Differences For Our Daughters *Racialized Sexism in Art, Mass Media, and Law*

BY DENISE S. McCONNEY

Il s'agit ici d'une installation artistique féministe qui met en évidence les meurtres de Paul Bernardo et de John Crawford. L'auteure a utilisé cette installation comme point de départ pour examiner les images des victimes violentées qui sont véhiculées différemment dans les médias selon leur race et leur sexe.

In this article I will begin by discussing a feminist art installation which focussed on the murders committed by Paul Bernardo and John Crawford, and use this as a starting point to examine the ways in which victims of violence are differently portrayed in the mass media depending on their race and gender. This analysis of Colleen Whiten's feminist installation, "Seducing the Receiver," (1994-1995) raises questions about how art, mass media, and law select and represent "serious" crime. Further questions arise from a comparison of the Bernardo case-the main subject of the installation-and the strictly localized (Saskatchewan) attention paid to the murders by John Crawford. The main conclusion is that for reasons of location, class, and racialized sexism, Bernardo's murders drew massive attention across the continent while Crawford's murders received no newspaper coverage outside the province of Saskatchewan.

A quilt of theories

In this section, I will acknowledge the works which have spoken to me and inform the analysis I undertake in the later portion. I am calling on the idea of making a quilt to explain that while these works stand on their own—as does a bolt of fabric—what I have used here are particular pieces of theory, of fabric, to produce a design for which I take responsibility. These intellectuals have inspired me. What appears here is how I have attempted to take up their work and apply it to these specific cases.

For example, in this work, I have finally come to understand two terms which had been puzzling me: "racialized" and "post-colonial." For my understanding of the term "racialized," I cannot directly credit any of the writers listed in the citations. Rather my understanding has come from both reading across the work of community or organic intellectuals (in the Gramscian sense) such as Razack, Monture-Angus, hooks, Matsuda, and Cook-Lynn, and from my own recent experiences in the academy. Understanding "post-colonial," a term which troubled me although I could not quite identify why, came from reading through Spivak's work. Again it is not from any particular place in her writings but rather an accumulated understanding from reading the articles listed in the references. My conclusion, at this point, is that racialized is a particularly useful term for my work in explicating the history and contemporary conditions which structure the lives of Native and non-Native peoples in what is now called North America but, post-colonially is not. This conclusion, of course, requires some explanation.

If one is being racialized, clearly there is a racializing agent at work. Racism is what is done to people; it is not part of their inherent natures.

I began to hear the term "racialized" about two years ago. It did not, at first, make sense to me. At that

time all I could do was ask someone for a quick, 25-wordsor-less explanation. The explanation I received was that it was meant to call attention to the ongoing, pervasive effects of racism in the lives of people of colour. As bell hooks describes this:

the vast majority of black folks who are subjected daily to forms of racial harassment have accepted this as one of the social conditions of our life in white supremacist patriarchy that we cannot change. This acceptance is a form of complicity. (10-11)

As that was evident to me already I did not, at first, see this term as an advance.¹ It was only with understanding, for example, the problematic structuring of discrimination as defined in law and human rights codes that I came to understand the utility of "racialized."

In such legal definitions, racism is one little box of proscribed behaviours. The little boxes have two main effects. One is that some race-based behaviours fall into the little box called racism and some do not. The other is that because particular behaviours must fit into only one of the little boxes, there is no allowance for actions which are coming from both racial *and* sexual discrimination (see Monture-Angus). These little boxes effect our thinking about how we can address issues of race, sex, and colonialism. They tend to close out considerations of the interstices of how these appear in our everyday lives. In other words, the problems of racism rarely occur in discrete acts and can rarely be understood solely by reference to racism. This was a fundamental concern in my analysis of structural inequities in the Mendel Gallery and in Whiten's work in particular.

