

Review of *Living Indigenous Leadership: Native Narratives on Building Strong Communities*, edited by Carolyn Kenny and Tina Ngaroimata Fraser. Vancouver, Canada, UBC Press, 2012. p. xiv, 231. Contributors. Index. ISBN: 978-0-7748-2347-0.

As an immigrant, I cross the borders every time I switch from English to my native tongue, every time I bow to my elders in greeting, and every time I notice the ways the culture of my birthplace shapes my behavior and thoughts. For me, these shifts can trace back their origin across the ocean, to the tangible land where my “otherness” is the everyday norm for more than 50 million people. As I dove deeper into the narratives of Indigenous peoples, however, I could feel the endeavors of those who strive to create the intangible validation of themselves through cultural connections and revitalization.

Living Indigenous Leadership reveals the personal and social struggles of Aboriginal peoples experience from the loss of their land and cultural identity all across Canada, the United States, and New Zealand. Yet, like a traditional war cry of Aboriginal warriors declaring their prowess, the fourteen essays by Indigenous scholars proclaim the leadership concepts that promise to mend hearts and build strong Native communities. Carolyn Kenny and Tina Ngaroimata Fraser have gathered the voices of grandmothers, mothers, and single women from diverse Aboriginal nations who are fearless academics and leaders in various fields, including education, health, social justice, and ethnic studies. Through personal storytelling, the authors show the historical trauma caused by colonialism that affects social, political, educational, and leadership conditions of Indigenous people today. Though each author presents unique experiences, the essay collection speaks in unison that rethinking leadership based on history, tradition, and cultural values shared by Indigenous peoples is the critical process to improving Native communities in meaningful ways.

The journey to reconstructing leadership concepts begin by seeking the guidance of elders in Native communities, particularly that of the grandmothers. In Part 1, “Leadership, Native Style,” the authors examine the correlation between low self-esteem of many indigenous peoples and their lack of First Nation identity, and the ways grandmothers’ teachings ultimately become a pathway to decolonization that sustains cultural identities. In her essay, “Learning to Lead Kokum Style,” Yvonne G. McLeod conducts an anthropological study on eight Indigenous women and argues that the Indigenous leadership can be empowered through “*kokum*-style” (grandmother-style) leadership based on the process of reflection, experience, and self-direction (17). Reflecting on their lives, the eight women agree that cultural artifacts, such as legends, stories, and metaphors, allowed them to have understanding of the world that sense alone cannot provide (22). By watching her grandmother perform traditional sewing, singing and drumming, and ceremonies, one woman was freed from the hurts of racism through understanding the values of cultural connections (34). Another remembers her mother modeling the “old ways” of her mother to teach the interconnectedness of universe and special gifts of individuals (36). The behavior, resiliency, and knowledge transmitted through grandmothers in geese and buffalo metaphors, the medicine wheel, the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers, helped these women to overcome the struggles as Indigenous peoples and find their identity and leadership roles in their communities (34).

Similarly, Alannah Young Leon in “Elders’ Teachings on Leadership” focuses on elders’ perspectives on the role of culture in Indigenous leadership and applies them to leadership in postsecondary institutions (48). Emphasizing the four pedagogical components of an Indigenous leadership identified by elders as land interaction, cultural practice, community service, and language and genealogy, Leon argues that these leadership qualities are needed to reclaim holistic health of Native communities which still suffer from racism, religion, reservation, and the legacy

of residential schools (53). Leon views Elders as those who, through modelling and storytelling, teach how to make meaning out of history, to connect the past to present conditions, and indicate safe directions to pursue so that history can be sustained and advanced (49). Finding that both students and Elders today feel the cultural values are missing in leadership training, Leon argues that the personal narratives recounting internalized racism and its continued impact are the key to decolonizing the Indigenous leadership education and practice (53).

