, and so to research and write on these topics is to speak of myself, my experiences, my relations, and my life. In my practice of autoethnographic methodologies, this also means to tell stories: stories about me, stories about my family, stories about the people I have come to know over the years and who have made me who I am. Indeed, this paper is structured as a series of stories about borders and Indigenous identity, interspersed with critical analytic reflection. I am also trained as an anthropologist and a sociologist, and I presently teach in a political science department. Therefore, I am deeply inspired

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by the work of the Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson, who, in her work *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, not only speaks to the complexities and experiences of Indigenous life across settler-colonial boundary lines but also combines ethnographic research with the production of political theory (Simpson). I am also deeply inspired by the work of the sociologist Avery Gordon, especially her text *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, where she writes not just “that life is complicated” but that such “a banal expression of the obvious ... is nonetheless a profound theoretical statement—perhaps the most important theoretical statement of our time” (Gordon 3).

I firmly believe that is how I am best able to examine these topics, to contribute to academic discourse on the topics of borders and identity, and, at a more important-for-me ethical level, also to make space within such discourses—be they anthropological, sociological, political scientific, methodological, or otherwise, as I do not wish to fall into the trap of borders of a different kind, ones defined by a worn out disciplinary decadence (Gordon; Rabaka)—especially other Indigenous scholars and Indigenous students also to employ these sorts of research and writing methods.

Thus, with that said, let me begin with my first story.

## BY AIR OR BY SEA

*Quo fata ferunt.* These Latin words often stared back at me as I grew up. They were everywhere, part of the national background of the culture I was primarily raised in. They are emblazoned on the national crest of the small island nation and the largest remaining British Overseas Territory, Bermuda, upon which I was born. It was many years before I learnt that they translated as “whither the fates carry.” I think about them now often as the winds of my life have carried me to many places and many people I would have never expected in my childhood.

My Bermudian father is a sailor at heart, like so many of his and my compatriots, like those of the *Sea Venture*, whose winds carried them onto the reefs that, fortress-like, surround Bermuda on all sides. He used to race and has sailed from Bermuda to locations as far afield as Boston and Aruba. I was never much for sailing and never took to it, but I was raised on the deck of a boat. Sail to either the eastern or western ends of the island chain or just off the north and south shores, and the ocean depth quickly drops to the bottom of the Atlantic. However, many might not even notice the sea change beyond the shift from teal to the deepest blue.

What is more immediately noticeable, indeed the first thing that likely catches any eye not turned towards the land is that the ocean stretches to the horizon and beyond. The closest land, Cape Hatteras in North Carolina, is 563 nautical miles away, easily several days' travel by sea. There are no roads, no trains, no science fiction deep-sea tunnels with which one can either come or go, only the sea (or, by the mid-twentieth century, the air).

Our borders are the shorelines, never quite fixed in place, always in flux with the coming and going of the ocean's tides. As the Atlantic slowly erodes, the limestone islands that make up the Bermudian archipelago, and as the sea levels rise, the border creeps slowly inwards. On the scale of human time, the border seems fixed, but every Bermudian who has ever toured around the unified aquarium, museum, and zoo has probably taken in the exhibit showing that Bermuda was once much larger when the world was last covered by glacial ice. However, I never considered the sea border; it was part of my home.

Neither did I think about borders much when I would travel to visit my mother's family. My mother, and by extension, myself and my younger brother, are American Indians of the Menominee Nation of Wisconsin. My father and mother met on her traditional territory. My dad told my mom he was from Bermuda, which she was incredulous about. She told him she was an Indian princess, which, for him, was something he had only known about by way of Hollywood caricatures. However, they quickly fell in love, and soon, she metaphorically set sail for a new life far away from either the bustling city streets of Milwaukee or the dense forests of our reservation.

I was born ten years later, and my younger brother was born eighteen months later. We are both blessed, or perhaps cursed, with three citizenships: American, British, and British Overseas Territory. So, the border, as much as one can think of the seashore as a border between the United States and Bermuda, was never something that concerned me much as we traveled back and forth between the island and Wisconsin every summer. This is added to by Bermuda being one of only a handful of countries granted the status of being able to perform American immigration and customs clearance on the non-US side. Thus, even then, I never had the experience of passing through border control, having an immigration officer scrutinize my passport, and determining whether I had the right to enter the country. The flags displayed at either end of the trip changed, but the experience was closer to internal travel within a country.

