

Chapter 32

Resisting Exotic Puppetry: Experiences of Indigenous Women Leadership in the Academy

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous women have increasingly taken up leadership roles in the academy, particularly in the time of truth and reconciliation within the Canadian context. While the institutions are keen to promote Indigenous leadership, spaces are carved out, yet there is a surge of resignations, firing, and toxic work environments. This chapter will delve into the colonial patriarchy and misogyny that intersects with Indigeneity within academic institutions. The notion of these carved out spacing being stages of performance and the exotic puppetry that often plays out particularly for Indigenous women will be underscored.

RESISTING EXOTIC PUPPETRY: EXPERIENCES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN THE ACADEMY

Indigenous women have increasingly taken up leadership roles in the academy, particularly in the time of truth and reconciliation within the Canadian context. In Canada, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to collect Indigenous survivors' experiences in residential schools and the final report was released in 2015 noting 94 Calls to Action (TRC, 2015) – an attempt to redress the intergenerational harms of residential schools. Some universities responded by creating Indigenous specific senior level positions, such as associate vice president, academic and Indigenous programs, vice provost, Indigenous engagement, deans of faculties that focused on Indigenous principles, etc. This is not to say that prior to 2015, Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous women in particular were not taking up leadership roles in the academy.

While the institutions are keen to promote Indigenous leadership, spaces are carved out yet there is a surge of resignations, firings and toxic work environments. In the efforts to 'Indigenize' university spaces and academic programs in response to reconciliation there is growing complexity to the experience

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8592-4.ch032

of Indigenous learners and leaders, particularly how this relates to colonial patriarchy and misogyny that intersects with Indigeneity within academic institutions. The notion of these carved out spacing being stages of performance and the exotic puppetry that often plays out, particularly for Indigenous women will be explored in this chapter.

SETTING THE STAGE: TIME AND PLACE

I never thought of myself as a feminist. That term never really fit, because I never saw myself reflected in people who identified as feminist or within feminist movements, which was and I would argue, still is, predominantly carrying the privileged white woman's narrative. Green (2007) and others have articulated the need for feminism to make space for Indigenous thought and Cameron (2010) incorporated critical theory and feminism from an Indigenous perspective in her doctoral work, coining the term *critical ekweism*.

I credit Dr. Sheila Neuman, a white feminist who was provost at the University of Toronto for increasing my awareness of toxic masculinity, misogyny and patriarchy in the academy. To a certain degree, I could now relate to women's experiences in the academy. Albeit, this analysis did/does not translate for Indigenous women in the academy or Indigenous women in society more generally. She was the keynote for a talk about women in academia. She asked us to reflect and take note of how men in the academy take up space, and gave an example of a man, spreading out, leaning back - #ManSprawl - and presenting his accolades for 20 minutes, yet a woman with more experience and credentials taking a fraction of the time to do the same. I reflected back to many experiences where this would occur and how I played into it by minimizing my accomplishments. I became increasingly conscious of this #ManSprawl in the academy.

Around the same time, a teaching about not minimizing myself came from Grandmother Dr. Lillian McGregor while I was on the Board of Directors of the Native Canadian Centre in Toronto. Grandmother Lillian held an honorary doctorate from the University of Toronto and an Indspire¹ award recognizing her well over a half century of work with the Indigenous community. Her teaching recognized the internalized colonial violence of misogyny in our communities. She spoke about the way in which women's voices around the table were often minimized and told me that I should not shy away from using my title of doctor. She noted that humility is much needed from the men in our community but for women, humility is often projected on us to take away our strength and power. Dr. Lillian McGregor is now in the spirit world and I will never forget this teaching.

Fast forward a few decades to the narratives of toxic masculinity, heteropatriarchy and misogyny existing and playing out within the #MeToo movement. In the past two years the #MeToo movement has gained momentum in the Indigenous community. Misogyny and toxic masculinity in Indian country is being publicly presented in social media exposing behaviour of Indigenous male leaders. This #NativeMeToo is not quite a movement in comparison to #MeToo. I term the #NativeMeToo as an *expression* and not a movement because there does not appear to be as much support within and outside of the community for, primarily Indigenous young women coming forward attempting to share their experiences of sexual harassment, assault and misogyny. Of course, the #MeToo movement began with the courage of an African American woman, Tarana Burke and only gained broader momentum after actress Alyssa Milano tweeted about sexual harassment and assault by producer Harvey Weinstein (Garcia, 2017). The cooptation of the #MeToo movement by white women increased the support and awareness creating a movement that seemed to matter more. The #NativeMeToo expression has no momentum and women,

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