

Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale, eds. *#NotYourPrincess: Voices of Native American Women*. Toronto: Annick, 2017. 112 pp. ISBN: 9781554519576.

<http://www.annickpress.com/NotYourPrincess>

#NotYourPrincess: Voices of Native American Women, co-edited by Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale, is a heartfelt and heart-full contribution to the creative productions of Indigenous women, queer, trans, two-spirit, and non-binary communities that have proliferated in Canada and the United States over the past several years. Described by Charleyboy as a “love letter to all young Indigenous women trying to find their way” as well as an effort to “[dispel] stereotypes so we can collectively move forward to a brighter future,” (9) *#NotYourPrincess* is a book *by* and *about* Native women and girls written *for* Native women and girls. It includes poems, essays, interviews, and art from a multigenerational collection of over fifty contributors who belong to a diverse array of Indigenous communities and showcases the voices of Indigenous women and girls as they speak to relationality, the gendered and sexual oppression of colonization, stereotypes, and Indigenous futurity. These themes are organized (respectively) into four sections: (1) the ties that bind us, (2) it could have been me, (3) I am not your princess, and (4) pathfinders.

At its core, *#NotYourPrincess* is concerned with witnessing, refusing, and transcending the violence that settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy directs toward Indigenous women and girls. The magnitude of such violence is described most succinctly in Nahanni Fontaine’s contribution to the collection, “Reclaiming Indigenous Women’s Rights”:

Altering, diminishing, and transforming Indigenous women and girls’ spaces and places within the nation, tribe, territory, community, and family has sown and set the seeds and firmly entrenched the conditions for physical and sexual violence; the break-down of community-based thinking; intergenerational trauma; economic and political marginalization; the regulation and oppression of our reproductive health, including being sterilized by the government without our consent; the theft of our children, taken to residential schools and put up for adoption without our permission; and, ultimately, the theft of our very lives (25).

The taste, touch, and feel of the violence that Fontaine speaks of is explored in more depth by a number of contributors to the collection. For example, in her essay “We Are Not a Costume,” Jessica Deer writes about the relationship between colonization, cultural appropriation, and sexual objectification, speaking specifically to the weight such representations force Native women and girls to bear: “We have to deal with ongoing marginalization and the lingering effects of colonization, like a culture that normalizes violence against us” (61). In “The Things We Taught Our Daughters,” Helen Knott soberly reflects on the ways in which Indigenous communities have come to normalize and replicate the sexual and gendered violences that heteropatriarchal colonialism has introduced into our lives. Lines such as “somewhere we learned to create an asylum / for the very things / that plague our dreams” (44) and “we stuck sexual abuse up on the mantelpiece / picture framed the portrait of rape / and named the old Rez dog domestic dispute” (45) are painful to stomach and demand critical self-reflection. Imajyn Cardinal’s brief plea, “All over the news there are Native girls being hurt and abused. I feel

afraid when I walk around. But I don't want to be afraid," (39) conveys a stark vulnerability that can't easily be dismissed. And Shelby Lisk's photo series "The Invisible Indian" communicates the dehumanization and commodification of Indigenous identity that has occurred through assimilationist efforts. Alongside mugshot-like photographs of Native women and girls holding papers with their tribal registration numbers printed on them, Lisk describes the impossible-to-achieve expectations and desires that colonial powers have of Indigenous peoples and concludes, "They [colonizers] want my culture behind glass in a museum. But they don't want me. I'm not Indian enough" (65).

These contributions to *#NotYourPrincess*, as well as others, are important acts of witnessing the onslaught of violences that Indigenous women and girls are subjected to. Simultaneously, they operate as acts of refusal – blatant rejections of the settler colonial and heteropatriarchal imperative to eliminate the voice, visibility, livelihood, indeed the very existence, of Indigenous women and girls. Equally significant, however, are the contributions to *#NotYourPrincess* that transcend these violences, that dream of and operationalize Indigenous presence/ents and futures. These contributions foreground hope, resiliency, survivance, and life itself. Chief Lady Bird's illustrations are a beautiful example of such work. In "We Are Sacred," she weaves an illustration of the torso and neck of a Native woman with a lush and flourishing landscape out of which the woman (literally) emerges (53). In an untitled illustration that sits opposite Tiffany Midge's essay "What's There to Take Back?" – a refusal of an indie publication's call for submissions aimed at "taking back" the Disney character Tiger Lily – she depicts an intentionally nonplussed Native woman staring unflinchingly into the eyes of anyone who dares to obstruct her journey (66).

Another poignant example of such work is the short essay "Defender of Mother Earth," written by AnnaLee Rain Yellowhammer. The thirteen-year-old, who initiated the petition to halt the Dakota Access Pipeline and who ran 2000 miles alongside 37 other youth to deliver the petition to Washington DC, boldly declares, "We demand 'respect' for our water, our land, and our voices" (85). Yellowhammer's words pair nicely with Dana Claxton's photo contribution "Baby-Girlz-Gotta-Mustang," which pictures two Indigenous girls wearing red polo-shirt dresses and moccasins while sitting regally atop red bicycles and staring confidently into the camera. Claxton's accompanying commentary guides us in reading the photo: "I see powerful and knowledgeable girls who have the enormous potential to lead us into a just future. I see girls who thrive and survive despite the violence of colonialism and settler colonialism" (97). Kelly Edzerza-Bapty and Claire Anderson's presentation of their ReMatriate project in "More Than Meets the Eye" similarly employs photography to resist colonial representations of Native women and girls and make visible "that Indigenous women are not a single stereotyped age; that they hold multiple identities and are much more than meets the eye" (95).

Indigenous cultural worker Tanaya Winder has developed the concept of "heartwork" to describe the labor of finding one's passion, using one's gifts to ignite healing in others, and to live (and create) revolutionary love. *#NotYourPrincess* is a powerful and greatly needed example of heartwork in action. Each of the contributors to the text have passionately and sincerely employed their experiences, their talents, their visions, and their dreams to ignite healing in other Native women and girls. This labor is not easy. Indeed, as Winder herself reminds us, this labor is necessarily (at times) the labor of "div[ing] headfirst into the muck, ugliness, stark darkness of

that wreckage [of colonialism]" (79). But this labor is also transformational. "This is what we do," Winder declares, "We recast wounds in unending light. And so, light, love, and courage are circles we keep coming back to" (79). For this reader, *#NotYourPrincess* is another of those things I will keep coming back to – a light in the settler colonial and heteropatriarchal darkness.

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