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Wokini Initiative: The New Beginnings Newsletter

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The New Beginnings Newsletter, October 2020

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THE NEW BEGINNINGS NEWSLETTER



SOUTH DAKOTA
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**WOKINI
INITIATIVE**
A NEW BEGINNING
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Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

Violence is often thought of as something physical that is inflicted upon the body of a victim, however violence can also exist in the way a cultural thinks about and represents others. In their analysis of violence against missing and murdered indigenous women, Jiwani and Young (2006) point out that violence begins as a sort of media spectacle. In other words, violence becomes legitimated through the ways the media analyzes, represents and categorizes certain “others.” When it comes to violence perpetrated against indigenous women, it is quickly apparent that the media representation of these women legitimizes violence by subtly devaluing indigenous women’s lives.

Awareness of the extent of the missing and murdered indigenous women crisis first began in Canada in the 1990s after many indigenous women began to go missing in Vancouver's downtown east side. In 2002, the serial killer Robert Pickton was arrested after having killed 26 indigenous women (Beniuk 2012). However, sensationalized reports of an individual serial killer preying on native women largely obscured the broader, systemic nature of violence perpetrated against native women in settler colonial societies. In 2012, Sheila North Wilson, the former Grand Chief of Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc., coined the hashtag #MMIW to draw attention to the ongoing problem of murdered indigenous women (Moeke-Pickering, Cote-Meek and Pagararo 2018). The problem of missing and murdered women is not due to just a few bad men, but is a result of the systematic devaluation of indigenous lives and indigenous women in particular. One prominent way that human lives are valued or devalued is through media representation.

Early on in media coverage of missing and murdered indigenous women, a blame-the-victim mentality became apparent. Indigenous women's murders were explained with reference to the fact that many of Vancouver's missing women were supposedly prostitutes and drug addicts (Colhane 2003). The blame the victim mentality of these reports is one example of what media theorists call a 'frame.' Framing is when the media selects and emphasizes certain facets of events and issues to promote a certain interpretation, solution, or evaluation (Jiwani and Young 2006). Frames make certain aspects of a situation visible while marginalizing or ignoring others. By framing indigenous women as prostitutes and drug addicts, the media makes visible the stigmatizing aspects of the women's poverty while ignoring the broader picture of how settler colonialism, racism, police brutality and theft from indigenous people leaves indigenous women in poverty and in vulnerable forms of work (Culhane 2003).

The distortions which occur through media framing constitute what Culhane (2003) calls a regime of disappearance – “a media process that selectively marginalizes or erases people through strategies of representation that include silences, blind spots, and displacements with symbolic and material effects.” The silences, blind spots and displacements refer to the ways the media silences colonialism and poverty and

instead suggests the women's moral character is at fault. Once the women's moral character is put into question, it is easier to see them as dehumanized, stigmatized and immoral others who do not fully measure up to the demands of a moral society (Moeke-Pickering et al. 2018). The relatable and human aspects of the victims such as their identities as mothers, sisters, friends and family members also become easier to ignore. When a group is systematically dehumanized and de-individualized, it becomes easier to commit and ignore violence perpetrated against them (Moeke-Pickering et al. 2018).

When the media frames the problem of missing and murdered indigenous women in terms of a problem of either a few bad men or the expected outcome of an immoral lifestyle, there is a lack of critical analysis of the ways that colonial culture and ideology devalues women's and particularly indigenous women's lives (Culhane 2003). The specifically colonial causes of the violence are not presented as part of the context of the crimes against native women. Understanding the colonial context of violence against native women is essential because colonization has a long history of subjugating the body and reproduction of native women (Beniuk 2012).

Native women across Canada and the U.S. have responded to the media discourse of MMIW with their own counter narratives. The annual valentine's day march in Vancouver's downtown east side is one such forum for an indigenous counter-narrative. The women's speeches focus on systemic problems that drive aboriginal women into poverty, including police racism, lack of social services, and lack of employment and educational opportunities (Culhane 2003). Social media activism and forums where indigenous women's voices can be heard serve to return a sense of agency, personhood and identity to indigenous women and allow them to represent themselves on their own terms.

References

Beniuk, Jodi. "Indigenous women as the other: An analysis of the missing women's commission of inquiry." *The Arbutus Review* 3.2 (2012): 80-97.