Whiten's work is produced from a self-declared feminist perspective which is all well and good. Many of the writers I listed in the beginning of this section identify as feminists (hooks, Spivak, and Razack for example). This

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analysis, however, will question both Whiten's choices in her subject matter—are Paul Bernardo's crimes the "worst" serial crimes in recent memory?—and her presentation—what and who are depicted in her creations? What does she make of her choices of medium? I will be arguing that feminist little boxes of this type can be categories which are just as limiting as those of colonial law.

For many Native people, neither race nor gender is the primary source of their oppression. Winona Stevenson expresses this quite clearly:

I do not call myself a feminist. I

believe in the power of Indigenous women and the power of all women.... Feminism defines sexual oppression as the Big Ugly. The Indigenous women's movements sees colonization and racial oppression as the Big Uglies. (Johnson, Stevenson, and Greeschner 159)

She acknowledges that racism is part of what has happened but puts colonialism first as being the source and means through which these other oppressions entered the lives of Native people. Thus, colonialism is the foundation for racism and sexism. This is another crucial aspect of the term racialized. It highlights racism as a process in that it signals the role of the racializers. If one is being racialized, clearly there is a racializing agent at work. Racism is what is done to people; it is not part of their inherent natures. This fits quite well with what I have come to see as White people's responsibility in addressing racism. We can no longer assume that racism is an issue which only racialized people will address. This stance obscures our complicity in the maintenance of racism. Identifying our complicity in dominance as well as identifying when we are dominated is of crucial concern to women like hooks and Razack. To move away from the position of complicity brings its own dangers.

I know, from my own experience if nothing else, that when we challenge racism, we give up the relative safety of White privilege.² In relinquishing this privilege, we are attacked by "peers" and higher authoritics, not only for our scholarship but with the viciousness typically reserved for collaborators (with the "losing" side) in postwar periods. Similarly we risk making mistakes in our analyses. This can bring on criticism by racialized peoples. Neither of these is adequate reason for avoiding this work.

With respect to post-colonialism, although this term has come from the work of respected Third World scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, its utility in the North American context is severely limited. It sounds like colonialism is over and "we" are past/post colonial. I agree the shape and functions of colonialism are not what they were in the nineteenth century. This means while I do find neo-colonialism a useful term, the idea of post-colonial is much too soon in these territories. As I understand it, a crucial feature of being post-colonial is to have received, at least, political independence from the imperial power. This typically gives the Indigenous peoples of the territory the right to govern themselves. However, as Spivak acknowledges, all too often they continue to maintain the ideologies and apparatus of colonialism (264-266).

For the Indigenous peoples of North America, none of these necessary conditions—law-making, enforcement, or administration—exist. The settler populations received political independence of this type but not the First Nations. We could not even argue that the First Nations are sovereign on their own reserves, let alone in their original territories. As much of the following analysis shows, this lack has clear and detrimental affects on their lives and representations. Post-colonialism is, therefore, not useful in this context.

"Art" is in the eye of the beholder

An important part of Razack's analysis in *Looking White People in the Eye* was the construction of gender and race in law, especially in courtrooms. As part of the materials she examined, she analyzed the representations of the particular cases in the mass media reports. So when I heard the subject of Whiten's exhibit, I was immediately interested in seeing it and in doing some serious thinking about it.

Another reason for my interest was that in her choices for this presentation, Colleen Whiten used a particular medium—beadwork—for this exhibit. Whiten strung long curtain-like strands of beads, in shades of black and white, and used these to spell "headlines" from the media coverage of Bernardo's trial. Beadwork, for me, instantly recalls the artistry of Native women. I found it ironic that both Whiten and the initial curator, Marnie Fleming, see beadwork as an "undervalued medium that lacks authority," whereas for Native peoples beadwork is a highly valued skill and art form. To be known as a "fine beadworking woman" is to be acknowledged as doing well at a much-respected, valued, and long-integral part of Native art and design. I am not known as a "fine beadworking woman." My beadwork has "texture." Less kind descriptions of it have been that it is lumpy or bumpy.

