

***The Lubicon Lake Nation: Indigenous Knowledge and Power.* By Dawn Martin-Hill. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008. 208 pp. References, index.**

Indigenous studies scholar Dawn Martin-Hill, of McMaster University, writes of a northern Alberta land claim struggle, based on research conducted at Little Buffalo Lake between 1989 and 1994. Her book, *The Lubicon Lake Nation: Indigenous Knowledge and Power*, includes sections on Lubicon and Haudenosaunee Indigenous knowledge, the history of the Lubicon Cree, the status and experiences of Lubicon women, as well as prospects for Lubicon youth. The book focuses on a community struggling to make sense of federal and provincial land claims and resource development policy, and to define its own destiny on traditional grounds. It is based on Martin-Hill's work in organizing Lubicon women to support the land claim struggle. The author argues that Indigenous knowledge can inspire a people to largely reject state options for development and title recognition, in favour of achieving justice through direct political action and spiritual contemplation. A reflexive consideration of the author's own role as a Mohawk woman scholar in an impoverished Cree community is central to the book's narrative, theory, and method. While elements of the author's work will be useful in understanding Alberta Cree people, as well as Pan-Indianism and land claims, this book has a number of problems.

I welcome attention to northern Alberta, an understudied area. Unfortunately, Martin-Hill's selection of Little Buffalo as a field site does little to address gaps in ethnological understanding, since the Lubicon Lake Indian Nation (LLIN) is already among the most studied First Nations in the province. This leaves the question of whether her research was useful to the First Nation itself. In view of the fact that helping the LLIN settle its claim was one of her main research goals, and given that the claim remains unsettled twenty years after she began her fieldwork, I leave this matter for the reader to assess. One might also question whether her work contributes to a fuller understanding of the regional claims situation. I suggest it does not, nor does it promote solidarity between the LLIN and closely related Aboriginal communities. Therefore, I do not regard this book as a success.

I support a just resolution to land issues in northern Alberta, yet perhaps the strategy and tactics of the LLIN ought to be revised after decades of failed talks. Currently (November 2009), a contested election result holds the potential to end LLIN Chief Bernard Ominayak's thirty-year term of office, but we do not get any context for this development from Martin-Hill's 2008 book, which is strongly supportive of the agenda of Chief Ominayak

and his council. The author devotes most of her attention to the height of LLIN activism in the early 1990s. As a result, she fails to capture the political realities of the past fifteen years in Little Buffalo. Indeed, she returned to the field only once after 1994, and did not receive permission from Ominayak to publish her book until a decade later. The result is a warmed-over study with potential to exacerbate a twenty-year-old dispute between the LLIN and neighbouring communities. This is a pity, since local relations have warmed somewhat since 1994. Moreover, the solidarity Martin-Hill describes between the LLIN and other First Nations supporting them from further afield no longer appears as evident on a practical level.

Few scholars would accept the controls over their work that Martin-Hill gave the LLIN council. She seems to have allowed them to direct her research, vet informants, and take ownership of data. The result is a book that misses many divisions among people within and around Little Buffalo, while exaggerating other divisions. Residents of neighbouring communities, Evangelicals/Pentecostals (an important group in the community since the 1950s, though one would not know it from this account), drinkers, and political dissidents are all targeted for criticism and re-education. I invite the reader to consult my own work, and that of Christine Schreyer, for more balanced, up-to-date accounts of regional politics and social life.

Some readers may be interested in Martin-Hill's discussion of theory about Indigenous researchers. I found these sections of the book intellectually stimulating, as the author draws on perspectives from numerous Indigenous scholars (most notably Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Marlene Brant Castellano) to integrate a liberating theory of insider research with theories of Indigenous oppression and political struggle. This theory, in turn, affects the author's praxis. Martin-Hill's main tasks were organizing a women's group and building contacts with other Aboriginal groups on a ceremonial level. She states that the primary reason the LLIN leadership welcomed her was to cement political alliances with Six Nations people. As such, Ominayak discouraged Martin-Hill from conducting archival research. Thus, she relies mainly on interviews, with no data triangulation and little background. Additionally, she does not provide enough context for some of her informants' inflammatory remarks about certain Aboriginal individuals, communities, and local religious movements.