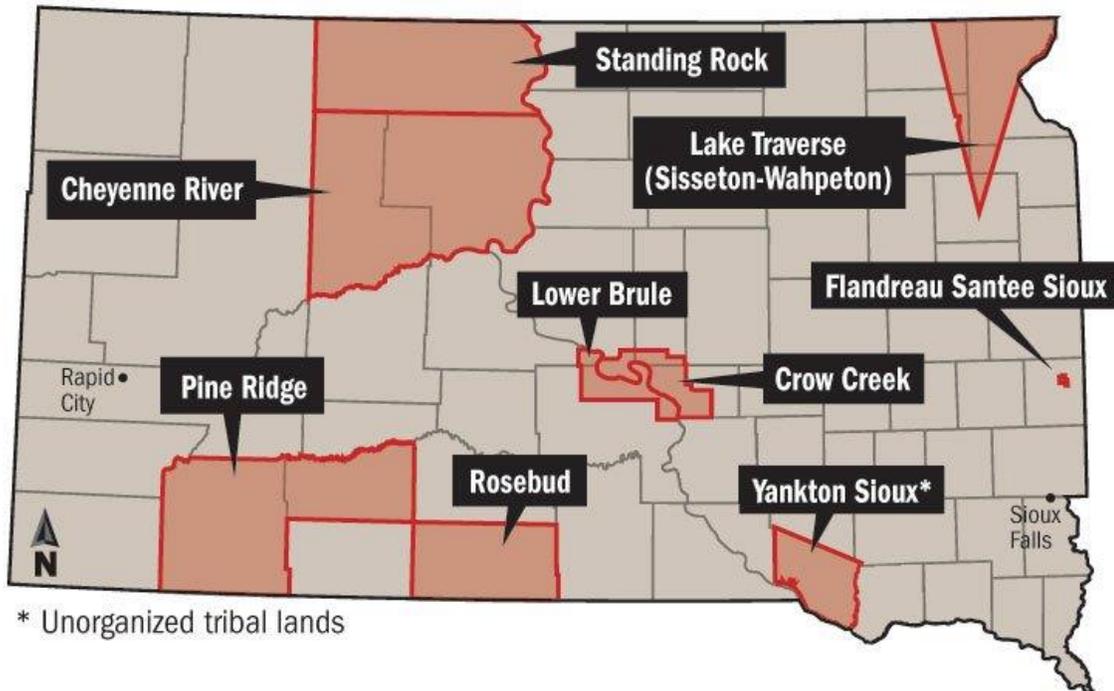
Culhane, Dara. "Their spirits live within us: Aboriginal women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver emerging into visibility." *American Indian Quarterly* 27.3/4 (2003): 593-606.

Jiwani, Yasmin, and Mary Lynn Young. "Missing and murdered women: Reproducing marginality in news discourse." *Canadian journal of communication* 31.4 (2006).

Moeke-Pickering, Taima, Sheila Cote-Meek, and Ann Pegoraro. "Understanding the ways missing and murdered Indigenous women are framed and handled by social media users." *Media International Australia* 169.1 (2018): 54-64.

Palmater, Pamela. "Shining light on the dark places: Addressing police racism and sexualized violence against indigenous women and girls in the national inquiry." *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 28.2 (2016): 253-284.

South Dakota's Indian Reservations



Assessment and Grant Specialist Position Available

South Dakota State University is currently seeking an Assessment and Grant Specialist to lead and coordinate grant writing and the collection, analysis and interpretation of data connected with the Wokini Initiative. The Specialist will develop assessment and program evaluation tools, collect and analyze data, and prepare reports for programs and activities related to the Wokini Initiative. The position will also develop statistical models to measure the impact of Wokini programming on American Indian student recruitment, retention, and graduation rates. Grant duties include researching grant opportunities that align with Wokini Initiative goals and collaborate with both internal and external departments to develop competitive grant proposals consistent with the vision of the Wokini Initiative. This is a 12 month, full-time, benefit-eligible position. This position is supervised by the Wokini and Tribal Relations Director.

For more information on this position and to apply, click [here](#).

Featured Events

For Our Women, For Us All

American Indian Student Center

Indigenous Peoples Day Celebration

Saturday, October 10 9:00am. Students Union/ Jacks Green
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Walk for Justice

Sunday, October 11 5:00pm.

More than Fry Bread

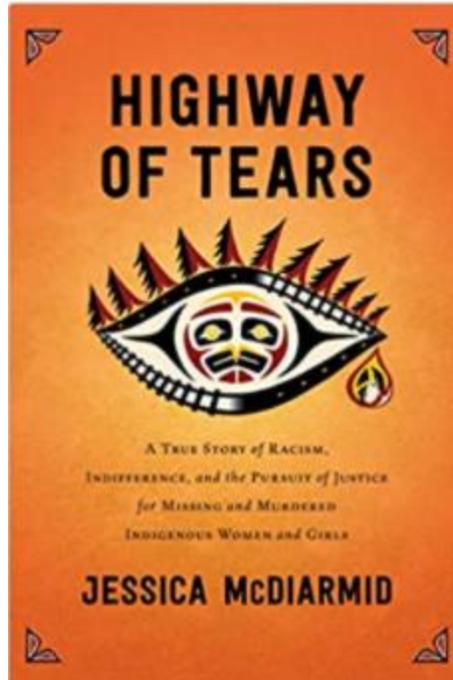
<https://sdstate.zoom.us/j/99077233480>

Monday, October 12. 12:00-1:30

Indigenous Social Justice Movement Panel

<https://sdstate.zoom.us/j/96974391820>





Book of the Month

Highway of Tears

For decades, Indigenous women and girls have gone missing or been found murdered along an isolated stretch of highway in northwestern British Columbia. The corridor is known as the Highway of Tears, and it has come to symbolize a national crisis.

Journalist Jessica McDiarmid meticulously investigates the devastating effect these tragedies have had on the families of the victims and their communities, and how systemic racism and indifference have created a climate in which Indigenous women and girls are overpoliced yet underprotected. McDiarmid interviews those closest to the victims—mothers and fathers, siblings and friends—and provides an intimate firsthand account of their loss and unflagging fight for justice. Examining the historically fraught social and cultural tensions between settlers and Indigenous peoples in the region, McDiarmid links these cases to others across Canada—now estimated to number up to four thousand—contextualizing them within a broader

examination of the undervaluing of Indigenous lives in the country.

Highway of Tears is a piercing exploration of our ongoing failure to provide justice for the victims and a testament to their families' and communities' unwavering determination to find it.

Lakota Words of the Month

Count to Ten

1 - waŋží

2 - núŋpa

3 - yámni

4 - tópa

5 - záptaŋ

6 - šákpe

7 - šakówiŋ

8 - šaglóŋaŋ

9 - napčiyunka

10 - wikčémna

[Listen here](#)



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