Book Review: *Healing Traditions: The Mental Health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada* Edited by Laurence J. Kirmayer and Gail Guthrie Valaskakis

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In Healing Traditions, the editors have assembled the voices of 29 academics, researchers, and mental health professionals from across Canada as well as Australia and the United States. This distinguished panel offers an important contribution to our understanding of Aboriginal mental health issues and the unique healing processes currently underway in a number of communities. Kirmayer and Valaskakis contextualize mental health in a distinctive manner, acknowledging how Canada’s First Peoples have been affected by colonization over several hundred years. We learn how historic social policies continue to affect individuals, their families, and the communities in which they live. The notion of identity and the social confusion these policies create are developed in several chapters. The heterogenic nature of these communities, with their own cultural values and experiences requiring distinct healing strategies for Canada’s Métis, Inuit, Cree, or other Indigenous communities, is elaborated on by the contributors. These themes are intertwined within each of the book’s sections, but rather than causing confusion, their reiteration reinforces the concept that practitioners must be students of history as well as students of their field of practice in order to engage effectively with Aboriginal people and their healing pathways.

While the editors indicate the volume is not meant to be a handbook of practice, the contributors offer practitioners significant insights into what factors may be contributing to issues their clients confront. As such, it moves the reader beyond the theoretical and into the realm of practice with a number of thought-provoking strategies. The section dealing with resiliency and how communities are addressing mental health issues is particularly helpful in this regard. Rather than focusing on a “best practice” approach, the editors have ensured that readers gain an appreciation for the unique characteristics of each community and the need to engage with the community in identifying mental health features and strategies that reflect its strengths and needs.

With the growing migration of Aboriginal people to urban centers in mind, the editors provide important caveats related to the systemic health care structures that might impede rather than support a distinct response to the unique needs of this population. Montreal is offered as an example of a large urban center that vests Aboriginal treatment strategies in a mainstream treatment regime, contrary to the reflections of other contributors in the book. While other cities like Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver have been able to address such issues, bureaucracy and jurisdictional issues would appear to continue the cycle of colonization in contemporary urban society.

A Pan-American treatment regimen is not the answer to mental health issues in Canada’s Aboriginal communities. Rather, individual treatment must be linked to a community-driven response. The chapters dedicated to experiences outside of Canada, while supporting the book’s general theme, only distract the reader from comprehending how resiliency can be achieved in Canadian treatment models. The experience of western Canada, particularly Manitoba and Saskatchewan as well as the Territories, could have made this book a comprehensive overview of how mental health practitioners are contributing to the strengthening of Canada’s Aboriginal communities. Peter Menzies, Aboriginal Services, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, University of Toronto.