

TRUTH AND THE MEANING

In her article, “Hitchhiking and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women”, Katherine Morton argues that many of the reasons behind the missing and murdered Indigenous women along The Highway of Tears (Highway 16) are also the reasons behind the lack of productive action in preventing them. The relationships between race, gender, mobility, space (Morton, 2016), socio-economic status, and deeply rooted colonial stereotypes explain the disproportionate number of Indigenous women that are murdered or go missing, as well as the response and the perception of the public.

Katherine Morton utilizes analysis of subliminal messaging in terms of slang and the latent inferences around labelling to redefine the place of Indigenous women in society, which lends the ability to better understand the social circumstances that Indigenous women (and Indigenous peoples in general) face along The Highway of Tears (and throughout Canada). Furthermore, Morton supports her arguments through objective examination of highway signs in order to demonstrate both the biased understanding of Indigenous woman and hitchhiking and the subsequent methods employed to prevent it.

Through these methods, the article reflects an interpretivist theoretical paradigm, more specifically symbolic interactionism. The article highlights the experience of a marginalized group of people in society, in this case as constructed through labelling. Morton analyzes why Indigenous women are not seen as legitimate concerns to society, not only why they are murdered, and analyzes a sort of “advertising” through billboards on the highway. Morton’s article adds a new yet unseparated perspective on The Highway of Tears and employs arguments that analyze the fundamental levels of society.

It is an extremely thought-provoking article that looks to re-examine the issue without looking to take anything away from it.

In his New York Times article; “Dozens of Women Vanish on Canada’s Highway of Tears, and Most Cases Are Unsolved”, author Dan Levin describes the cases of murdered and missing Indigenous women on The Highway of Tears. The article highlights both the emotional impact on the victims’ families and the fragile relationship between Indigenous communities and the Canadian government (Levin, 2016).

Levin uses journalistic interviews and quotations from grieving family members, public officials, and residents of communities around The Highway of Tears. Levin also makes use of statistics and case examples relating to the number of women to be murdered and go missing conducive to the severity of the situation. In addition, the article makes use of anecdotes and physical descriptions to add context to the landscape of northern British Columbia. The central theoretical paradigms present in Levin’s article are structural functionalism and quantitative sociology, even though it has a critical tone. The article analyzes the function of government institution and its latent role in perception and appearance in terms of domestic issues. Furthermore; the article uses quantitative data to compare, contrast, and identify relationships between various criminal cases, residential schools, and ethnicities.

Levin’s article is objective in its research and offers a straightforward outline of the practical and political issues surrounding The Highway of Tears and the missing and murdered Indigenous women. However, even though the article makes subjective arguments around the political implications in Canada - specifically the connections to

Indigenous relations and marginalized groups such as Indigenous women - it does not contain much critical thinking or analysis into the root of the issue that could lead to a solution.

Both articles by Katherine Morton and Dan Levin describe and analyze to some level the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women on highway 16 (“The Highway of Tears”). In comparison, both articles recognize the impact of “the Highway of Tears [being] a microcosm of Canada’s painful indigenous legacy” (Levin, 2016), as “the historical frame through which all contemporary violence against Indigenous peoples must be analyzed” (Morton, 2016:303). Levin’s article focuses more on the staggering and disproportionate numbers of Indigenous women, the practical policy and reconciliation issues (stemming from the Residential School system) on the part of the government, and the emotional effect on the families and communities of the victims.

In contrast, Morton’s article focuses on the more fundamental social constructs that form such circumstances, and more specifically the intersection of many social labels and identities that marginalize Indigenous women outside of society (Morton, 2016). Furthermore, Morton examines the way in which society understands issues surrounding a marginalized group that may be considered “outside of the moral and physical boundaries of mainstream society” (Morton, 2016, pg:301), and how those perceptions form the response(s) to an issue. Levin’s article focuses on fact and face-value information to inform and educate people about a very serious issue. Katherine Morton examines the reasons *why* things are structured the way they are, and the way they are understood, even by an objective journalist such as Dan Levin.

References

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