

# DEMETER PRESS

author interview with

KIM ANDERSON AND

DAWN MEMEE LAVELL-HARVARD

Indigenous Mothering,  
Family and Community:  
International Perspectives

Edited by Kim Anderson and  
Dawn Memee Lavell-Harvard



WE SPOKE WITH DEMETER AUTHORS KIM ANDERSON AND DAWN MEMEE LAVELL-HARVARD ABOUT THEIR NEW EDITED COLLECTION, **INDIGENOUS MOTHERING, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**, THEIR EXPERIENCES AS INDIGENOUS MOTHERS AND SOME FAVOURITE BOOKS.

**To order Indigenous Mothering visit [www.demeterpress.org](http://www.demeterpress.org) where all books are available for a limited time at 50% off and with free mailing for orders over \$60. #motherhoodisNOTaliability**

## WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT TO PRODUCE A BOOK ON INDIGENOUS MOTHERING? WHY NOW?

Lavell-Harvard: After our first volume on Aboriginal mothering (“*Until our Hearts are on the Ground:*” *Aboriginal Mothering: Oppression, Resistance and Transformation*, Demeter Press, 2006), there were so many people who immediately wanted to know when we were going to create another one. Some had missed the opportunity to contribute the first time, but there were also those who simply found that the stories personalized the experience of Indigenous women, and they felt that was critical: to put an identity and a humanity to what can be some very disheartening statistics about the crises that a lot of our women are facing in their day-to-day lives.

## YOU COLLECTED INDIGENOUS STORIES AND EXPERIENCES FROM AROUND THE WORLD. WHY DID YOU WANT TO INCLUDE THIS GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE?

Anderson: There are international connections that come out of activism, which started early on for Native women in Canada in terms of rights. And as Memee can attest from her work with the Ontario Native Women’s Association, there is a strong network globally of Indigenous women today working through avenues such as the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. So it only makes sense that we have literature that is in synch with all of that really significant work that happens at the grassroots [level]. It’s an ongoing interaction between the local and the global — and so interesting to see what we discover in terms of common experiences, as we discovered even further while editing this book.

## HOW HAVE YOUR EXPERIENCES AS INDIGENOUS WOMEN INFORMED YOUR OWN MOTHERING “PRACTICES”?

Anderson: I often talk about how I started researching and thinking about Indigenous womanhood after I had my first child, who’s now 19, because this caused me to reflect on the sacredness of womanhood. My experience of that intense physicality of pregnancy, birth, and early years taught me the sacred feminine — and then I started looking for Indigenous cultural practices that validate that sacredness.

Lavell-Harvard: I believe what’s distinct about Indigenous mothering and womanhood is the role that we see for our mothers and our grandmothers, once they have moved beyond the physicality of caregiving; you know, the day-to-day needs, the cooking, the cleaning. I think within Indigenous traditions there is more respect for grandmothers’ wisdom and knowledge-based caregiving. This is different from some non-Aboriginal families or cultures, where the elders are sometimes seen as having lived past their usefulness. In Indigenous communities they are still caregivers, but just in a more knowledge-oriented, spiritual way.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE FEMINIST/MOTHERHOOD BOOK OR BOOK THAT YOU WOULD RECOMMEND?

Anderson: A lovely one written by Anishinaabe writer Louise Erdrich is *The Blue Jay’s Dance: A Birth Year* (Harper Perennial, 1996).

Lavell-Harvard: My favourite mothering book is [Demeter’s] *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* edited by Andrea O’Reilly. I still wear my Mother Outlaws T-shirt all the time. The whole idea of being an outlaw and mother is so incongruous — like that popcorn that is sweet and salty at the same time or salted caramels. Mothering outside the lines speaks to me; perhaps it is my inner rebel as a native woman. Finally, love to you all! :)