

Heidi Bohaker

Doodem and Council Fire: Anishinaabe Governance through Alliance. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020. 245 pp.

Dr. Heidi Bohaker's book *Doodem and Council Fire: Anishinaabe Governance through Alliance* emerges as Indigenous self-governance and Indigenous law have come to the forefront of critical law debates. Although presented as a historical examination, Bohaker's contribution to these debates adds a level of analysis of Anishinaabe self-governance that is the product of years of careful research and community consultation.

Expanding on her dissertation, Bohaker's book is a brilliant socio-historical delve into Anishinaabe doodems between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, and she even points to current events around the beginnings of the *Restoule v Canada (Attorney General)* case.¹ In addition is a careful analysis of the processes of building alliances, the importance of gift-giving, the differences between types of councils, and the protocols involved. Since the doodems appeared on everything from treaties to land-sale agreements, Bohaker's work with these doodems adds a depth to examinations of intercultural exchanges that goes beyond simply recounting what was written in settler archives.

What sets Bohaker's work apart is the inclusion and use of Anishinaabemowin to describe specific positions, processes, and events and her careful attention to linguistic conventions. Her choice to problematize commonly used words such as band, clan, tribe, and nation to describe First Nations' systems and structures of governance reflects the important shift in socio-legal and ethnohistorical studies that hinges on Indigenous consultation. Bohaker is very forthcoming about her consultation with Indigenous peoples, both within and outside of academia.

She further distinguishes herself with the conclusion that a reactivation of Anishinaabe governance is occurring today in many ways, including the use of doodems in any capacity. Bohaker concludes that such self-governance never really disappeared but merely adapted and transformed to work with settler colonial systems. These important claims are more than substantiated by the complexity and breadth of evidence, spanning centuries, presented by Bohaker.

That large body of evidence is perhaps the crux of this book. Given the scope of historical events, complex processes, and intercultural dynamics covered in this book, a basic familiarity with Indigenous worldviews and knowledge, at a minimum, is needed to appreciate Bohaker's work. This is not an entry-level book for new scholars unfamiliar with the importance of place and community in Anishinaabe culture, or the complexity of settler-Indigenous relationships. While Bohaker does delve into Anishinaabe culture, economies, and politics to a certain extent, she does so merely to situate the importance of doodems within those facets of

¹ 2018 ONSC 114.

society. Given the complexity of the topics covered in this book, it should probably be reserved for third- or fourth-year undergraduate classes and higher.

The concepts and ideas put forth by Bohaker provide several openings for exploration that will inspire a myriad of avenues for new scholarship. The importance of the women's councils, which were often dismissed by European settlers and are not included in official records, were only touched on briefly. Bohaker did a fantastic job of noting the important roles of the women's council with the archives that were available to her, but as Anishinaabe legal traditions establish themselves, research into newly established women's councils will enrich understanding of this area.

Another important statement Bohaker makes concerns Anishinaabe leaders' use of land cessions to try and make space for both Anishinabek and settlers, while also protecting the lands and waters. This is a departure from what is presently taught in schools regarding treaties. Most current narratives suggest that Indigenous peoples did not understand what it meant to surrender or cede land. Bohaker takes the opposite stance, proposing that not only did nineteenth-century Anishinaabe leaders understand what was happening, they attempted to work the settler colonial system in a mutually beneficial way. This intriguing departure from the currently espoused narrative gives those leaders agency, demonstrating how they attempted to adapt to the new settler colonial systems. More research in this area may not only reveal past resistances to assimilation, but also add to scholarship on current tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, especially where land, treaties, and governance are concerned.

Bohaker's book joins the ranks of recent work by Borrows, Coyle, Askew, and other scholars leading the research into Anishinaabe law and legal traditions. Since doodems were often overlooked by scholars of the past or assumed to be nothing more than familial or primitive symbols, this work provides a revolutionary examination of the holistic nature of Anishinaabe culture and politics.

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