In Part 2, “Collaboration is the Key,” the concept of seventh-generation thinking emphasizes the Indigenous value of fostering interconnectedness of communities and multi-generations. Raquel D. Gutiérrez in “Indigenous Grandmas and the Social Justice Movement” examines the council of thirteen Indigenous grandmothers, which embodies the classic seventh-generation thinking by upholding the Aboriginal culture to nurture, educate, and train the Indigenous people all across the world (105). In “The Legacy of Leadership,” Tina Ngaroimata Fraser looks at the *Kapa Haka* (performing group) that relives the stories of Māori histories and plights through songs and dance. Exploring how the performance is inextricably linked to Māori language, culture, and community, Fraser recognizes it as a way that can foster unity between performers and audiences, as well as spiritual connection between ancestors and the audience that can lead to self-healing of Native communities (125). Fraser tells her memory of how the grandmothers guided the haka group of her youth with their strengths developed out of a desire to protect their land and language (121). As for Māori people and most Indigenous peoples, identity emanates from the land, and the focus of tutoring and performing *Kappa Haka* is having a greater understanding of Māori origins and self-awareness (121). Remembering the story of a feisty great-grandmother who had been arrested for pulling out surveyors’ land markers to resist illegally confiscation of lands, Fraser argues leadership should emulate the naturally abilities of grandmothers to lead as tribal women (121).

Likewise, Stelómethet Ethel B. Gardner in “The Four R’s of Leadership in Indigenous Language Revitalization” explores the grassroots revitalization of Indigenous languages based on the Indigenous spiritual values and belief in the sacredness of Indigenous languages, which recognize that language, land, identity, culture, and spirit are interconnected and intertwined (125). Along with Siyàmiyatéliyot Eilzabeth Philips, the only fluent Halq’eméylem speaker, Gardner advocates the mobilization of revitalizing Stó:lō language as a means of sowing grassroots leadership that can actualize the traditional values of balance, harmony, and respect embedded in the language (135). Spreading the method of awakening respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity of Indigenous languages to revivalists across various tribes, Gardner lives out the interconnectedness of cultures and models a leadership that creates stronger unity within and between Indigenous peoples today (131).

At the closing of the book, the authors address the continuing effects of colonization seen in violence and discrimination against Native people. In Part 3, “Healing and Perseverance,” Michelle M. Jacob in “We Want a Lifelong Commitment, Not Just Sweet Words” examines the need to heal the historical trauma perpetuated within educational system and observes an on-going presence of micro aggression against Native American students in one California college campus (180). Jacob set up a focus group study that provides the very first opportunity for the students to speak about the shameful experiences they faced as Native American students on campus, in which the students recounted instances of tokenization of Indigenous culture and the pressure to hide their Indigenous identities in order to survive and thrive (183).

In “Leaders Walking Backwards,” Alanaise Goodwill digs into how the First Nation communities suffer from normalized levels of violence which undermine the Indigenous people’s

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collective ability to stand up against it (223). Identifying the leadership qualities that have become distorted in colonial spaces as the driving force of Indigenous children in choosing gang-life, Goodwill argues that Indigenous leadership can redirect these qualities to developing pro-social leadership in Native communities for future generations (231). Goodwill interviewed several Indigenous men who were ex-gang members, but are now taking a leadership role as mentors to sympathize with and redirect what are fundamentally caring and loyal qualities in Indigenous children (224). One of the men explains that even though the men and the children come from different experiences and tribes, he is able to understand the pain and help because they are “all one race,” as “the traditional race” (228).

Living Indigenous Leadership is a unique contribution to leadership studies from the perspectives of diverse Aboriginal nations that share the core values of Indigenous societies. It is an inspiring collection of essays that reflect the resiliency and strength of the will of Native communities to “not only survive but thrive, sometimes against all odds” (Preface, xiv). Moreover, the message of this book does not only apply to Native communities, but also applies broadly to communities that seek to untangle the effect of messy history and look forward to bettering their lives, and the lives of future generations.

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