



Sleeper-Smith, S., Ostler, J., & Reid, J. L. (Eds.). (2021). *Violence and Indigenous Communities: Confronting the Past and Engaging the Present*. Northwestern University Press.

Past and Present Colonialist Practices: Violence in Indigenous Communities

Marianela Rivera¹

Florida Gulf Coast University, Fort Myers, Florida, USA

Abstract: *Violence and Indigenous Communities: Confronting the Past and Engaging the Present* is an interdisciplinary collection of fifteen essays in which the authors raise awareness of past and current colonialist practices that continue to impact and shape Indigenous communities across the world. The editors of this volume thematically organized the essays into five sections to guide and expose the reader to different representations of violence within and against Indigenous communities. Trustworthy historic and academic sources serve as the foundation of each essay, as the authors deepen into topics that include captivity, enslavement, displacement, sexual violence, and death. This collection of essays highlights existing curricular and social gaps that have prevented the general community from understanding Indigenous communities' crucial role and invites the reader to explore and inquire about perspectives that go beyond patriarchal ideologies and a Eurocentric mindset.

Keywords: colonial institutions, Indigenous communities, settler colonialism.

¹ Corresponding Author: Assistant Professor of Spanish and Literature at Florida Gulf Coast University, Fort Myers, FL, USA. E-Mail: marrivera@fgcu.edu

Violence and Indigenous Communities: Confronting the Past and Engaging the Present is an interdisciplinary collection of fifteen essays that originated from a symposium of the same name that took place at Newberry Library's D'Arcy McNickle Center in Chicago in May 2017. The text was edited by renowned researchers and authors Susan Sleeper-Smith, Jeffrey Ostler, and Joshua Reid. They have published extensively on American Indian history, colonial encounters, and identity formation. The editors thematically organized the essays in five main sections that follow "a comparative global Indigenous framework" (Sleeper-Smith et al., 2021, p. 3). The thematic division of the chapters provides a connection among essays and gives the reader the freedom to approach the text as they see fit. With contributions that focus on Indigenous communities from the United States, Canada, Greenland, the Pacific Islands, Sápmi (Northern Europe), and Latin America, this volume provides a strong foundation to expose the reader to different representations of violence as a transnational issue.

Many academic studies about Indigenous peoples have been published already; however, according to the editors of this collection, most of those publications have reinforced the image of Indigenous people as passive and silenced victims (Sleeper-Smith et al., 2021). In the introduction of this publication, the editors provide a glimpse of the thematic approach that has dominated previous studies on the subject of violence and Indigenous communities, among them enslavement, captivity, displacement, and sexual violence. Sleeper-Smith et al. acknowledge that previously published studies on Indigenous communities have helped raise awareness, not only among academics but also among students, community leaders, and related organizations. At the same time, the editors underscore the need to expand interdisciplinary collaborations on the issue of violence and settler colonialism that continues to affect Indigenous communities today. The authors explain that this collection of essays attempts to deepen and expand the scope of violence against Indigenous communities while providing "a connection among various expressions of violence across space and time to the present" (p. 3). To achieve this, each one of the collaborators distinctively approached the issue of violence. Each of the five parts of this volume works independently and allows the reader (expert or novice) to delve into the critical analysis of representations of violence within and against Indigenous communities in different geographical spaces and across different points in time.

The first part of this volume is titled "Beyond War and Massacre: The Nature of Violence" and includes three essays essentially devoted to family violence within Indigenous communities. Although the essays approach this topic from different points of view, the common thread that connects them is the general lack of awareness and accountability regarding the range of violence that directly affects Indigenous families. In the first essay, Brenda Child discusses family violence in Indigenous communities based on the testimony of a nine-year-old Indigenous boy who in 1938 witnessed the murder of his mother and the suicide of her partner. In the essay, Child uses the boy's story to highlight the lack of attention given to the alarming rate of domestic violence cases in 19th century Indigenous communities. At the same time, Child persuasively argues that there is a direct relationship between past and current domestic violence cases and the family structure imposed by colonizing processes that dismantled and replaced the social systems to which Indigenous communities originally adhered. Beth Piatote, author of the essay that follows, does not focus on testimonials, but on Louise Erdrich's novel *LeRose*, published in 2016. Although Piatote's study focuses on a literary text, she manages to connect the genealogical structure of Indigenous communities, Indian law, and specific state institutions through a well-developed critical analysis of the character of *LeRose*. Piatote argues that *LeRose* is presented as a symbol of the evolution and persistence of different forms of enslavement and containment within Indigenous family nuclei and highlights the connection between pre-colonial and current practices that perpetuate different forms of family violence. The third and last essay in this part, *Holding Ourselves Responsible*, by Rauna Kuokkanen, focuses on the lack of social importance given to violence

against Indigenous women. Kuokkanen maintains that there is a strong relationship between gender-based violence and the self-determination of Indigenous women, specifically in Canada, Greenland, and Sápmi. A distinctive feature of this essay is its comparative approach among the Indigenous communities studied. Kuokkanen manages to effectively argue the connection between colonization processes and the adaptation of patriarchal ideologies to current cases of gender violence.