The frequent misspellings of names of LLIN members, neighbouring communities, other Aboriginal groups, lawyers, politicians, and bureaucrats are an annoyance. Named people come and go in the book, often without introduction. Inconsistent spellings make it hard to know who's who. The book is generally disorganized. For example, much of the engaging discussion

of critical theory that I mentioned above appears in a chapter on local history. Secondary references dating since 1989 about LLIN issues are few and far between. Most seriously, much of the book, particularly the conclusion, appears to be about Mohawk/Six Nations land claims and litigation (in Ontario), the relevance of which is rarely clear. There is little sustained discussion of Indigenous knowledge, even though this phrase is included in the book's title. Moreover, Martin-Hill does not show mastery of regional ethnology in reporting and interpreting the findings of James G.E. Smith, the most celebrated anthropologist to conduct any significant fieldwork at Little Buffalo. In particular, she uncritically employs his marriage universe concept in a manner that is deeply prejudicial to the claims of neighbouring Cree communities and exaggerates its implications for the federal recognition of new First Nations in the region. She mentions little other Cree or Algonquian ethnological literature in her study.

Equally unsatisfying is Martin-Hill's discussion of contemporary LLIN identity, in which she repeatedly uses phrases like "the Lubicon believe," or "the Lubicon were there," when she is actually referring to a small in-group of informants, activists, and politicians, generally from within Ominayak's family or those of the councillors. In fact, her analysis is dominated by the discourse of these individuals. Consequently, there is little balanced consideration of issues underlying a series of splits within the LLIN, nor of alternative strategies presenting themselves in the land claims negotiations.

Martin-Hill suggests that full acceptance by governments of the LLIN's unique demands is the only way forward. For me, the key question is: if every other First Nation in the district has been able to settle claims and reach Agreements-in-Principle on their Treaty Land Entitlements, why not the LLIN? Calling the other communities sellouts is not good enough. I consider the LLIN demands for comprehensive claim-style benefits to be somewhat unrealistic and inequitable in the Prairie provinces' context. While it is not necessary for Martin-Hill or the LLIN leadership to agree with me, I would have liked a more balanced discussion about the regional context of negotiations.

Although Martin-Hill implicitly endorses Pan-Indianism, she is critical of other new religious movements in the community, such as locally led Cree-language Pentecostal churches. She does not mention that at least one of her key informants (an Elder) was a Pentecostal, who nevertheless maintained a strong Cree identity. Conversely, two Mohawk Elders accompanied the author on visits to Little Buffalo, and sharing spiritual traditions was an objective of many participants in her research. I have no objections to Martin-Hill's building a Mohawk longhouse or arranging Mohawk ceremonies in a

Cree community; however, I would prefer that she not scold anthropologists who raise critical questions about such practices. Clearly, if Lubicon culture is threatened, blending Cree and exogenous traditions will be potentially problematic for many scholars as well as some Cree people. Yet Martin-Hill's justification for diffusing her Mohawk culture is essentially that the Chief said she could do so. Furthermore, she does not acknowledge the deep differences between Woods Cree and Plains Cree spiritual practices. The recent adoption of Plains-style practices in the North is a reality I recognize. Nevertheless, to describe the politicized imposition of Plains Cree drumming (for youth) and ceremonies as a return to local traditions strains the imagination. Personally, I would have preferred more discussion of the northern Tea and Lame dances. Scattered discussions of these traditions are the book's highlight for me, although the author does not address the relationship of Pan-Indianism's spread to their declining frequency.

Some of the data in the book is ethically questionable. Martin-Hill brings to light old photos of a Tea Dance, taken by an Evangelical missionary opposed to traditional ceremonies. She does this although photos are no longer permitted at such ceremonies. More seriously, Martin-Hill acknowledges interviewing informants in mourning, due to time constraints during her research visit. Where I work, this is known as "bothering people." Similarly, at Ominayak's urging, Martin-Hill repeatedly attempts to interview an aging informant, who has declined to talk to her, and then presents his tape-recorded remarks about a sensitive family issue. Many scholars would see this as a direct violation of the ethic of informed consent and of the right to not participate in research. On a related note, some readers will find amusing Martin-Hill's attempt to tape former Indian Affairs minister Tom Siddon, without his permission, while attending a private political meeting. Others will find it troubling, as they might her role in the meeting generally, which culminates in her arguing with Siddon. Certainly, this section raises questions about the separation of Martin-Hill's political and research activities, which are reflected in the book as a whole.

I believe that political commitment and research can go hand in hand. However, I question the fairness and effectiveness of Martin-Hill's book. Speaking truth to power is all very well. But tact, pragmatism, thoroughness, balance, and careful editing also have their place.

**Clinton N. Westman**, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology,  
University of Saskatchewan