It was not until I moved to Canada, where I would eventually permanently settle, that I experienced the concept of a border for real.

It was 2005, and I was a month from my nineteenth birthday. I was set to begin my undergraduate studies in Ontario, and, as one should expect, I needed to obtain a Canadian study permit. To save a long story for another time, it did not work out as planned. Nevertheless, my mother and I still boarded our plane in Bermuda and “set sail.” When we landed in Toronto, we were, of course, immediately shunted off towards immigration. We were told that, as my study permit had not been approved, I would not be allowed entry. My mother, distraught, went, sat down, and I think she began to cry. However, I went over and said something to her: “Did you remember to bring my US birth certificate like I asked you to?” She had, so I took it and returned it to the immigration officer. Canadian study permit policy allowed American citizens to apply for, pay for, and receive their study permit at the port of entry. Thus, with that information presented, my situation was, luckily, quickly cleared up, and I was allowed to enter the country. While I am not a scholar of migration or diaspora per se, the idea of borders has ever since been with me.

This deepened when I decided to pursue studies centered around Indigenous peoples and our experiences of settler colonialism in North America. Indigenous studies and border studies may not be often thought of together, at least on this side of the United States (the situation is, of course, quite different at the Rio Grande), but for me, for my life, and how my studies connect to my life, they are ineluctably linked. The intersection of these two seemingly disparate experiences has brought me to where I am now as I write this: an American Indian born and raised in Bermuda, writing about US and Canadian Indigenous people in Canada, and now teaching about it in the same country.

## THE BORDERS OF MYSELF

As I said, I am a Bermuda-born Menominee Indian currently living and working in Canada, and so speaking or writing about borders, Indigenous life and politics, and their intersections is, for me, fundamentally autoethnographic. A long time ago, no doubt because of my early training as a critical cultural anthropologist, I shed the idea that I could simply extract myself out of my body and my experiences to write on topics such as these. The reasons for this are twofold; firstly, the ability to engage in some kind of “neutral” or “objective” study of this topic is nothing but a pure illusion because in this, the classical subject-object dichotomy collapses as I am both the researcher and the researched. On another level, reflecting a common trope

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within Indigenous research and politics, it is not ethically responsible to either myself or my kin.

Thus, while an academic paper, this text is also a small window into my life as a person, an Indigenous person, and an immigrant, finding my way on and down that path. For me, it is important to state outright that this is a story because the epistemic centering of stories and storytelling is essential for a decolonial Indigenous scholar (Doerfler, Sinclair & Stark). In essence, it is how we come to know the world, tell our stories, hear the stories of others, and find that space of interconnected intersubjectivity that lies between them. The importance of centering stories as both Indigenous epistemology and methodology is made by Margaret Kovach when she notes:

Stories remind us who we are and our belonging. Stories hold within them knowledges, while simultaneously signifying relationships. In oral tradition, stories can never be decontextualized from the teller. They are active agents within a relational world, pivotal in gaining insight into a phenomenon [...] they tie us with our past and provide a basis for continuity with future generations. (Kovach 95)

To borrow from an oft-recited Indigenous motto of sorts, we are all connected, or as Judith Butler says, “I am not fully known to myself, because part of what I am is the enigmatic traces of others” (Butler 32).

Thus, ethical responsibility to the context of my kinship relations—those living, those long gone, and those yet to come—is fundamentally central to how and why I write. Therefore, I want to tell another story to set the stage for my broader meditations in this paper.