The second part of this collection of essays is titled "The Violence of Cultural Erasure" and it is composed of two essays dedicated to the violence exerted on the cultural production of Indigenous communities. In the first essay, Christine DeLucia criticizes the way in which historical institutions have been complicit in the appropriation of indigenous artifacts obtained as a result of colonization processes and which came to be seen as trophies that formed an integral part of the identity formation of the communities that replaced the Indigenous people. DeLucia at the same time conveys a message of hope by including examples of recent decolonization efforts. These have resulted in the repatriation of native ancestral remains as well as of items of cultural and ceremonial value to institutions ran by Indigenous organizations. Kealani Cook, on the other hand, examines Polynesian iconoclasms as well as the violence that arose among Islanders, specifically due to the struggle for mana (authority) and political power. Although Cook does not rule out the presence of Christian missionaries as colonizing agents, unlike DeLucia, the author focuses on the use of physical and symbolic violence within and among Polynesian tribes as means to validate Indigenous leaders' authority. Cook presents the role of the Indigenous peoples through a different lens: they are victims of violence, but they are also instigators. The constant power struggles are presented as an element that led to the Christianization of the Indigenous chiefs and that substantially helped the missionaries who sought to Christianize and colonize the islands in the Pacific region.

The third part of this collection, titled "Strategies of Resistance," is composed of three essays in which various survival and resistance strategies implemented by Indigenous characters, both historical and fictional, are discussed. Although the authors differ in their approach, they share violence as the common denominator and as the catalyst for the processes of identity counter-appropriation discussed in each essay. In the first essay, Ashley Riley Sousa examines how groups of Native Hawaiians selectively identified themselves as Indian, as Hawaiian, or as both as a survival strategy as they faced discrimination and violence during the gold rush era. Relying on historical documentation and testimonials, Sousa maintains that Native Hawaiians were perceived as racial and ethnic transgressors and as aliens to non-Indian social groups, which led them to develop a flexible and fluid identity to be able to survive. The second essay, written by Scott Manning Stevens, focuses on the representation of Indigenous people in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French literature, in the writings of Jesuit missionaries, and in more recent American and English media sources. Stevens guides the reader through a detailed series of historical events that influenced the development of the image of the wild Iroquois. From this, Stevens outlines the way in which the archetypal image of savagery and cruelty linked to the Iroquois became a symbol of resistance that persists nowadays. Stevens makes a persuasive analysis of written and visual sources and draws a clear connection between the violent Iroquois warrior and current demonstrations of Indigenous resistance. In the third and last essay in this section, Lucinda Rasmussen discusses how the film "A Red Girl's Reasoning" becomes the director's tool to dismantle imposed colonizing narratives that have perpetuated and normalized violence against Indigenous women. Rasmussen argues that the director of this film, Elle-Máíjá Tailfeathers, seeks to defend and celebrate Indigenous women's resilience through the appropriation of the Indigenous people's stereotypical violent image originally imposed by the settlers. In the film, Delia, an Indigenous woman who faced a justice system characterized by systematic racism and sexism, has the mission of punishing the white man who raped her as well as all those who have attacked other

Indigenous women. In this essay, Rasmussen calls on those in the audience who define Delia's actions as vindictive and cruel and invites them to think critically about the right of the Indigenous artists (such as the director of this film) to respond to the colonial institutions and narratives that keep controlling the social discourse.

The fourth part of this volume is titled "New Approaches to Indigenous Activism." This part includes three essays in which Indigenous activism takes center stage either through marches, protest music, or historical accounts. In the essay "Pathways toward Justice: Walking as Decolonial Resistance," Amber Hickey examines how Indigenous peoples and their allies have developed strategies in which they retake colonialist forced relocation processes as part of their resistance strategies. Among these strategies, Hickey presents the Longest Walk of 1978, from Alcatraz Island to Washington D.C., as a significant example of how the commemoration of the forced walks Indian people endured can successfully turn the act of walking into a noticeable and effective act of resistance. Music, on the other hand, is the central axis of the essay that follows. Liz Przybylski discusses Tanya Tagaq's songs and the way she uses music and her throat singing skills as protest tools to defend the rights of Indigenous women who are missing or have been murdered. Przybylski revisits different aspects of Tagaq's musical career, including a variety of musical influences, the instrumentation she employs, and the interactivity that characterizes her performances in an attempt to create an emotional connection that would move the audience into action. Nick Estes's essay closes this part of the book by highlighting the dams as a symbol of settler colonialism in the lands of the Missouri River Lakota and Dakota communities. Indigenous resistance against the repossession, sale, and flooding of their lands, the construction of dams, and violence against those who have defended indigenous properties are the focus of this chapter. Estes describes the clashes between the militarized police and Water Protectors groups and aims to inform the reader about the historical significance of Indigenous resistance that relies on the belief that water is life.