This is not an issue in Whiten's work as her beadwork is of single strands with lead fish weights at the bottoms. Whiten used this weighting technique to overcome the difficulties she encountered with trying to do the pieces on a loom. Native women frequently do larger pieces as loomed work.

My use of the terms "art and design" should not be taken as suggesting that Native beadwork is "merely" art or decoration in the western/Eurocentric sense. Often these designs carry important family and spiritual significance. Among the Dene of the Northwest Territories, specific designs and their colour combinations represent particular family membership. As one of my Dene students explained it, the women include these designs, particularly on men's clothing, to signal to people in other communities where their relatives may be travelling, who the traveller is, and as a request that the wearer be taken care of while away from home.³ This seems somewhat reminiscent of the original intention of the designs on fisherknit sweaters in Ireland. Specific designs on the fishermen's sweaters were to serve as identification for the men's bodies when they washed up on shore after accidents at sea. Among the Blackfoot (and other Plains Nations) beaded designs can signal the accomplishments of the wearer.⁴ Thus this art work has far more than decorative value.

The difference between what is art and what is craft was brought home to me during a class discussion of what items appear in the "Gallery" of the Mendel Art Gallery and what appears in the gift shop.⁵ While there is Native "art" in the gallery, specifically pencil drawings by Ruth Cuthand of the Little Pine First Nation, Whiten's beadwork is exhibited in a gallery. Native beadwork, earrings, and necklaces, are in the gift shop. Similarly, in another portion of the Gallery, there was an exhibit of the work of Ukrainian "ethnic" photographers. When my brother-inlaw, Denis Angus-Cree of the Thunderchild First Nation-took his photographs to the Mendel to see about a showing, he was told to take his work to Wanuskewin.⁶ We can raise many questions about the role of ethnicity in the Ukrainian exhibit but I also want raise the question of race as a determinant of art. Cuthand's work is able to be identified as art but the work of Denis Angus is not? And, at roughly the same time, the work of the Ukrainian photographers is somehow clearly art?

These considerations led me to think about and question how the events-of Paul Bernardo's trial and its inseparable counterpart, Karla Homolka's-how did these become so important, not only for the points of law involved in them but as mass media and public events? My question became: While these two trials and the actions they were judging in the trials became national news events—what might we draw out of the vastly similar yet,

I suspected and this was confirmed in my archival research, the very localized coverage of the trials of John Crawford? I would also note here that John Crawford's trials had unsettling parallels with another trial which followed soon after. This was the trial of Steven Kummerfeld and Alex Ternowetsky and their fatal kidnapping and assault of a Saulteaux woman.

So, why did "we" come to care about Bernardo so much? Why did these other two sets of murders receive so little attention (outside Saskatchewan)?

Responding to the questions

First, but not necessarily most nice middle-class importantly, who can argue with the idea that Toronto is the centre of the universe? We "know" anything that happens in Toronto (or its immediate area) is more important and more interesting than events that happen elsewhere. Thus, two murders in the Toronto area are ipso facto more important than three murders in Saskatoon. I was only mildly surprised to find that John Crawford's name does not even appear in the Canadian News Index. It

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is true that Saskatchewan papers are not indexed in its listings but this still tells us that these murders were seen to have no significance outside of the province of Saskatchewan.7

What is important about this point is how it demonstrates the privileging of Toronto as a news site. It also highlights the complicity of silence that allows specific tragedies which happen in "elsewhere," such as Saskatchewan, and which may have just as significant implications for public safety,⁸ to go virtually unnoticed in the Canadian mass media. While many of us who have children were no doubt horrified by the accounts of Bernardo's reign of terror, we would do well to remember that other "types" of victims, like John Crawford's, are disappearing on a far more regular basis than the young women murdered by Bernardo.⁹ During Crawford's trial, Saskatchewan media reported that up to 80 per cent of the people on Prairie missing person's lists were Native women. I am not suggesting that all these women are dead. I am saying their uninvestigated disappearances are also horrific. How would this issue play out in Toronto (if the media noticed it)?