Every year during my childhood, at least as far back as I can remember, my younger brother and I traveled to Wisconsin, often taking in Milwaukee before finally arriving in Shawano, the small settler town a few miles south of our reservation. We stayed there with our grandmother and grandfather. Sometimes, they would come to Bermuda and take us back with them. Other times, we traveled with our mother. Either way, my brother and I, our mother, and eventually also our father would all gather in Shawano and spend the summer. Often, we were joined there by cousins, the children of our mother’s siblings in Milwaukee, who would make the trek north with us. I have vivid, though long past memories of going to the annual powwow on the reservation, traveling deep into the woods—covered head to toe to avoid ticks and always weary of the possible presence of snakes and bears—to pick blackberries and raspberries with family,

and of going to the cemetery to see where other kin have been laid, including the older half-brother Benny, my aunt Margaret, and others.

It was during these childhood years that, despite the great distances needing to be traveled and while otherwise spending most of the year on the island in school, I had perhaps the strongest link back to my own, my mother's, and my mother's family's nation. Slowly, that began to change, however. First, my grandfather passed away on the cusp of my teenage years, after which our regular summer journeys to Wisconsin would become fewer and fewer. His passing was followed not long after by my aunt Anne. We made one more trip in our mid-teens at our insistence. After that, it would be another five years or so before we returned, and only then was it on the occasion of the passing of my uncle Lee in the summer of 2007, who, after my grandfather, was probably the most important male Menominee figure in my life. My brother and I were pallbearers; it was the only time I had had that kind of dark honor, and it was a surreal experience in hindsight. Following that, it would be another sixteen years before I would return once more to bury my grandmother and give the eulogy at her funeral. She and I had stayed in semi-regular contact, often having quite long phone conversations on birthdays, Christmas, New Years, American Thanksgiving, and other occasions. She was always very interested in hearing about the Native experience in Canada, and we would often speak at length about the state of Indigenous and Indigenous politics. However, it is one of my deepest regrets that I never returned to see her before she passed on. Now that she is gone, I do not know when the next time I will return shall be.

During those years of steadily declining returns to my Menominee source, I also made a major life choice and moved to southern Ontario to undertake university studies. While I have returned to Bermuda over the years, mostly during my summers off or full-time for a brief period from 2012 to mid-2014, I have made this region, nestled between Lakes Erie, Ontario, and Huron, my home. In a way, it always felt like home without being home. Yes, I was born in the King Edward VII Memorial Hospital in the parish of Devonshire in Bermuda. I carry one of those odd British Overseas Territory passports with the national emblem of Bermuda, which doubles as a British passport. However, I have often felt more connected to the Wisconsin's lands than Bermuda's, which is not to say that I have no affection or no connection to its famous pink sands, blue waters, pastel-colored homes with white roofs, subtropical climate, plentiful ocean seafood. Because I do have that. Likewise, I have great affection for my Bermudian father. Nevertheless, perhaps because of the mixed-up generations of my father's

family, where the cousins my age are the more distant ones, while many of my first cousins are older than my mother, I have felt a closer kinship to my maternal family.

Likewise, because my brother and I were always raised to know that we are Menominee—even if due to the vicissitudes of settler colonial biopolitical governmentality of Indianness, we are just shy of the blood quantum to be fully enrolled members and are thus included in the nation as “First Degree Descendants”—and because such deeply important and meaningful formative moments were spent either on the reservation or in its shadow, I came to think of those far-off Indian Lands as my real home. This is my connection to southern Ontario. The differences between here and northern Wisconsin and the upper Michigan peninsula are imperceptible to most who are not specialists in climatic, ecological, plant, or animal sciences. More than that, this territory is Gdoo-Naaganinaa, the Dish with One Spoon Territory, traditional lands of the Attiwoonderon, Anishinaabeg Three Fires Confederacy & Mississauga, and Rotinonshón:ni Six Nations Confederacy. The Anishinaabeg—Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomie, Mississauga, Algonquin, and Nipissing—are all close kin to the Menominee. We have many words in our language to describe that relationship, and indeed, it has become a bit of a running joke that most Anishinaabe I know can relate to you that one of the first things I often say upon meeting them for the first time is “our nations are very closely related, you know.” It has also pleasantly surprised me the number of Anishinaabe people I have met in this region who, upon hearing that I am Menominee, “Oh, our family carpools to your pow wow every summer,” or “Oh wow, I go to your reservation to attend lodges and ceremony.” I also sometimes joke with them that as Menominee is actually the Anishinaabe name for us and means “people of the wild rice,” that should show deference given the cultural and ceremonial significance of wild rice to both our peoples. The joke is, of course, always taken in good spirits. So, this place feels like home because of that as well. A home that I have come to know, an Indigenous home, across settler borders and oceans.

