

**Claudia Mitchell & Relebohile Moletsane (Eds.). *Disrupting Shameful Legacies: Girls and Young Women Speak Back through the Arts to Address Sexual Violence*. Leiden, London: Koninklijke Brill. (2018). 345pp. (ISBN 978-90-04-37769-1)**

Lori Beavis

Volume 55, Number 2, Spring 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077981ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077981ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Faculty of Education, McGill University

ISSN

1916-0666 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Beavis, L. (2020). Review of [Claudia Mitchell & Relebohile Moletsane (Eds.). *Disrupting Shameful Legacies: Girls and Young Women Speak Back through the Arts to Address Sexual Violence*. Leiden, London: Koninklijke Brill. (2018). 345pp. (ISBN 978-90-04-37769-1)]. *McGill Journal of Education / Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, 55(2), 502–507.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1077981ar>

© Faculty of Education, McGill University, 2021



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

The logo for Érudit, featuring the word 'Érudit' in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

CLAUDIA MITCHELL & RELEBOHILE MOLETSANE (Eds.). *Disrupting Shameful Legacies: Girls and Young Women Speak Back through the Arts to Address Sexual Violence*. Leiden, London: Koninklijke Brill. (2018). 345pp. (ISBN 978-90-04-37769-1)

In 1964 Fluxus artist, Yoko Ono knelt on a stage wearing an elegant suit holding a pair of scissors and invited audience members to cut off pieces of her clothing. The artist remained still and silent until she was left only wearing remnants of her clothing and underwear. This early feminist performance work was the first to address the potential for sexual violence and women's vulnerability in a public spectacle. With *Cut Piece* (1964) the artist was speaking to issues of women's identity and place in society: violence against women's bodies and most emphatically, women's silence.

In recent years the #BeenRapedNeverReported (2014-2015) and the Me Too movements (2006- ongoing)<sup>1</sup> have brought the issues to which Ono alluded to in the early 1960s to far greater public attention. Claudia Mitchell and Relebohile Moletsane, in the introduction to their *Disrupting Shameful Legacies: Girls and Young Women Speak Back through the Arts to Address Sexual Violence*, state that it is time to lift the carpet on sexual violence against girls and young women. Their objective is to privilege young women's voices – have them speaking up and speaking back, through the arts and visual practice – to challenge situations of sexual violence. This co-edited volume is the result of a transnational study on sexual violence in Canada and South Africa. It is a compilation of seventeen essays that outlines the programs and methodologies used and created by various researchers, artists and others across the two countries. Moving back and forth between Canada and South Africa, the majority of the essays examine workshops and programming that has been done in community with girls and young women to address gender and gender-based violence. The editors draw attention to the connections between these two countries as, in both, much of the violence against women's bodies is rooted in the structures of colonialism. South Africa is known to have one of the highest rates of sexual assault in the world, with teenaged girls (12-18 years) being particularly at risk. Moreover, girls living on the margins of

society because of race and geography are at an even greater risk of victimization thus rending their safety and security in school and community as very challenged.

In Canada, the deeply gendered characteristics of colonization and its aftermath have had immensely destructive impacts on Indigenous women and girls. Currently, Indigenous women in Canada are five times more likely to experience violence or death than other women<sup>2</sup>. Many believe that Aboriginal and Treaty rights and the Indian Act have played a significant role in ensuring on-going violence against Indigenous women's bodies. The violence is compounded by Indigenous women's marginalization through the patriarchal contextualization of colonialism and the resultant racism is often overtly sexual and violent in nature<sup>3</sup>. Mitchell and Moletsane note, "Across the two countries [...] violence on women's bodies also reflects violence on the land; both are issues of dispossession" (p.5).

The essays in this book build on the research that Mitchell and Moletsane have been conducting for more than a decade on the use of visual arts-based methodologies in working with youth in relation to gender and sexuality. The methodological approaches used by contributors to this volume also often engages young women in visual methods such as participatory video, photography and other arts-based responses. The editors and authors recognize the colossal shift away from positivist, investigator-driven research methods towards more dialogic and collaborative strategies. This means researchers are taking the approach and adapting their methodologies by recognizing that community participants as their research partners come with their own expert knowledge on life issues and are equipped with the ability to make change. Much of the work that is described in the essays has been done in light of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)<sup>4</sup>. Additionally in Canada, the TRC and the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2016- 2019) have placed more focus on the need to address the systemic barriers built into Canadian society through colonization. This acknowledgement has meant that in the programming described in *Disrupting Shameful Legacies*, researchers are working with girls and young women to advance equality, encourage women and girls in leadership and decision-making roles, and advocate for ending violence against women, girls and two-spirit people. The significant participation of girls and young women in these projects in both countries points towards the changes that are happening at a grassroots level which one hopes will in time have a wider impact, both nationally and globally.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, *What's engagement got to do with it?* encompasses chapters that focus mainly on engagement or participatory work at field sites. The second, *Engaging Images* draws on the significant visual and art work produced through arts-based and participatory

