

Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart help Cree culture to make a paradigm shift from oral performance to written text. Such a transformation is necessary in order for Cree culture to perpetuate itself; however, this change is also done with a great deal of sincerity and personal connection to the storytellers.

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Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength, edited by Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk. Manitoba Studies in Native History, Volume IX. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996, 204 pp., photographs, index.

Historically, little effort has been made to bridge the gulf between the academy and Aboriginal communities. Generally, academics study a wide range of historical and contemporary social phenomena from distant ivory towers, while community-based workers slug it out at the "front lines." In the fall of 1989 the University of Lethbridge Native Studies Department attempted to help bridge this gap by hosting a conference entitled "The National Symposium on Aboriginal Women of Canada: Past, Present and Future." The objectives of the conference were threefold: to provide a forum in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women scholars, community-activists and other front-line workers would "share ideas, information, experiences, and strategies"; to encourage more research on various aspects of Aboriginal women's lives; and to publish a collection of readings "for students, researchers, and other interested groups, encompassing various theoretical issues" (vii, 4). Over the course of four days participants attended formal paper presentation panels, "experiential and problem-solving" workshops, and a variety of cultural events.

By many standards the conference was an overwhelming success — it attracted participants and presenters from diverse backgrounds, a wide range of academic and community issues were discussed, and the dialogue was candid. On more sensitive topics such as representation, appropriation, voice, authority and truths, the dialogue was often tense and lively.

The thirteen articles in *Women of the First Nations* were selected to reflect the conference's commitment to diversity and the range of approaches and topics ongoing in Aboriginal Women's Studies. Four of the articles were written by Aboriginal scholars, writers and community workers, nine were written by non-Aboriginal academics, and the introduction was a collaborative effort from the co-editors, Dr. Christine Miller, Department of Native Studies, and Dr. Patricia Chuchryk, Department of Sociology, both at the University of Lethbridge.

The collection is opened, as was the conference, by a moving keynote address from Jeanette Armstrong, Okanagan writer and Director of the En'owkin International School of Writing. Armstrong's presentation set the tone both for the conference discussions and for this collection of essays by providing a forthright encapsulation of the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and by focusing on issues and concerns most pressing to contemporary Indigenous women. She stresses that Aboriginal women historically resisted colonial intrusions and still struggle with dignity to maintain balance and continuity with the past. She closed with a passionate encouragement to Aboriginal women to continue rebuilding and healing their communities and to remain true and strong to traditional values.

Emma LaRoque provides the theoretical framework for the collection by carrying Armstrong's theme into the academic realm. She takes a personal look at how colonialism still operates in the academy to deny Aboriginal women scholars credibility. Aboriginal scholars challenge academic conventions, which confine discourse to standard Eurocentric forms, by striving to create a place for approaches and methods that more appropriately reflect diverse Aboriginal ways of knowing. They do this by variously employing transdisciplinary methods, "insider" or direct experience-based critiques, by linking the past, present and future, and by writing in the oral tradition. LaRoque stresses that Aboriginal women scholars resist pervasive intellectual colonialism by assertively demonstrating that "voice" is not only an "expression of cultural integrity"; it is also "an attempt to begin to balance the legacy of dehumanization and bias entrenched in Canadian studies about Native peoples" (13).

The non-Aboriginal contributions to this collection clearly reflect the aims of feminist scholarship — they challenge and attempt to fill gaps left by Euro-male-centered research themes and approaches. The foci of feminist historians Sarah Carter, Laura Peers and Diane Payment are on diverse roles, contributions and adaptive strategies employed by Plains, Saulteaux and Métis women, respectively, in the late nineteenth century. Jo-Anne Fiske focuses on Carrier women's experiences in residential schools at the turn of the century. One of the primary criticisms of earlier feminist histories of Aboriginal women is that they are devoid of women's voices. Three of these scholars take heed by utilizing and incorporating oral histories collected from their own field studies and from existing archival collections.