## THE POLITICS OF FINDING MYSELF ACROSS SETTLER BORDERS

As it came to be, because I slotted myself in alongside my Anishinaabeg kin, most of the time the only Menominee outside of the brief period in which my younger brother also lived in the same city as me with his now wife. While I did not immediately find myself as part of the local Indigenous community, when I eventually did,

it pushed the ideas of borders and diaspora further into the back of my mind. As such, it was many years before I found myself actively returning to them, what they mean to me, and my life experience rather than my passive speculation as an immigrant in Canada. More than anything, I think the driving impetus behind this revisiting has been the cultural shift, which one can see any day by paying attention to #NativeTwitter or other Indigenous enclaves on social media platforms, of what I think of as the ‘old pan-Indianism.’

Educated as I was in my Indianness and my Menomineeness by a mother and her kin who came of age in the great period of social upheavals, activist mobilization, and political turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s, my sense of Indigeneity—including as it what manifested in my methodological, pedagogical, and praxiological commitments in both activism and academia—was rooted in the pan-Indian undercurrent of the American Indian Movement and the broader Red Power Movement. “I was—I am—an Indian, and all of the Americas is stolen Indian land;” this is what I used to tell myself and what (in)formed my politics at a deeply fundamental level. I felt that anywhere I walked, I would be an Indigenous person on Indigenous land. Indeed, that was my feeling whenever I spent time in New England, Atlantic Canada, or the American Southwest. If I could find Indians, I could find kin and a home.

Of course, politically speaking, there was a period where that was a progressive aspect of who we were. Certainly, those decades of upheaval and movement-building brought us together in ways I do not think we had been since the end of the so-called Indian Wars and the closure of the frontier. However, that has been slowly turned on its head. Whereas once the notion that we are all Indians played a positive role in bringing us together, today, more often than not, it is, correctly, I believe, seen as an anachronism that contains within it the danger of smothering over our uniqueness as different nations, and the sometimes significant gulfs that exist between us in terms of language, culture, epistemologies, and worldviews.

Slowly coming to understand this fundamental truth, though not without some resistance at first and not to say that I evenly apply it today, I came to recognize something else: my own diasporic Indigeneity. I have never been from the ‘homeland.’ I have visited, yes, many times, though also not, as I said, in many years. I was born and raised far away. I sometimes joke that while there is a common divide between urban and ‘rez’ Indians, I am neither, as I am not even continental.



Furthermore, even though this land is the land of perhaps my nation's closest kin, it is not mine. While I readily, if paradoxically unsteadily, came to accept this logic, it would not genuinely reflect this story if I also shared that it was an intensely jarring experience at first. While there has been a shift in my perspective—a recognition that one can be both Indigenous and diasporic in the case of Native peoples from so-called Latin America or the worldwide African diaspora—the idea of linking an Indigeneity from North America with a diasporic from was new to me.

However, today, that is what I recognize my Indigeneity to be. I am a diasporic Menominee. I am a Menominee born within what some may consider either the outermost reaches of the British West Indies or one of the most isolated oceanic locations in the world, perhaps both. I am a Menominee who makes his current home on the lands of his Anishinaabe kin. I am a Menominee who does not, and never has, made his life and home on the lands of the Menominee Nation, which might, of course, be different in other nearby worlds. Obviously, I mean in those possible worlds, alternative time streams and feverish dreams in which the white wave of death inaugurated by the Colombian Contact Event never took place, but, of course, this is not such a world. The hypersurface of this present colonial moment, from those hazy first moments in the Caribbean, is one in which our traditional territories, nations, and lives are bisected, marked out, and controlled by the presence of borders imposed by white settler imperialism and colonialism.

