

ity (although differing in degree): our stories were not written and our teachings are often undocumented and harder to “prove”. Critique and analysis are traditional, too, I think. How we engage in those exercises in ways that employ ethical standards is a difficult discussion.

IN THE DAYS OF OUR GRANDMOTHERS: A READER IN ABORIGINAL WOMEN’S HISTORY IN CANADA

Mary-Ellen Kelm and Lorna Townsend, Eds.
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REVIEWED BY PRISCILLA CAMPEAU

When asked if I would be interested in doing a book review, I agreed to it once I found out it would be on Aboriginal women. The title of the book was intriguing; I would get the opportunity to learn more about the *grandmothers*, those who have gone before me and those who still teach me.

As the editors say in their introduction, they hope to prompt dialogue and debate that will inspire students to add their own voices to this important and growing field [Aboriginal women’s history] with this collection of essays. It certainly had that effect on me and brought memories to the surface that were long buried. When I was a child I was told that I was not to refer to my *kokom* and *mosom* by those terms when we were in town, I was to call them grandma and grandpa, two foreign terms to me at that time. There was no explanation given when I asked why, and as I read through these chapters I thought how I could expect my parents or my *kokom* and *mosom* to explain colonialism and its effects to me when

they were living through it. As I read through these chapters and thought about what messages they were trying to convey to me as the reader, as an Aboriginal woman, I was at a loss, for the messages are relevant to me as a person who happens to work in an academic centre in a university. While I can read them, understand, and synthesize their concepts with my own understandings, I wonder what my *kokom* or my *grandmothers* who have taught me would think about these chapters. They are all learned women in their own rights but would they understand the viewpoints of a cultural anthropologist, an historian or a professor of Women’s Studies or Native Studies—and would these academics understand their viewpoints? We are at a point in academia where Indigenous traditional knowledge and oral testimonies are as relevant as historical accountings and archival records.

The editors have chosen fourteen contributors ranging from such topics as women in the fur trade, religion, sexuality, stereotypes, law, and settlement. As we know, all fields are interrelated when discussing Aboriginal women’s history. The reader must question the sources used in the articles and whether they are from an Aboriginal voice, as Jean Barman states: “However much we pretend to read our sources ‘against the grain,’ to borrow from the cultural theorist Walter Benjamin, we have become entrapped in a partial world that represents itself as the whole world.” And the reader must remember that historical records on Aboriginal peoples were made by non-Aboriginal men who focused on their Aboriginal male subjects and thus grouped Aboriginal women within that same purview. They did not have training in First Nations protocols, traditions or language. One wonders what the Aboriginal women whose pictures appear in Carol Williams’ essay regarding the Tsimshian Methodist Converts or the women who appear in the archival photographs in Sylvia Van

Kirk’s founding families of Victoria would say to their circumstances as they are presented. Is it a case of Aboriginal women adapting and living by whatever means possible to ensure their survival and that of their offspring? How accurate are the voices attributed to them?

The collection raised questions involving First Nations protocols: I question the inclusion of ceremonial knowledge in the reader. In particular, I find the information on the women’s lodges in Mary C. Wright’s “The Woman’s Lodge: Constructing Gender on the Nineteenth-Century Pacific Northwest Plateau” fascinating and at the same time questionable. While I can appreciate the subject matter, the research, and the writing involved in such an essay, I also wonder if the proper protocols of that First Nations group were observed and I wonder whether they are comfortable with the information as it is presented. As we are given access to more information on Aboriginal peoples’ cultural traditions and protocols, we have a responsibility to acknowledge, respect, protect, and preserve those sources.

Mary Ellen Kelm and Lorna Townsend have undertaken a great endeavour, to compile a collection of essays to explain Aboriginal women’s history in Canada. While the essays give us a foundation of knowledge to work with, the subject matter is too vast for just one book. This collection raises as many questions as it answers and propels the reader to further explore issues raised within the essays. In this regard, the editors have achieved their goal of inspiring debate and dialogue within Indigenous women’s histories.

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