Review of *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine* by Kim Anderson

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*Life Stages and Native Women* unearths the vital teachings of fourteen diverse Indigenous elder oral historians who share their knowledge about the life cycle of Native women. From conception to walking, childhood and youth, adult years, to grandmothers and elders, author Kim Anderson weaves the four life stages from a series of oral history interviews conducted over a period of five years beginning in 2007. Cree/Métis elder and master storyteller Maria Campbell guides Anderson on her journey to gain knowledge from a generation of Cree/Métis, Cree, Saulteaux, and Ojibwe elders, each of whom holds tightly to the stories of her people amid the severe stresses of colonization from the early to mid-twentieth century in Saskatchewan and Ontario, Canada.

*Life Stages* is a significant body of work that digs up and shares the vital stories from the perspective of elders, many of whom were *notokwe opihikeet* (old-lady raised). They lived through a time when the majority of children were forced into residential schools and Indigenous cultural knowledge was silenced. The *notokwe opihikeet* were often children selected by their parents and communities to be raised underground, outside the confines of the church and state; special measures were taken to pass on cultural knowledge to them to ensure it would remain in the community.

The life-cycle teachings flow from the stories of the elders who share *ahyokaywina*, the sacred stories, while others share the *tahp acimowina*, the family histories; Anderson skillfully weaves the stories together and offers them to the reader as “medicines . . . [and] a contribution to the healing process we call decolonization.” The stories fill voids in female gender-based knowledge that was silenced by the Christianization of Indigenous communities across the Canadian Plains and throughout Ontario.

Reflecting on the teachings of the Anishinaabe and Cree/Métis elders, Anderson discusses commonalities in social organization, such as children being located at the center of these “traditional communities.” Within the first life stage, communities welcome and “protect” the baby’s life-force through ceremony and specific pregnancy, infant, and toddler care. Infancy is viewed as a sacred life stage, which is similar and has many connections to that of the elder life stage. This vital connection exists on practical levels because elders within land-based societies played a significant role as caregivers and teachers to children while the adults worked out on the land. The vital connection between elders and infants is further reinforced because these life stages also share the closest proximity to the Spirit world. Elders therefore play a significant role in naming and welcoming ceremonies and are able to recognize the life purpose of the child through spiritual insights and communication that is closed off to other life stages.

*Life Stages* pulls the reader into engaging with diverse Indigenous worldviews that
explore women's roles, responsibilities, and purpose outside of a Western patriarchal framework. Anderson compels and inspires the reader to imagine women fulfilling their life-stage roles and responsibilities to become ogi maa kwes, head women, that each clan and extended family would have had in place. In these societies women's roles were revered, and, as life-givers, they were also considered to be sacred by members of the community.

Kim Anderson's Life Stages invites the reader to learn about the author's own journey as a Cree/Métis woman seeking to gain knowledge and pass on vital teachings for her own family and that of the larger Indigenous and non-Indigenous community. While she also includes the significant role that men in traditional societies played in maintaining community balance and harmony, it is the central role of the ogi maa kwes in traditional societies that Anderson respectfully unearths through the relationships she builds with the elders profiled in her book.

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