



Audra Simpson – ‘Mohawk Interruptus’ Fact sheet

Chapter Four

Introduction

In *Mohawk Interruptus* Audra Simpson dedicates chapter 4 to the argument that, if the historical form of ethnological representation is taken into account, we can analyse a culture without focusing too much on the differences or a one-sided point of view. This historical form included the ranking and governing of differences between White settler societies and Indigenous communities, in this case the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk. By doing so, the settler State established their place of power through the possession of the people and the land. Furthermore, Simpson writes about the link between Indigenous voices and their sovereignty, and how speaking for themselves abolishes stereotypes generally held by White settlers. This includes the image of Indigenous people being harmonious, whilst, in reality, they continuously struggle against the state.

Significance

Audra Simpson's piece is essential in the sense that it can be considered as representative if one is looking to truly understand the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk. It is written from their own perspective, unlike what has been passed along within anthropology and history. Simpson has succeeded in capturing the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke and their fight for sovereignty, whilst refusing assimilation with the settler State. Most importantly, it explains how history was altered in order to marginalize Indigenous peoples to this day.

Key points Audra Simpson makes

- Ethnographic refusal is the act of not conveying all the knowledge to outsiders, since it may do harm to the communities.
- Once White settlers realized how diverse and strong Indigenous people actually were, they decided to stop underestimating them and reckon with them. It led to a common, incorrect notion held by White settlers about Indigenous people, including topics such as brutality, politics, and cooperation. Simpson calls this the “captivity narrative”, which includes fabricated stories of white settlers being captured by “uncivilized” Indigenous people who deviate from White settlers’ customs. It was a way to promote animosity towards Indigenous people.
- This information that the settler State possessed, was a means to govern Indigenous communities, control them, and take possession of their bodies and territories. Their ability to tell their own stories was drowned by the settler State’s persistence to hold onto their own fabricated ideas regarding Indigenous people.
- According to Audra Simpson, it is necessary to take into account this way of governing and representation, so as to ensure authentic representation, free from the focus on cultural differences and the inaccurate notions regarding

Key points continued...

Indigenous people. On the contrary, one can focus on the Indigenous perception of governance, sovereignty, and rights, specifically that of the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk.

- Just as the law has done, both anthropology and historians' perceptibility have been and are still being used in order to produce incorrect knowledge about the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk, in turn empowering and disempowering them, thus allowing the settler State to take away the land from the rightful owners.
- Simpson mentions the relation between settler views and land theft, explaining how the concept of Terra Nullius (meaning land which is not occupied) led to White settlers taking the land that "was not mixed with labour", since it did not correspond with their view on land ownership. Indigenous people, however, have been caring for the land in their own ways, which was not recognised as valid. It led to mass land theft that was justified in the eyes of White colonists.
- Despite the fact that the Kahnawà:ke Mohawks have fought continuously and ferociously to defend their territory, historical and anthropological sources have been reluctant in acknowledging these facts, since this does not correlate with the widely held beliefs and knowledge on the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk.



(Erin, 2018)

- Audra Simpson refuses to pass along all the knowledge on the Kahnawà:ke Mohawks, since knowledge can be used by White settlers to advance their own agenda at the expense of Indigenous people. This refusal is a way of retaining sovereign authority.
- Ethnographic refusal in order to protect the communities is paramount, since colonisation is an ongoing occurrence, harming Indigenous societies still. By dictating their own history and present as they wish and by refusing to pass along all their knowledge, the Kahnawà:ke Mohawks utilise their right to sovereignty.

Bibliography

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