It is also important to recognize that the widespread portrayal of Paul Bernardo as a singular monster is deeply problematic. While no doubt it was meant to convince "us" that he was an aberration and "we" really have very little to fear with respect to these kinds of attacks, does this really hold true? I would argue that Paul Bernardo, and his

kind, are actually just one point on a continuum of male violence against women. If this reasoning sounds familiar perhaps it is because I am not the only one who remembers Marc Lepine. Not so oddly enough, I also remember this same argument having to be made after Lepine's Montreal massacre.¹⁰ We likely could, without a great deal of effort, recall other names and similar tragedies. And that is my point. Most of us ordinary people can remember these events. Why do the media personnel and system seem to

forget them?

An even starker contrast, is that the disappearance of the three Native women went virtually unnoticed and certainly uninvestigated.

Another significant absence in the work is that of anything that refers to the victims. None of the texts Whiten chose to represent in the beadwork seem to make any comment on Bernardo's victims. What happened to the ones who died? Why are they absent from this representation? I was living in Ontario at the time that the young women went missing. All Ontario and perhaps even outside the province knew that Bernardo's victims were missing.¹¹ In Saskatchewan, no one, neither their urban friends nor their families on the reserves and in their communities, were even sure if any of Crawford's vic-

tims were truly "gone." This is an important contrast in these events.

We should also compare who these women are and what happened when each "set" was discovered to be missing. Bernardo's victims were nice middle-class school girls and "everyone" was looking out for them on the very days that they disappeared. Newspaper reports during John Crawford's trial demonstrate an extreme contrast. These reports included mention of the fact that several of their family members tried to file missing-person reports about their loved ones. Both the RCMP detachments in their areas and the Saskatoon police force continue to refuse to accept missing-person reports on this "type" of person-i.e. adults who are "known" to come and go. There is even a heartbreaking quotation from one of the women's father where he recalls saying to the RCMP officers who came to tell him that his girl was dead: "Two guys tell my daughter was still alive. Now you're sitting here telling me my daughter's dead. What kind of a damn system do you have?" (Sheane C3). He had filed a missing person report in July and subsequently been informed his daughter was alive.

An even starker contrast to that noted above, and this is not to make light of the horrors they suffered before those two girls died is that the disappearance of the three Native women went virtually unnoticed and certainly uninvestigated. When the Indian families tried to convince police that the women were not displaying typical "come-andgo" behaviour (i.e. they were not coming home for particular events that they would normally be expected to attend), these families were not believed nor their explanations given credence. I see no other way to understand this than through racialized sexism. It was because of the victims' race and gender, with all the implications noted so far, which allowed the police to feel free to dismiss their families' concerns.

There is another part to this convergence in racialized sexism. A large part of why their families' assessment of the women's behaviour was not accorded the respect which the families of Bernardo's victims received was because Crawford's victims were caught up in the ongoing displacement, relocation, and search for a safe place that is a consistent theme in the lives of most Native women.¹² What I want to stress here is that this is a theme which is largely invisible to non-Native Canadians. Our complicity in this is in maintaining this status quo which crucially includes the ongoing existence of a permanent Native under-class while resource-rich Canadians enjoy their stolen prosperity—from these same Native peoples.¹³ Thus, no one knew or even seems to care much today that these Native women and very likely others are gone.

Where are concerns about the victims? Whiten chooses not to show us any of the faces; not Bernardo's nor his victims. Does she assume we "know" what the characters look like? Again, all Ontario knew what Bernardo's victims looked like. Their faces had been everywhere, on posters, billboards, and in the mass media. In comparison, in Saskatchewan when the skeletal remains of the three bodies were discovered the question was "who were these women?" There was great uncertainty about who they were and what had happened. Crawford's victims needed forensic reconstruction before they could be identified.