My people are closely related and are old allies, kin, and friends of the Anishinaabeg. I have already said that. So, in my wildest dreams, in one of those other timelines where colonialism never happened, it is not beyond the realm of comprehension that in that world, in this same year, it would not be out of the question or all that bizarre for myself as a Menominee to make my home on this territory. Indeed, even now in this world, I feel I can safely say, even without having undertaken any research on the matter, that I am not the first one. I can feel it in my bones when I touch the trees or feel the soil and water.

Nevertheless, once again, this is not one of those worlds, of course. Today, my nation's traditional territories are on the other side of a border created not by us but by those who came after, those who dispossessed and settled, those who took, tried to assimilate, and, at their worst, murdered. Despite the nominal claims from both settler governments and the various "tribes" that Indigenous communities are sovereign, I am not able to simply come and live with my Anishinaabeg kin. Indigenous sovereignty is of a second-order variety, if it can be said to have any meaningful content at all, and is utterly under the suzerain

of the colonial state. To borrow a concept that I was first exposed to via the online science fiction writing of the SCP Foundation, I have come to think of Indigenous sovereignty as *mesofictional*; it exists at the whim of the sovereignty of the settler and, more fundamentally, perhaps even metaphysically, it is subordinate to a higher order, more real, or more accurate form of sovereignty. If the settler governments of North America decided it was within their best interests that Indigenous sovereignty ceases to function, even in its second-order state, tomorrow, we would awake to find that we are truly no longer sovereign nations.

Thus, to be able to visit, much less live, amongst my kin here on the *Gdoo-naaganinaa*, I am subjected not to whatever the immigration protocols may be that a possible contemporary Anishinaabe governance structure might employ on some nearby possible world but rather to the border surveillance and policing of the Canadian state. It is to Canada that I must seek permission to live on this territory, even as it is even more common to place words of territorial acknowledgment such as these from the University of Waterloo, where I presently work, on course syllabus, websites, and before the first words of a speaking event:

The University of Waterloo acknowledges that much of our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. Our main campus is situated on the Hal-dimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. Our active work toward reconciliation takes place across our campuses through research, learning, teaching, and community building, and is coordinated within the Office of Indigenous Relations (University of Waterloo Office of Indigenous Relations).

Territorial acknowledgments are common in Canada in 2024. Setting aside the performativity that I often, perhaps cynically, find in the liberal-settler praxis of territorial acknowledgments, here we have encapsulated a paradox, or at least the appearance of a paradox: Indigenous nations are said to be at least nominally sovereign, and now we are seeing a rise in clear recognition of the people for whom these territories were theirs long before Europeans plied the waves to cross that great oceanic border, yet still even for me, a Menominee, kin to the nations of the Anishinaabe, it is the settler border that I must cross, the settler's state apparatus that I must appeal to and ultimately be granted permission to visit, live, work, study, or anything else.

This can be most clearly seen in the asymmetric recognition of the Jay Treaty, which the United States nominally continues to uphold, but Canada does not, which means that First Nations people in Canada have a degree of freedom when crossing the border. They still must present themselves to border control, but certain rights are there, particularly the ability to cross using one's status card or even to live and work in the United States. Obviously, there are caveats, especially if one wishes to cross the border for more than a visit. For example, if one wishes to live and work in the United States, one must not only present proof of status, such as the above-mentioned ability to cross the border using an Indian Status Card but also proof that one meets 50% blood quantum and the prospective Canadian Indigenous applicant must also present an extended form birth certificate indicating parental status.

However, while an Indigenous citizen of Canada may cross into the United States to visit, work, or live, even if there may be some hurdles to surmount, the opposite is true on the other side of the settler-created boundary line. As the US and Britain signed the Jay Treaty, the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples in Canada wrote in *Border Crossing Issues and the Jay Treaty* that "the Jay Treaty has no practical application in Canada today" (8). They list two reasons for this: first, the document claims that the treaty was abrogated by the War of 1812, a war between the US and Britain that has become a hallmark of recent Canadian settler nationalism, and second, the "Treaty has not been implemented or sanctioned by legislation in Canada" (8). It continues by noting that the Canadian courts have upheld both reasons for Canada's non-application of the Jay Treaty several times. This Senate report is also clear about the asymmetric immigration protocols that apply to Indigenous individuals when crossing between these two settler states:

Consequently, currently when entering Canada, First Nations are subject to the same requirements as all other individuals. Individuals may enter Canada by right to live and work if they are Canadian citizens or have Indian Status in Canada. For other individuals, including Native Americans in the United States, the right to enter Canada is not automatic. The requirements are different for First Nations entering the United States. With the appropriate documentation, First Nations who are born in Canada but who do not hold American citizenship are permitted to freely enter the United States by right for the purposes of employment, study, retirement, investing, and/or immigration (2016, 8–9).