research projects and workshops. The third section Reflections and Re-imaginings opens a space for researchers to engage with their own learning from the work they are undertaking.

In part one, *What's Engagement Got to do with It?*, the six essays explore the many grassroots initiatives in which girls and young women are participating in both countries. The first essay, "Sisters Rising" (de Finney, Mareno, Chadwick, Adams, Sam, Scott and Land) equates the violence inflicted on the land to the violence that targets Indigenous girls and women. "Sisters Rising" re-centres Indigenous values and teachings and links body sovereignty to decolonization and land sovereignty in applied arts-based research workshops using land-based materials as storytelling. Other essays include the Altenberg, Flicker, MacEntree and Wuttunee Saskatoon-based project "We are Strong. We are Beautiful, We are Smart, We are Iskwew" with girls using cellphlms to talk back against gender-based violence. Also in this section are four projects based in South Africa that examined community participatory research to address social and sexual violence; another using photovoice to draw attention to rape, explicit sexual violence and other abuses and make parallels within smaller communities (Treffry-Goatley, Moletsane, and Wiebesiek's "Just Don't Change Anything": Addressing Sexual Violence in Rural South Africa". In this way enable members (and participants) to self-define their own experiences and the enactment of sexual violence they have known. Photovoice as a way of talking back is the subject of "Pictures Speak for Themselves: Youth Engaging Through Photovoice to Describe Sexual Violence in their Community". In another study by Ngidi and Moletsane, "Using drawings to Explore Sexual Violence with Orphaned Youth", drawing was used to help orphaned children as these children lack social networks, face economic neglect and are vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence. In this work girls and boys explained their fears and experiences through both drawings and their descriptions of their artwork. Another essay, "Using Participatory Visual Methodologies to Engage Secondary School Learners in Addressing Sexual and Reproductive Health Issues" by Sibeko and Luthuli analyses a school-based intervention and the ways young people speak about often taboo subject matter.

No matter where they are situated, the focus is on girls' safety within their communities while also combatting the trauma and shame associated with sexual violence. These projects, including the arts, digital technology, role play, and drama, all demonstrate the value of bringing girls to the table and giving them space and room to work through their own experiences and ultimately envision a different way of seeing themselves in the world – now and in the future. A common thread running through these essays was that these young women brought their own roster of skills and abilities to the projects, even

showing their capacity to take the lead. The researchers honoured and built on the girls' strengths and talents, making it a mutually beneficial experience for everyone.

The second part of the book, *Engaging Images* examines the ways young children and girls can creatively and artistically engage with art materials to draw attention to their experiences of or resistance to sexual violence. The authors of the essays in this section report on the artistic actions and affective encounters with art that these children have had. They recall the agitation as well as the transformative experiences of the artmaking process. This section also includes an essay in which children's drawings are examined as witnesses for violence and conflict and as a way to counter children's invisibility. An additional essay in the second section is by Haidee Smith Lefebvre who thoughtfully considers the work of Inuit artist Annie Pootoogook. She re-reads the imagery in this artist's oeuvre to reveal a nuanced and richer understanding of the artist's drawings, stepping back from colonizers' readings and looking at the Pootoogook's drawings as work that recognizes the precarious situation of Indigenous and Inuit women yet cherishing her own sexuality. Maria Ezcurra and Claudia Mitchell's essay on negotiating dress as a way to resist or counter sexual violence, invokes the many ways that artists around the world have used textiles to create new knowledges. This survey moves from the work of Ezcurra and other professional artists to girl and young women-led organizations and collective movements that work towards resisting classification and actions based on the way they are dressed. Other essays turn attention to schoolgirls co-creating visual artefacts (cellphilm and policy posters) as an aid to talking about and back to school administrators and politicians as the girls work to resist the violence they face (Adams and de Lange). Lamb's essay examines the affective possibilities of art as a way to address sexual violence. She references how self-expression through art can lead to transformation and healing. Lamb is keen to understand how people are talking (or not) about violence and thus how change may occur in the life experiences of Indigenous women and girls in Canada. Finally Khan discusses public exhibitions of children's drawings on violence and sexual violence and the related ethical implications of this curation. The author has investigated exhibition catalogues, online collections and documentary films as a way to explore children's trauma, finding both positive and negative outcomes although ultimately children are empowered through the expression found in drawing.