"Community and Identity Formation in the Aftermath of State Violence" is the last part of this volume. Four essays focusing on the effect of state violence on Indigenous communities are included in this section. The four studies describe the consequences of openly discriminatory processes that continue to be the source of constant attacks on the identity and culture of Indigenous communities. In the first essay, Amy Lonetree defines the means of fostering and adopting Indigenous children by white families as forms of intimate colonialism and as evidence of the violence exercised by the state. Lonetree uses the testimonies of those who were separated from their families during their childhood to critically describe the journey undertaken by those who seek to regain their rightful place within the Indigenous nations to which they originally belong. In addition to testimonials, Lonetree relies on studies that have demonstrated the permanent effects of such traumatic experiences on people's behavior and mental health.

The last three essays are focused on Indigenous communities in Latin America, specifically in Mexico, Bolivia, and Guatemala. In each of the essays, the perpetuation of violence against the Mayan and Aymara Indigenous communities is analyzed through different lenses. In the essay "A World Where Many Worlds Fit," Silvia Soto presents a brief historical background of the emergence and development of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). Six statements published by the EZLN are described in detail, which according to Soto directly condemns the injustices committed by the state against the Mayan communities in Chiapas. The emergence of the "caracol" (snail) as a symbol of the ongoing revolution is highlighted in this essay. Forrest Hylton takes the reader to Bolivia in the late 19th century. By then, the country was going through what became known as the Federal War. A detailed historical background on the social and political situation in the area is offered by Hylton, who gives special attention to the Mohoza Massacre and trials. Hylton defined them as a series of events that condemned the Aymara people, solidified racial and social class issues, and

encouraged the privatization of Aymara lands. This part concludes with Alicia Ivonne Estrada's essay titled "Weaving Strategies of Survival," in which Estrada criticizes the way the state, the media, and even immigrant rights organizations have ignored and erased the systematic historical violence exerted on Mayan communities from Guatemala in the United States. Estrada presents a perspective on Indigenous otherness that is worth discussing. Through the experiences of three Mayan women living in the United States, Estrada introduces the reader to the invisibility and adaptation efforts experienced by them as immigrants and as indigenous women in a foreign land. Orality and traditional clothing thus occupy a central role in the struggle of these women against colonial processes of silence and violence.

Violence and Indigenous Communities: Confronting the Past and Engaging the Present is an edited book that successfully presents a variety of relevant themes and approaches that, with trustworthy historic and academic sources as evidence, brings attention to the existence of colonialist practices that continue to be transmitted from generation to generation within and outside Indigenous communities. Settler colonialism, described by Wolfe (2006) as the process that aims to destroy in order to replace, is the central axis of this volume. The contributors interweave relevant themes that not only concern Indigenous people but also governments and non-indigenous communities in general. This collection also successfully underscores the existing curricular gaps that have prevented students, and therefore the general community, from being informed and educated on perspectives that go beyond a Eurocentric mindset. Interdisciplinarity is still needed, and courses in gender studies, race, ethnicity, history, social studies, political sciences, and environmental sciences could benefit from the work here presented.

The contributors underscore the need for dialogue by revisiting (and eliminating) the colonizing processes that continue to perpetuate the isolation and silencing of Indigenous nations worldwide. As mentioned in the publication's introduction, the editors do not attempt to impose a specific framework to analyze each essay, but they do provide a variety of methods to explore the recurring violence inflicted on Indigenous communities in the past and present. Each of the essays invites the continuation of discussions aimed at understanding and providing solutions to violence within and against Indigenous communities. This is what makes this book a valuable educational tool for social organizations, government officials, academics, non-Indigenous communities, and higher education students.

References

- Sleeper-Smith, S., Ostler, J., & Reid, J. L. (Eds.). (2021). *Violence and Indigenous Communities: Confronting the Past and Engaging the Present*. Northwestern University Press.
- Wolfe, P. (2006). Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), 387-409.

Notes on Contributor

Marianela Rivera is currently an assistant professor of Spanish and literature at Florida Gulf Coast University and a faculty affiliate of the FGCU Center for Critical Race and Ethnic Studies. She has designed and taught a wide range of Spanish language, literature, study abroad, and cultural studies courses in higher education institutions in the United States, Qatar, and The Netherlands. Dr. Rivera's research interests and publications include topics related to the socio-economic and cultural integration of African immigrants in Spain and literary productions from Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea written by women.