What is most striking in these words, though in no way surprising or even terribly interesting, is how it is made clear that it is the sovereign legislative authority of the Canadian settler state that has the final say in the matter rather than the pre-existing rights, laws, governance structures, or agreements of the Indigenous people who had little, if any, say in the formation of a colonial border which now splits them and their territories from themselves. Indeed, if it was merely a matter of the War of 1812 abrogating the treaty, that may be enough of an argument, but the secondary statement explicitly notes that it is *also* a matter that Canadian legislation has not chosen to implement the treaty. Perhaps this is the Derridean deconstructionist semiotician in me which holds that just as much meaning is held in what is not said or what may be read between the lines, but the obvious implication in the words of this standing committee of the senate is that, despite the War of 1812, Canada *could* choose to make the Jay Treaty a reality for Indigenous people south of the border entering the country. It is clear then that Canada chooses not to enact this treaty despite its various other claims and desires to inherit past British territorial claims and treaty agreements in North America.

#### THE SOVEREIGNTY OF BORDERS OR THE BORDERS OF SOVEREIGNTY?

Thus, it is the sovereignty of Canada—a settler entity that has imposed itself and continues to impose itself, often by way of violence, on top of the territories and sovereignties of Indigenous people—that possesses the power of the final word on the matter. Once again, Indigenous sovereignty, despite its promise, the claim that it is actually something real and tangible, and not a feverish fiction, is rendered moot. This is made all the more clear when the same senate report recounts the testimony of a representative of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne who spoke before the standing committee to say that the border crossing right of Indigenous people ante-dates the colonial imposition of the US-Canada border before continuing immediately on to say that the Jay Treaty has, as was noted above, no practical application (8).

Canada's concerns regarding border security issues, citizenship in the settler state, and international law and trade configure the matrix of power and the exercise of rights North of the boundary line. Canadian settler state sovereignty overpowers the limp, residual sovereignty of Indigenous nations on this matter. Furthermore, indeed, if my many years studying, working, and living amongst the mixed Anishinaabe and Rotinonshón:ni community of this part of southern Ontario have taught me anything, it is that there is actually a desire on the part

of Canadian Indigenous peoples to see the Jay Treaty recognized. Until such a time that we might be able to say that we have reached a decolonized and decolonial future, I believe that this will always be the case. Unlike my perhaps more liberal- or social-democratic-minded compatriots in the Indigenous community or Indigenous Studies, I do not hold out any meaningful hope of the prospect of the settler state in either the United States or Canada meaningfully opening the border to trans-national movements by Indigenous peoples who lived, traded, loved, hunted and migrated across these lands for thousands of years before Europeans set sail for spices and pillage. Thus, it is not at this moment that the Three Fires Confederacy, Rotinonshón:ni Six Nations Confederacy, or the Mississaugas operate passport control at Toronto Pearson airport. It is Canada. Our ancient ties mean little today in the face of the rigid barrier to movement that is the northern settler border. This border severs, almost but not quite, our nations from one another, attempting to cut through old alliances, kinship and friendship, trade routes, and sacred migration paths, and which even bisects many of our nations apart from themselves. These new settler governmental formalities are such that maintaining relations across them may often be fraught with difficulty if not peril.

While I was indeed raised offshore, off the soil of the continent, it is this, the presence of a settler colonial border, drawn, at least from an Indigenous perspective, seemingly capriciously and arbitrarily, following lines of latitude emergent from a worldview alien to us before Europeans arrived on these shores, that perhaps more than anything contributes to my sense of Indigenous diaspora while still living on the land of kin and old allies, a land in which my people almost certainly lived, loved, and worked long before the existence of the US or Canada. It would undoubtedly be the case that if the border was not in place, I would still be a Menominee living on the territory of another nation. I do recognize that.

