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This book was on my radar screen well before I was asked to do a review for Indigenous Religious Traditions. Even though it is outside my discipline, it has all the right key words to be relevant to my own work—borders, militarization, Indigenous—and I loved the big picture and provocative ideas that expanded my own understanding of topics I have studied for many years. In this book Schaeffer discusses how the securitization of borders builds on the legacy of Indigenous knowledge. This is ironic, of course, because colonial borders were often initially defined and ultimately instituted in some ways as a contrast between Indigenous societies and the perception of colonial powers as more advanced. As the ‘unsettled’ title suggests, it is an issue which continues to come into tension between the two entities still today.

Early on Schaeffer lays the groundwork for how the U.S. military’s use of Indian Scouts (what she calls ‘Nativision’) converted Native Americans’ expertise and sacred experiences with the land (‘sacredsciences’) into a secular resource in the ongoing service of colonization. The book was particularly adept at connecting past with present and even presaging border security controls that are cutting edge or in development. At formal checkpoints this is represented through a shift from casual observation by agents to a dependence on biometric sensors looking for anything out of the ordinary. It is a dynamic informed by modern artificial intelligence but hearkening back to the 1800s when Apache Scouts were hired to make security observations beyond the capacity of the settler colonial military at the time. The book centers Indigenous perspectives to demonstrate not only the contributions Indigenous science has made to (or rather, been appropriated by) the military-industrial/
border-security complex, but also the ways that Indigenous scholarship contributes to our understanding of this dynamic from a critical thinking perspective.

The primary focus of the book is U.S. borders and Arizona features prominently therein, but the lessons go well beyond this geography as approaches to border security have become globalized. Technology designed in places like Israel and Arizona is translated into derivative border security products to become valuable exports. This allows these locations—where settlers overwhelm Indigenous residents and migrants with Native-inspired technology—to leverage their technological security as a form of economic development benefitting the dominant society.

The last chapter goes farther in the globalization of Indigenous knowledge vis-à-vis borders to consider the case of the Maya through the analogy of beekeeping. While related to the rest of the text thematically in terms of the passing of Mayan migrants through Indigenous land in Arizona, technological appropriation of nature for border security, the development of newer collective artificial intelligence, and even Indigenous resistance/revitalization—it did not connect as robustly to the rest of the text as I would have liked.

Scholars with whom I am familiar regularly discuss borders with a wide-angle lens that incorporates both empirical and more intangible observations, as well as which situates borders in less traditional places and practices such as airports, biometrics, and other security networks. *Unsettled Borders* follows this lead and takes an expansive view of the sacred and the Indigenous as well. I anticipate that many readers of this journal will recognize a basic distinction between sacred as the lived experience of many Native Americans and the more limited way in which the concept is understood by other social groups. Schaeffer takes the term even farther, however, to encompass almost all aspects of Indigenous existence. The sub-title reference ‘on Sacred Indigenous Land’ is therefore both an overly broad definition including everything everywhere and one that does not seem to do justice to the less territorial assertions covered. The connection between land and knowledge and the co-optation of Indigenous intellectual and spiritual experiences is a focus of this work, but so also are the psychology of deception and algorithms that underlie these border controls.

No book can be all things to all people on all aspects of a subject, but from my perspective one of the book’s weaknesses was its limited empirical component that could have allowed for a broader and more longitudinal understanding of border Indigenous communities with greater nuance. Indigenous groups are hardly monolithic and a greater effort to understand diverse perspectives would have been beneficial in
the chapter covering the Tohono O’odham experience along the southern Arizona border. Schaeffer mentions that the majority of scholarship and activism on immigration and border issues overlooks Indigenous peoples (59) and I concur. This is most certainly a gap she is helping fill. But there are more writings and activists out there that could have been accessed to further ground this section. Schaeffer did an excellent job uncovering archival and academic sources in other sections of the text, so it is a bit puzzling to have overlooked some obvious resources here (geography, history, and law are some with which I am familiar).

In a more mundane example, the book stated that the U.S. had a long-term lease of land along the border in Mexico for construction of the border fence (64). This is something with which I am not familiar and a dramatic claim that deserved to not just be asserted but supported with documentation. Perhaps the source was oral or told in confidence—but even so providing some type of source information would have been a valuable addition. I was also left desiring more discussion of sources when the text mentioned that there was a discrepancy between how the O’odham measure the border (62 miles, 56) and ‘US’ accounts of 75 miles (endnote, 163). This is probably a difference caused by using the wrong map projections—a mistake I have made before—but regardless there seemed to be a story left untold.

Despite any minor issues, however, at the level of contemporary security deeply rooted in Indigenous approaches to making sense of the world, this book makes a theoretical contribution to borders, Indigenous studies, and even technology studies that is worthy of our attention. Too often Indigenous perspectives are glossed over. Native people may get superficial recognition as a worthy historical opponent honored by the naming of modern technology—Apache and Blackhawk helicopters are mentioned in the book as examples—but less so as a critical academic approach to understanding and making sense of that very same technology and its use. Schaeffer’s efforts to correct this oversight by exploring the past, present, and future of contemporary border security as it intersects with Indigenous heritage, culture, and sacred knowledge has resulted in an ambitious text and one that enhances our understanding of the topic.