Whiten does use the faces of Haitian and Abkhazian peoples from seemingly disparate and unconnected news "events." Perhaps because I came to the exhibit with a different agenda—and even after viewing the works more than once—I'm still asking why? Where did the people from this tragedy go? I admit I had difficulty and actually could not "make meaning" from the juxtaposition which Whiten created. At least not until I had read the program and even now I am still not sure I get it.

There is something that I do get with respect to the convictions in these cases. The results of these trials are crying out for challenge and interrogation. For example, what convicted Bernardo? It became clear during his trial that he had been a suspect for a long time but backups in the police processing labs stalled the DNA analysis, thus allowing him to continue—Why? Surely the irony of the failure of DNA technology to have contributed to a more expeditious arrest is highlighted by the role played in Bernardo's conviction of the fact of his audacious taping of the tortures and murders. Another level to this irony is that he had access to a video camera which ultimately contributed to his own conviction. There are issues of privilege which need to be invoked here. Bernardo had both a private home in which to enact his crimes and access to a video camera with which to record them. These elements helped his crimes to go unseen for quite some time.

Now we can ask-what allowed Crawford to continue? Clearly he had no such access to recording technology. He did not have Bernardo's good looks to rely on when passing for "normal." What John Crawford did have was his place in another stratum of society-and one which only seems to function in public view-that of "street life." Street life implies it is out in the open. Presumably there would be no privacy available in such a life. Yet these lives, which are often layered with violence and desperation, are most often ignored by the "public" and our "servants" (i.e. the police as mentioned before.)¹⁴ If this territory were truly "post-colonial" surely the lives of Native people, even of their underclass, would be important to public servants. Yet, this underclass, which on the Prairies (but not exclusive to the Prairies) is largely Aboriginal, receives very little attention. As we saw before, these people come and go without the public or often even family and friends being aware of their movements, let alone being able to become concerned about these.

And yes, I said "allowed Crawford to continue." He had a fourth and possibly even a fifth victim. Actually the fourth woman I am referring to was his first kill. This murder took place several years earlier in Lethbridge, Alberta. Crawford is also suspected of a fifth murder, again in Saskatoon. A woman, who has since "disappeared," had laid a complaint with police that Crawford sexually assaulted her (Hoffman 1996a, A3). What allowed Crawford to continue is the same element that was so useful to Kummerfeld and Ternowetsky in both their convictions and sentencing.

"We were able to put him with her [the first victim] we were able to say he bit her. From the confession we were able to say he did hit her," Plomp said. [detective and crime scene specialist from the Lethbridge case] *"(But) we didn't have the evidence to say someone else didn't come along after he left her and finish her off."* (Hoffman 1996b, C1, emphasis added)

As many of us should recall, this was a major issue in Kummerfeld and Ternowetsky's trial. There was no concrete evidence of when exactly the Saulteaux woman died. Their defense was able to raise exactly the same doubt that Plomp identifies and thus enable the "boys"¹⁵ to be convicted of a lesser charge. Think about the implications of this for women of different social categories. Think of the message this "post-colonial" justice sends to the parents of young Native women. Is this independent justice for Native people? The father quoted above was able to make this connection: Why was she prostituting herself when the Queen promised her a prosperous life on the reserve? ... Why would she prostitute herself if the treaties had been fulfilled? ... Many times I wonder at nights whether she screamed "Canada, Canada" like that Somalia kid that was killed by the Airborne Regiment. (Sheane C3)

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that my focus within has been on representations in art, mass media, and the law. It is important in these areas to question representations in terms of "Whose lives and deaths count?": the bold, the beautiful, and the innocent, or the disabled, the privileged, and the dispossessed?

One final question: Why did Whiten, a self-declared feminist artist, draw on the Bernardo case for this exhibit? She must have known full well that she could be accused of participating in the further exploitation of this tragedy? Whiten acknowledges her interest began with In Saskatchewan when the skeletal remains of the three bodies were discovered the question was "who were these women?"

the discovery of the body of one of Bernardo's victims¹⁶ and increased during the trial. She says her interest came from thinking about how she, as a woman with two daughters,¹⁷ would have coped if this happened to her family. This is a good question even as it misses the point about exploitation.

