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Denise Bolduc, Mnawaate Gordon-Corbiere, Rebeka Tabobondung, Brian Wright-McLeod (Eds.), *Indigenous Toronto. Stories That Carry This Place*, Toronto, Coach House Books, 2021, 304 pp., ISBN 9781552454152

*Reviewed by Paolo Frascà*

While treaty recognition is a very important step in the right direction, the Anishinaabe notions of land stewardship and communal relations with non-human beings need to come back to the forefront of the discussion of land. We speak in ownership terms because that is what is understood in the white world we inhabit. But if we could – as Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor has asked – unwind ourselves from the white words we have become, the idea that all lands are there to sustain life in a collective stewardship model doesn't seem so idealistic.

Wanda Nanibush, "Williams Treaties", in *Indigenous Toronto*

As Nanibush highlights in the quote above, it is imperative to dismantle anthropocentric conceptions of relationship to land, as well as to name and relinquish the white gaze through which this relationship has been viewed and realized for the last five centuries in the Canadian context. While balanced Nation-to-Nation relationships, based on pre- and post-contact treaties and agreements such as the Two-Row Wampum (Guswenta) or One Dish One Spoon, can exist and should be pursued, a re-Indigenization of our settler worldview and a recentering of Indigenous knowledge must be prioritized. The teachings, histories, and stories offered within the collection *Indigenous Toronto. Stories That Carry This Place* are indispensable in this pursuit because they provide foundational knowledge based on which new, yet ancestrally rooted, kinds of Nation-to-Nation relationships can be formed.

The stories in *Indigenous Toronto* nurture a process of unlearning and relearning in a specific geographical and cultural context, encouraging readers to ground themselves in their local reality. At the same time, the texts invite readers who live in any industrial, colonial North American metropolis to search beyond the noise and beneath the asphalt for the stories it holds, as well as to recognize the contemporary Indigenous realities of their urban space. To that end, this book responds to an urgent need from Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the Toronto area, and beyond, to unearth and mobilize knowledges that have been obscured by colonial and migration histories. As Hayden King reminds us in his introduction to the volume, historical studies about the city of Toronto have described this place as being, for the most part, "empty and free for the taking"; King tells us that most historical accounts of this area refer to Indigenous people as marginal and passive to the history of the city and that, unsurprisingly, these accounts eulogize the theft of this land by Europeans as a noble undertaking (10-11). Therefore, *Indigenous Toronto* is a valuable contribution to the ongoing correction of the historiography on this city; its publication marks a significant moment in historical research on Toronto that allows Indigenous people to tell their own stories and speak of their own histories.

The collection features a diverse selection of pieces from Indigenous researchers, artists, elders, and knowledge-keepers, yielding a polyphonous volume that should be integrated in grade-school, secondary-school, and post-secondary curricula and that is linguistically accessible to a wide community of readers. The book begins with a section on Agreements, Naming, and Places: this section focuses on treaty-making processes in Ontario, their fallacies, and the material, cultural, spiritual and legal detriment that resulted from unfair negotiations. One article within this section, by Margaret Sault, focusses on the Toronto Purchase (Treaty 13), a devious process of land acquisition by

the Crown that was settled only in the 2010s, and only monetarily. The second section of the book, titled Trailblazers and Changemakers, contains the stories of a number of figures of the Toronto Indigenous community who have left a mark on the city through their community work, art, activism, and scientific endeavours. Quite remarkable, in this section, is the story of Oronhyatekha, also known as Doctor O, a Kanien'kehá:ka medical professional and businessperson known for his extraordinary contributions to education, healthcare, and politics. The book's following section, titled How We Carry This Place, focuses on contemporary stories that exemplify how Indigenous knowledges and experience enrich and contribute to life in Toronto. Many are the social-justice initiatives led by Indigenous peoples discussed in this chapter: they include renaming projects such as Ogimaa Mikana, educational projects such as Spirit School, community well-being efforts such as Anishnawbe Health Toronto, and the remarkable housing projects led by Nokomis Verna Patronella Johnston and Millie Redmond. Finally, the book's section Transforming the City offers meditations on ways to reclaim Indigenous Toronto through exploration of the land, placenames, and by viewing the hi/story of the city through the teachings of the Seven Fires prophecy. In this last text, Elder Jim Dumont Onaubinisay observes that "we are in a time of change. It's a time when the voices of young people will become significant in creating the change that is coming, and the change that is already here" (278).

I reflect on *Indigenous Toronto. Stories That Carry This Place* as an Italian-born settler on Turtle Island, living in Toronto since my early teenage years, and as a person with a Canadian educational background that did not center the histories and teachings of the original peoples of this land. I receive and use the knowledge from this text from the position of a white guest in this territory and as an academic in the fields of Italian studies and Italian migration studies. This text is particularly important for settler-migrants, and settler-migrant scholars, because the histories and teachings in this collection are precious in the pursuit of Nation-to-Nation solidarity and of balanced knowledge exchanges.

Margaret Cozry, a contributor to the volume, reflects on the differences between Indigenous people and migrants in the city when she first arrived from the Ojibway Perry Island Reserve: "I found that Natives didn't have a community like the European immigrants all had. The Europeans lived together in enclaves and spoke their own languages and never learned who built the foundation of Canada: us" (154). For Italian-Canadian communities in particular, the relationship with this land is informed by notions of colonialism and ownership, especially if we think of the harmful use of ethnic icons such as Giovanni Caboto and Cristoforo Colombo to legitimize the presence of Italians in Canada. For Italian-Canadians, *Indigenous Toronto* can become a tool of liberation from narratives that bind us to empire and separate us from our histories as migrants and from our role as treaty people: "We all hold a piece of the puzzle", reminds us Albert Marshall (178). "Now that we know" (251), as the title of Lila Pine's piece within the volume forewarns, we must join efforts for reconciliation, recognition, and restitution. Thanks to *Indigenous Toronto*, we deepen our understanding of Toronto as an Indigenous city – beyond the spectralization, the obfuscation, the concrete – and we are reminded that settlers and migrants must be engaged listeners and followers of Indigenous leadership.