



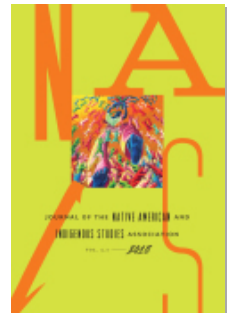
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*Mothers of the Nations: Indigenous Mothering as Global
Resistance, Reclaiming and Recovery* ed. by Dawn Memee
Lavell-Harvard and Kim Anderson (review)

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*Mothers of the Nations: Indigenous Mothering as Global Resistance,
Reclaiming and Recovery*

edited by Dawn Memee Lavell-Harvard and Kim Anderson
Demeter Press, 2014

MOTHERS OF THE NATIONS is an important collaboration between noted educators and aboriginal/Indigenous family advocates Dawn Memee Lavell-Harvard and Kim Anderson. The book consists of sixteen chapters on Indigenous women's different roles globally in revitalizing communities after centuries of colonial violence and in ongoing struggles against oppression. The chapters congeal around the theme of resistance and the "centrality of strong powerful women," a mutual experience and worldview among nuanced histories (2).

Building on motherhood studies—a field in which, despite new directions, Indigenous women remain marginal—the book challenges essentialist and mainstream conceptions of mothering.¹ Grasshoff/Makilam examines motherhood among the Kabyle Berber contra Western Christian patriarchy's gender logic. Sellers rereads Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe origin stories to explore nonheteronormative celebrations of mother-daughter bonds and "many mothers" communities. Through First Nations, Inuit, and Métis resistance stories, Brant reclaims an Indigenous maternal pedagogy that troubles biological reductionisms of motherhood and serves instead as a metaphor of resilience and rebirth through the historical violence of the Indian Act, eugenics movement, and sixties scoop assimilationist policies. From interviews with street sex workers and families, Charbonneau and colleagues locate strong motherhood in "othermothering spaces" among adoptive, foster, and queer families. They do so without romanticizing or victimizing Indigenous women—as do painful and empowering accounts by Proverbs on her tale of two mothers, Van Tyler on women living with HIV+ aids in Kibera, and Jayakumar on Mayan Ixil women and sexual violence in Guatemala. Marsden describes single mothering "off-reserve," though I wanted to learn more specifically what it means to articulate Indigeneity in relation to a "sustainable intergenerational starship community" (267)—something that perhaps could have been facilitated through additional context on the symposium for which the chapter was developed and/or a works cited page. Other illuminating chapters include Neufeld on women's loss of traditional food knowledge and its impact on "food security"—redefined as

having enough to eat *and* acquiring food in socially acceptable ways; Kadetz on U.S. colonial modernity's "moral imperative" in the Philippines and efforts to eradicate *hilots* (traditional birth attendants) under neoliberal humanitarian definitions of "safe motherhood"; Baskin and McPherson on troubling relations between aboriginal women, substance misuse counselors, and child welfare workers, and "bad mothers" and "good mothers" discourses and inadequacies of state-imposed deadlines on Indigenous approaches to healing; and Anderson's feminist photography to counter "unfit" Aboriginal mothering.

For those interested in what Indigenous mothering can offer decolonization and on-the-ground activism, *Mothers of the Nations* is a valuable resource. The revival of Indigenous midwifery and "medicinal knowledge" as acts of sovereignty remind us how Indigenous mothering can be transformative (see Tabobondung et al. on the establishment of an Indigenous birthing center in Toronto and Fontaine et al. on the archiving of residential school survivors' stories at a health center in Manitoba). Especially provocative is Connor's articulation of a theory and practice of mothering vis-à-vis Māori feminist discourse, *Mana Wahine*, as part of a broader renaissance and reclamation of women's roles and *mana* (power). This recovery of the "Māori maternal body" entails querying early twentieth-century Māori imbibing of Royal New Zealand Plunket Society nurses' mother-craft instruction that proved detrimental to *tikanga* (culture) and *tupuna wahine* (women ancestors) childbirth and childcare knowledge, including the practice of placenta burial connecting peoples and lands and legitimating one's *turangawaewae* (place to stand) against new and old forms of colonialism (239, 242–43).

Connor's analysis of Indigenous unwitting collusion with colonialism and the gendered dimensions of land/place/space is an example of the exciting critical work emerging in Indigenous studies and Indigenous feminisms. On the other hand, I think the book could have contributed more to these fields if more authors had reflected on concepts like "Mother Earth" and claims of women "in union with nature"—especially as such ideas lose meaning and specificity when invoked incontrovertibly and/or run the risk of replicating colonialist discourse that for centuries has employed a similar lexicon to naturalize, primitivize, and sexualize Indigenous women (20). Although the editors do not explicitly frame the book as an Indigenous feminist project, they highlight at the outset distinctions between non-Indigenous feminist mothering, which is defined by terms and traditions of patriarchal motherhood, and Indigenous mothering, which they argue has always existed outside such paradigms and is about reclaiming and revitalizing culture and tradition rather than functioning as a counter narrative to white patriarchy (5). For this, I felt the book missed an important opportunity to engage

Indigenous feminisms and its limits and challenges for Indigenous mothering. This, however, does not detract from the book's impressive breadth in demonstrating the stakes of Indigenous mothering for decolonial nation building and healthy futures.

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Note

1. Jeannette Corbiere Lavell and D. Memee Lavell-Harvard, *"Until Our Hearts Are on the Ground": Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth* (Bradford, Canada: Demeter Press, 2006); Samira Kawash, "New Directions in Motherhood Studies," *Signs* 36, no. 4 (Summer 2011): 969–1003.