Vicky Paraschak, Julia Emberley, Kathy M'Closkey, Jennifer Blythe, Peggy McGuire and Rosemary Brown focus on more contemporary phenomena. Brown, Blythe and McGuire go beyond Marxist and modernization theories in their examinations of how twentieth-century environmental, economic and political pressures impact women's lives among the Cree and Lubicon Lake and James Bay respectively. They also demonstrate how these incursions challenge Cree women's adaptive abilities to maintain traditional subsistence and economic activities. In her study of the Inuit Pangnirtung Weave Shop, M'Closkey challenges prevailing Western cultural standards that minimize Indigenous art by relegating it to the conceptually lowly category of "crafts," and Paraschuk looks at the much neglected role of organized sports in the lives of Six Nations women. Julia Emberley stresses the imperative for scholars to unlearn colonialist assumptions found in feminist theory and in post-colonial interpretive methods.

The contrast in tone and content between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal contributions to this collection exemplifies the rift this conference tried so hard to bridge and the points made earlier by Emma LaRoque. Non-Aboriginal contributions are of strong scholarly quality and reflect the individual interests of the writers. While each is clearly trenchant of historical and contemporary colonialist practices they tend to separate women's lives from men's, a practice Aboriginal women have been critical of for the last three decades.

The Aboriginal writers in this collection also challenge prevailing misrepresentations and omissions of Aboriginal women's roles and experiences in the literature, but do so from a different place. Their critiques of colonialism are grounded in personal experience (direct and generational) and their focus is on the very real and urgent issues facing Aboriginal communities today. Theirs is not an academic exercise — women's concerns are not separated from men's and immediate community needs are placed above professional and personal interests. Betty Bastion, Jeanette Armstrong and Beverly Hungry Wolf all agree that one of the primary roles of Aboriginal women is to maintain cultural identity and values and to ensure that

these are transmitted to future generations. They also demonstrate the vital links between people and place, past, present and future, and how these serve as guiding principles in all aspects of their lives.

Despite the diversity of women's voices in attendance at the conference, the articles in this collection weigh heavily on the academic side. Blatantly missing are the voices of the many front-line community workers who represented the majority of conference participants. An invaluable contribution would have been critiques or summaries of the various "experiential and problem-solving" workshops — what kinds of dialogues ensued among women from such diverse backgrounds? What kinds of outcomes, solutions or recommendations emerged? The inclusion of workshop summaries would have also ensured a representational balance between academic and community concerns in the collection. Despite this weakness, which is common in published academic works, this collection is a useful contribution to Aboriginal Women's Studies and will appeal to lay readers and scholars alike.

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Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997. 247 pp., index.

Anyone who watched *Jones v. Clinton* unfold in the American news media early this year has witnessed the way in which the definition of femininity can be manipulated and mobilized to serve political ends. Despite its notorious contempt for sexual harassment as an issue for the courts, the political Right was nevertheless quick to assume the role of chivalrous champions of wronged American womanhood. As for the individual women involved, no one will ever know them, except as the most recent feminine place-markers in the patriarchal discourse that has shaped the U.S. since the *Mayflower* landed. In keeping with the media-constructed term "Clinton's women," they were the captives of their own narratives as manipulated by expensive lawyers and media pundits on both sides of the political war. Indeed, the women's disclosures were not about the way women are treated by the men in high places who regard unlimited sexual access to female underlings as just one of the perks of the job. Rather, reshaped through a series of politically orchestrated and electronically mediated leaks and counterleaks, their narratives were about positioning public opinion for the next presidential election, when once again voters get to choose which of the two patriarchal visions of America will prevail for the next eight years.

As Canadians, we needn't be too smug about the political sagas and soap operas of our flamboyant neighbours. Our own political history is woven from a similar kind of gender-inflected yarn, and historians of the last thirty years have demonstrated considerable skill in unravelling it. Sarah Carter's *Capturing Women* is a recent and, in my view, immensely fascinating contribution to that endeavour. Her study examines the position of women in the colonial discourse that reshaped the political landscape of the Canadian West during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Like the women in the *Jones v. Clinton* story circulating through the American media, women of the fledgling white communities on the Canadian Prairies were the sexualized signifiers of virtue and victimization in the circulating stories that influenced the fateful shift in white-Native power relations during and after the Second Riel Rebellion of 1885.