In the final section *Reflections and Re-Imaginations*, the five essays have the authors' reflecting on what they and their young participant-collaborators have

learned from their work. In doing so, this section gives readers strategies for how to work with girls and young women to address sexual violence online; how to bring communities of girls together to tell and share their stories. The essay by Gonick, Christmas and Gore tells how the authors and participants creatively engaged with notion of “passing the talking stick” as they offered commentary on sexualized violence and ultimately on the idea of shared and collaborative speaking spaces. Hart’s chapter on addressing sexual violence online reflects on material gathered through interviews in Canada and South Africa as both a self-study and a way to extend our awareness of the implications of digital technology. The essay by Haffejee, Banda, and Theron, “Methodological Reflections of a Visual Participatory Study on Resilience Processes in African Girls with a History of Child Sexual Abuse” reflects on the value and challenges of using a case study research model. Interestingly the young person whose learning and experience is examined is also a co-author. In another, Maome, one of fourteen members of Girls Leading Change muses on what she learned as a participant of Networks for Change and Well-being. Lastly, Flicker’s essay is a self-reflective piece written as a settler on the notion of unsettling. The author works from the entry point of herself as a settler working with Indigenous young people in what is now called Canada.

This volume of essays speaks to the importance of empowering children- girls and young women through arts-based research projects. The many projects described were each in their own way beneficial to all participants as they learn to speak and learn from one another. There are many takeaways from this book: the individual essays both examine and model methodologies that could be used in other settings, the authors bring many voices in to the conversation and the book is transnational in its scope as the editors incorporate how learning and leadership is occurring across two country contexts. The examination of settler colonialism is necessary as the legacy of settler violence continues to impact everyone. The book begins and ends with this recognition. De Finney et al emphasize Indigenous values and Indigenous methods in their work and Flicker acknowledges her positionality as a non-Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous young people and what positionality means in her refusal to take such acknowledgement as the end product.

This book of essays illustrates that gender-based and sexualized violence experienced within communities across the world is being rebuked by girls and young women who have taken part in the programs, workshops and girl-led actions in Canada and South Africa. In much the same way that Yoko Ono’s Cut Piece sought to disrupt established systems of looking at and interacting

with women in public we can see, in the essays in this book, the ripple effect of on-going women-centric actions in the outcomes and responses of young women who have demonstrated the most impressive kind of self-determination, dignity and creativity.

Taken as a whole, the chapters in *Disrupting Shameful Legacies: Girls and Young Women Speaking Back through the Arts to Address Sexual Violence* point towards a new legacy, one based on methodologies that disrupt colonial legacies by speaking up and speaking back through the arts and visual practice. At the same time, the fact that so many of the authors are themselves Indigenous young people from either Canada or South Africa also suggests a new legacy of leadership for change.

Lori Beavis, *Director, Centre d'art daphne, Tiohtia:ke*

1. The hashtag *BeenRapedNeverReported* was started by newspaper reporters Sue Montgomery and Antonia Zerbisias. In 2006, Tarana Burke coined the phrase "Me Too", as a survivor of sexual assault. Burke wanted to help women and girls of color who had also survived sexual violence.
2. Amnesty International (2009). *No More Stolen Sisters: The Need for a Comprehensive Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada* <http://www.amnesty.ca/sites/default/files/amr200122009enstolensistersupdate.pdf>.
3. Borrow, J. (2013). "Aboriginal and Treaty Rights and Violence against Women" *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 50(3), 699-736.; Anderson, K., Campbell, M., & Belcourt, C. (Eds.) (2018) *Keetsahnak / Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters*, University of Alberta Press.; Bubar, R. & Jumper Thurman, P. (2004) "Violence Against Native Women" *Social Justice* 2004, 31(4), 70-86.
4. The TRC took place in South Africa (1995-1998) and in Canada (2008-2015).