

Book Note: *Violence Against Indigenous Women: Literature, Activism, Resistance*

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Book under review: Allison Hargreaves. 2017. *Violence Against Indigenous Women: Literature, Activism, Resistance*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Violence Against Indigenous Women: Literature, Activism, Resistance is a timely contribution to a body of work that argues a central role for storytelling in Indigenous scholarship, activism, and justice.

Allison Hargreaves' starting point is the fact that hundreds of Indigenous women in Canada have been murdered or have gone missing. Although these murders and disappearances have drawn recent public attention, the underlying issues of colonialism and power imbalance have not been adequately recognised or addressed. Hargreaves identifies as "an allied settler scholar" (she has worked with a sexual assault crisis group and an Indigenous/non-Indigenous coalition group) whose aim is to address misrepresentations of gendered colonial violence. In keeping with Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's ideas in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), Hargreaves approaches Indigenous women's literature (creative works, as well as visual and oral texts) as methodology, making this literature a significant site for the creation of knowledge and for resistance. Her own research method in *Violence Against Indigenous Women* involves comparison of Indigenous research and literary works with other types of policy and activist discourse about gendered colonial violence.

In Chapter 1, "Finding Dawn and the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry: Story-Based Methods in Anti-Violence Research and Remembrance," Hargreaves focuses on *Finding Dawn*, a 2006 documentary by Métis filmmaker Christine Welsh. By "re-membling" missing girls and women in British Columbia, Welsh recreates the territories, communities, and networks they are part of, making way for a new understanding of the violence aimed at them. Hargreaves argues that this work stands in contrast to the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, which elides much of each woman's story.

In Chapter 2, “Narrative Appeals: The Stolen Sisters Report and Storytelling in Activist Discourse and Poetry,” Hargreaves discusses three sources: the quantitative and qualitative research conducted by the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) as part of the Sisters in Spirit campaign; a 2004 report by Amnesty International titled *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*; and the Cree-Métis poet Marilyn Dumont’s commemorative poems in *A Really Good Brown Girl* (1996). Hargreaves suggests that the Amnesty International report uses a human rights storytelling approach, implicitly relying on the colonial state to initiate change. The NWAC is careful to frame its qualitative research within biographical narratives to reflect the complexity of lives concerned. And by acknowledging the difficulty of establishing public knowledge about violence, Dumont’s poetry postpones closure.

Chapter 3, “Compelling Disclosures: Storytelling in Feminist Anti-Violence Discourse and Indigenous Women’s Memoir,” examines instances of public apology in Canada to reveal their role in a narrative of “post-colonial” reconciliation, while dissimulating the colonial power they are meant to redress. In contrast, Hargreaves notes that the 2006 memoir *Morningstar: A Warrior’s Spirit* by Dene (Chipewyan) activist-writer Morningstar Mercredi uses Indigenous personal experience as a politically relevant basis to put the (settler) reader in a position of responsibility, thereby aiming to forge a different set of relations between settlers and Indigenous people.

Chapter 4, “Recognition, Remembrance, and Redress: The Politics of Memorialization in the Cases of Helen Betty Osborne and Anna Mae Pictou-Aquash,” deals with the logic of progress and liberation that often underlies performances of public apology. Hargreaves suggests that these practices unfold as if colonial violence were something of the past, despite current evidence to the contrary. In her view, commemorative creative works—David Robertson’s 2008 graphic novel *The Life of Betty Osborne* and

Yvette Nolan’s 2006 play *Annie Mae’s Movement*—despite their own limitations, are more critical in that they raise questions about popular anti-violence remembrance and grievability.

Hargreaves concludes in “Thinking beyond the National Inquiry: A Red Girl’s Reasoning” that gendered violence is largely a product of contemporary colonial relations, and that the political urgency is not settler reconciliation but decolonial transformation. By making a case for Indigenous literature as methodology, Hargreaves reaffirms the need for resistance to status quo. In the current context where women’s voices are often hushed, and their stories misrepresented, *Violence Against Indigenous Women* opens new venues for feminist alliances through a vital, specifically Indigenous, viewpoint.