

Maxwell, Krista, *Indigenous Healing as Paradox: Re-Membering and Biopolitics in the Settler Colony*. Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2025. vii+271. Softcover, \$29.99

Empires, particularly in popular memory, represent a series of strict binaries—modern versus traditional, rural versus urban, education versus superstition. Imperial scholarship has, of course, complicated those binaries in a multitude of significant ways over time, but the attractions of binary thought remain hard to resist. Krista Maxwell's *Indigenous Healing as Paradox: Re-Membering and Biopolitics in the Settler Colony* seeks to destroy these false dichotomies through a careful use of oral histories and case studies. Maxwell, an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Toronto, is particularly interested in several sets of what she sees as false binaries: biomedicine vs 'traditional' healing, rural vs urban, resistance vs collaboration and individualism vs communalism. *Indigenous Healing* argues that the reality for many indigenous people in Canada is both/and, rather than either/or. The colonial settler state remains hostile to indigenous cultures and practices, but those same cultures can use the state to further their own priorities and needs.

Maxwell uses the framing of healing throughout the book because the concept of healing is both malleable and inherently political. What does healing look like in the context of a nation-state born out of the Enlightenment? What does healing look like for an Anishinaabe person? The answers to these two questions look very different depending on the point of view. The goal of the settler state is to build an individual—one who consumes specific kinds of material goods and lives in an individualistic society. For the state (and its charitable divisions) healing occurs when an indigenous person lives in a 'modern' urban setting in a 'traditional' family unit, but for the Anishinaabe healing looks like building connections to their communities and reconnecting to their past. The flexibility of healing as an idea allows for Anishinaabe to construct their own

programs, utilizing scant state resources, which helps heal individuals and helps them connect with their larger society. Therefore, while the state imagines one very specific end point for their interventionist programs, indigenous people can use those programs for their own ends, to rebuild new kinds of societies and connections. It is not so much a question of regaining something that was ‘lost’—a tradition preserved in amber from a long-lost pre-colonial time, but rather new constructions that meet people where they are now.

Each chapter of *Indigenous Healing* provides a case study of these principles in action. Maxwell’s narrative is generally chronological, although each chapter can be read as a stand-alone narrative of a specific issue. The book begins with a discussion of the life of Giizhiiganang, an alcoholic veteran living in small town Kenora, Canada. Many of the Anishinaabe living or traveling to Kenora faced dangers—legalized racism, extreme cold, and the lure of alcohol. Giizhiiganang, also known as Don Morrison, built a waystation which provided a safe place to stay for Anishinaabe travelers. Crucially, the waystation, as well as Morrison’s work to rehabilitate local alcoholics, allowed the local community to connect their present circumstances to “colonial suppression and racism” as opposed to “backwardness or inherent dysfunction.” (p.54-55) Similar stories in the succeeding chapters highlight the ways in which various indigenous actors are able to use state supported programs to their own ends. Other chapters discuss the endemic violence experienced by indigenous women and how women from the local communities fought back against the state’s desire to criminalize that behavior. For many Anishinaabe, increasing the number of indigenous men does not solve the issue of male violence and female pain. The priority is healing for both parties within the constraints of the ongoing colonial settler-state. Maxwell’s work is an important addition to literature that discusses the ongoing harms of colonialisms—Canada is not a post-colonial society; it is a

colonial state. Within those parameters indigenous activists and community members are attempting to build their societies that work for them, not to build consumerist individuals, but instead to build fresh traditions and reject tired binaries about old and new, medicine and healing, individual and society.

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