Aileen Moreton-Robinson
The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015, $27 pbk (ISBN: 9780816692163), 272 pp.

Reviewed by: Kathryn Medien, *University of Warwick, UK*

What if we were to understand modern settler colonial nations, and their subjects, landscapes, policies, and laws, as embodiments of white possession? How would our understanding of, for example, Australia transform if we were to conceptualise the modern national subject as immigrant, engaged in the perpetual disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty? These questions fuel Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, a collection of essays that explore the on-going 'possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty' (p. xi). Offering a compelling critique of the naturalisation of whiteness in modern settler colonial societies, Moreton-Robinson pertinently argues that one must understand the racialisation and on-going dispossession of Indigenous subjects as a central tenant of modern racial hierarchy, one that articulates whiteness as the pinnacle of national belonging.

White possession, as Moreton-Robinson writes in her introduction, is a set of logics and rationalising processes that are 'operationalized within discourses to circulate sets of meaning about ownership of the nation, as part of commonsense knowledge, decision making, and socially produced conventions' (p. xii). The essays assembled in the volume traverse a multitude of case studies – Australia's 1993 Native Title Act, US colonisation of Hawaii, racist workplace discrimination, Australia's 1901 Immigrant Restriction Act, and many more – that are held together precisely through their demonstration of how white possession operates to perpetually disavow and disappear Indigenous peoples. The book offers a critique of what Moreton-Robinson sees as a tendency in Whiteness Studies and Black Radical scholarship to favour histories of enslavement, imperial wars and migration over a study of native dispossession. In Chapter 4, 'Writing Off Treaties: Possession in the U.S. Critical Whiteness Literature', Moreton-Robinson argues that this epistemic tradition functions to produce 'an epistemological and ontological a priori at the heart of the whiteness literature: the unequivocal acceptance that the United States is a white possession' (p. 60). In an attempt to denaturalise this underlying assumption, Moreton-Robinson instead asks that we expand our understanding of racial capital and citizenship, conceptualising US histories of enslavement and Indigenous dispossession as concomitant and inseparable deployments of white sovereign possession over peoples and land.

In a move to re-centre Indigenous dispossession, Chapter 2, 'The House That Jack Built: Britishness and White Possession', traces how the core values of Australian national identity remain rooted in 'Britishness' and the legal fiction of *terra nullius*: the land belonging to no one. Displacing the 'egalitarian myth that Australia is a "tolerant society"' (p. 24), Moreton-Robinson instead argues that the fiction of *terra nullius* has allowed the white founding of Australia to be narrated solely as a 'struggle against the landscape' (p. 29), a harsh desert landscape presumed as empty. Within this prevalent narrative, Indigenous people, who 'are perceived to be part of the landscape' (p. 29), are deemed non-human. Folding Australia's Indigenous peoples back into the realm of life,

Moreton-Robinson pertinently challenges us to consider how the assumption of *terra nullius* both masks and justifies 'the incarceration, removal, and extermination of Indigenous people' (p. 29).

Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 of the book propose a new research agenda for Critical Indigenous Studies scholarship. Underpinned by Michel Foucault's writings on biopower, race and sovereignty, Moreton-Robinson argues for the need to conceptualise white settler colonial sovereignty as a regime of power, one that operates through discourses of rights and laws, and one that is embedded in the disciplines of political science, history and anthropology. In doing so, these chapters stress the productiveness of white power. A most poignant example occurs in Chapter 10, 'Writing Off Sovereignty: The Discourse of Security and Patriarchal White Sovereignty', where Moreton-Robinson examines Australian security discourse, arguing that national conceptualisations of refugees and asylum seekers, or 'boat people', as invaders, is rooted in a national white anxiety. An anxiety that, in denying the history of white invasion and Indigenous dispossession, functions to legally reaffirm white possession of the land, producing Muslim populations as an illegal existential threat to the white Australian nation. Thus, as Moreton-Robinson makes clear, the 'deployment of the discourse of security is inextricably linked to an anxiety about dispossession shaped by a refusal of Indigenous sovereignty with clear roots in white supremacy' (p. 154).

The White Possessive argues for a systematic identifying of whiteness as central to logics of possession and dispossession in the modern world. Bringing together Indigenous Studies, Whiteness Studies, and legal, social and political theory, Moreton-Robinson's method gives the book an impressive geopolitical scope and interdisciplinary relevance. There are moments when the book's arguments could have benefited from a more sustained treatment of patriarchy, which is often named but under-theorised. Yet this omission should not distract from an otherwise comprehensive and compelling book. Indeed, Moreton-Robinson provides her readers with an indispensable theoretical analysis with which they can (re)think the ways in which the possessive logics of whiteness structure racialised populations, particularly Indigenous subjects, experiences of (non)belonging and displacement in contemporary settler colonial life.

Mara Loveman
National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, £17.49 pbk (ISBN: 9780199337361), 400 pp.

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Much of modern social science has been occupied by attempts to understand two major social phenomena: race/racial categories and the development of the nation-state. There have been numerous works that have attempted to uncover the histories and trends in the development of both phenomena. Loveman's book is one that tries to tackle aspects of both intellectual endeavors as well as a number of others, and does so masterfully. Loveman's book is premised on the question '[w]hy do states classify their citizens by race or ethnicity while other do not?' (p. 4). What makes this work special is both where