However, I do not believe that in a world where the invasion and the border did not happen, it would be quite the same experience to pass through some kind of Anishinaabe passport control to live, work, or study. Thus, I must leave the visions of such a different world and order of things to the realm of decolonial and Indigenous futurist imaginings for now. Perhaps one day, we will reach such a new power and social relations arrangement. Perhaps, if I am to be so blessed, I will be able to see it and experience what such a world would feel like in my everyday life as a diasporic Menominee on Anishinaabe land. Nevertheless, for now, that world does not exist. The border is here, and we must reckon with its presence and implications for our lives and work.

*Abstract:* This paper examines the complex interplay between Indigenous identity and settler-colonial borders through autoethnographic and storytelling approaches. As both an Indigenous person of the Menominee Nation of Wisconsin and an immigrant from the island of Bermuda, my experiences span both oceanic and continental borders between the United States, Canada, where I presently live and work, and the United Kingdom's largest remaining overseas territory, providing a unique vantage point on the politics of Indigenous identity across these settler-imposed boundaries. Using these experiences as a starting point and inspired by the works of Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson and sociologist Avery Gordon, in this paper, I integrate personal narrative with critical analysis to examine the complex nature of an Indigenous life lived across the borders of settler colonialism. Further, I also examine the historical and contemporary ramifications of the Jay Treaty and, in doing so, highlight the asymmetrical recognition of Indigenous rights to mobility upon their traditional territories, territories that existed long before the arrival of settlers to North America, between the United States and Canada. This treaty, which ostensibly provides certain border-crossing rights to Indigenous peoples, is upheld by the United States but not Canada. Not only does this asymmetry underscore the persistent challenges faced by Indigenous communities in asserting their ancient pre-colonial mobility rights, but it also speaks significantly to the imbalance of power that exists between nominally sovereign Indigenous nations and the sovereignties of settler nation-states whose border controls Indigenous people are now subject. Through this narrative, the paper seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on Indigenous internationalism and the ethical responsibilities of Indigenous scholars. By centering stories and storytelling as both epistemological and methodological tools, the paper advocates for a decolonial approach honoring the interconnectedness of Indigenous experiences and the enduring ties between Indigenous nations across borders.

*Keywords:* Indigenous identity, settler colonialism, borders, autoethnography, storytelling, diaspora, Jay Treaty, sovereignty, transnationalism

*Bio:* Rowland Keshena Robinson is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Waterloo, Canada. Born and raised in Bermuda and a member of the Menominee Nation of Wisconsin, since 2005, Rowland has lived and worked on the lands of the Menominee's close kin, the Anishinaabeg, as well as the Rotinonshón:ni, in what is now known as southern Ontario. Rowland's primary academic work involves a complex humanist project drawing on auto-ethnographic and phenomenological description, interdisciplinary, integrative analysis, narrative-informed theory, memoir, and dialectical philosophy to interrogate the genealogical formation and function of Indigeneity within biopolitical formations and racializing assemblages, as well as the visual, ontological, narrative, and affective imaginings of the United States and Canada. More broadly, his interests range from the politics of recognition and refusal to Marxist theories of ideology, classical and contemporary Western Marxism, the logics of settler colonialism and dispossession, semiotics, and national mythmaking, the metaphysics of sovereignty, world-systems analysis, as well as decolonial and Indigenous critical theory. He is also deeply interested, entirely as a lay person though still informed by his academic passions, in classical Chinese philosophy (Tiantai, Huayan, and Zen Buddhism, Mohism, Legalism, Daoism, Confucianism,

and Neo-Confucianism) as well as the philosophy and sociology of science and scientific practice. Recent work by Rowland has been featured in the edited volume *Three Way Fight: Revolutionary Politics and Antifascism* (Kersplebedeb) and in *Settler Colonial Studies*. He is also working on a monograph-length project entitled *A Distant Red-Shift Discord: Settler Colonialism and the Cartography of Savagery*.

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