My work, while fundamentally woman-centred, does not exclusively or even predominantly focus on gender as I am crucially concerned with race as well. It is the interconnections and intersections of and between these constructions which matter most to me.¹⁸

As the Mother of and Auntie to a number of young Indian women, in our family we are more likely to be coping with the actions of another John Crawford or Steven Kummerfeld and Alex Ternowetsky. And our girls, despite their absence in much feminist analyses and mass media representations, *do count!*

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¹Ever since moving to Saskatchewan from Ontario, I have

been continually astounded at the levels of racism which are tolerated in this province. This is not to suggest that Ontario is free from racism. The difference is that the vast majority of people there have realized that overt racism is no longer acceptable and a significant minority will act as if white women and people of colour have the same basic human rights and dignities as others.

²For my classroom experiences with this, see McConney.
³My thanks to Christine Tatti for this information.

⁴My thanks to Janice Manygreyhorses for this information.

⁵My thanks to Allison Muri for this inspiration.

⁶Lest I seem guilty of family pride here, I will also note that he has won a number of awards for his photography as well as being the recipient of a Canada Council grant to produce a book of his photos.

⁷I do not understand this to mean that no other province has a vulnerable "street" Aboriginal population. This would be patently untrue and is the point I am moving towards.

⁸Depending , of course, on who the public is understood to be: i.e. middle-class white girls or poor urban Indian women.

⁹Although I am uncomfortable constantly referring to these women as either Bernardo's victims or as Crawford's victims, I am attempting to be respectful of the victims' families: in particular I am not naming the women murdered by Crawford, Kummerfeld, and Ternowetsky out of respect for the Plains tradition of not speaking the names of the dead. In addition, the respective families of Bernardo's victims have requested that the media honour their right to privacy as much as possible.

¹⁰It is also important to note that the annual "anniversary" of this massacre is nationally remembered and honoured. There is not even a provincial commeration for Crawford's victims although many of us still grieve in private.

private. ¹¹Therefore some interest in their fates had existed long before the arrests of Homolka and Bernardo.

¹²They seek refuge from the poverty and violence on reserves only to meet the same in urban centres. Their conditions in urban centres are exacerbated by the isolation of being poor in a large city. Even relatively privileged Native women in high-status workplaces (i.e. universities) have spoken of their on-going search for safety and home. See for example Monture-Angus.

¹³I have adapted this argument from a lecture by Harold Cardinal on the 1969 "White Paper," which was introduced by then Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chretien. The "White Paper's" deeply offensive proposals included abrogating the treaties, abolishing all Aboriginal rights, eliminating the reserves and turning status Indians into "ordinary Canadian citizens." The Indian response to this was articulated in Cardinal's "Red Paper Policy." In Cardinal's response, he discusses the fact that the roots of Native poverty are in racism, the subsequent dispossession of Native peoples of their land base, and the lack of any revenue-sharing from the riches extracted from their territories.

¹⁴The exception to this is during periodic episodes of moral crisis and outrage—"clean up our streets" campaigns and the like.

¹⁵The defence and the judge made much of the "fact" that these defendants, unlike John Crawford, were youngsters full of promise (and class privilege). In his summation, the judge also repeatedly reminded the jury that the victim was a prostitute.

¹⁶An earlier exhibit included a needlework depiction of newspaper photographs of one of the bodies of Bernardo's victims.

¹⁷I note she did not use the relationship term "mother" in this conversation/interview with the installation's curator, Marie Fleming.

¹⁸I would also like to see analyses on the representations of crimes by Native men and the consequences of these in law. I suggest we would find that while Native peoples tend to be ignored or blamed as victims, they receive the full attention and weight of the law as offenders.

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