

# Living Indigenous Leadership

*Native Narratives on  
Building Strong Communities*

**Edited by Carolyn Kenny and  
Tina Ngaroimata Fraser**



**UBC**Press · Vancouver · Toronto

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*Dedicated to*

Dorothy Bell

Matriarch of the Tsiits Gitanne (Eagle) Clan

Haida Nation

Born 11 November, 1915-2011

In Old Massett Village, British Columbia, Canada

*and*

Bella (Te Pera) Ranui

Tuhoe, Ngati Haka/Patuheuheu Tribe

Born 21 February, 1911-1977

in Aōtearoa, New Zealand

*and*

All who work tirelessly

to build strong and healthy

Native communities

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## *Foreword*

THIS IS AN INSPIRING book written by Indigenous women scholars from across Canada, the United States, and New Zealand who have successfully challenged mainstream education to secure the highest academic credentials institutions of higher learning can offer. While engaged in years of study, they have maintained a profound interest in Aboriginal thought and perspectives. In this volume, they explore leadership concepts appropriate to building strong Aboriginal communities. They embrace primary sources in their research as they engage our people – grandmothers, parents, Elders, youth, and even former gang members whose stories and experiences have shown that leadership is unbound. Leadership, they demonstrate, is not the purview of the educated or the elected. It is a time-honoured belief among Indigenous peoples that each person is born with innate strengths that can assist in the overall betterment of the community. The influence of Western thought has led us away from this concept. The research in this publication encourages us to rethink leadership, to give thought to the original philosophies and practices of our people and to give voice to these invisible leaders.

This is a unique publication in that the authors are mothers, grandmothers, and single women of all ages who are Choctaw-Haida, Māori, Cree, Anishinaabe, Tlingit-Haida, Mi'kmaq, Stó:lō, Paiute-Shosone, Opata and Tarahumara, Yakama, and Métis. They are employed in various fields that include education, health, social justice, and ethnic studies, either in the community at large or as professors and doctoral students at major universities. Although they represent diverse nations, they and their stories also exemplify the many commonalities of history, tradition, and cultural values shared by Indigenous people. An awareness of this reality leads to the knowledge that building strong communities can be a collective effort. These women are leading the way.

If you have the same reaction to this book that I had, you will want to read on and on until you have read the whole book, maybe in the same day. It is an inspiration to me, someone who has spent many years trying to advance Aboriginal education, to see the calibre of the scholars and the research they are providing today to those who are seeking knowledge of the worldview and perspectives of Indigenous people. After you have read the book, I know you will join me in acknowledging the work of these brilliant women who have provided for us timely food for thought.

Ekosani.

VERNA J. KIRKNESS

Fisher River Cree Nation

Professor Emerita, University of British Columbia

# *Preface*

## **Carolyn Kenny**

ON A COOL SANTA BARBARA morning, sea fog rolls through the palm trees into my bedroom window. This is Chumash territory. And I can imagine the Chumash earth goddess, Hutash, helping my ancestors from my spirit home in the Haida Gwaii. Together, they send spirits across the many waters, over the Rainbow Bridge from the sea, through the Channel Islands off the southern coast of California, into the city of Santa Barbara, and through my bedroom window. These gentle breezes have their source in the north. Along with the moisture, they bring the smell of sweet grass. It embraces me, signifying the presence of my ancestors. They are here to greet me, to guide me through this day.

It is extraordinarily important for Native people to locate themselves spiritually. Our ecological, historical, and humanistic spirituality finds expression in the stories that help shape our lives and guide our days. There is also a sense of immediacy in our Native world for those who choose to feel it. Locating ourselves in the moment calls forth our past and our future in elegant and expansive perspectives that remind us of the interconnection of all things and an inclusive holism that permeates our worlds.

My ancestors are Native American and Ukrainian, with a little bit of Irish thrown into the mix. I am grateful for all. My Ukrainian Baba took good care of me when I was a small child. Speaking little English, she negotiated her new culture with elegance and grace as a true matriarch. Through the years, I became aware of a deep yearning to know something about my Native grandmothers and other Native ancestors I never knew – especially my Choctaw grandmother, who, out of desperation, abandoned her family when my own mother was only three years old. This was a story told in the shadows of our family – people wanted to move beyond the sad histories. But it was a story that haunted me. I was incomplete.

Thanks to the influence of her Comanche auntie, my mother did encounter and accept many Native values while she was growing up. So, she was able to instill some of these values in me. But she always told me, “Don’t get involved. You’ll only get hurt.” This was her sorrow, not mine.

When I moved to Canada in 1970, I was embraced by Native people who were not of my blood tribe – first the Musqueam and Squamish and Tseil-Waututh, then, through the years, the Stó:lō, the Cree, the Anishinaabe, the Mik’maq, the Nis’ga, the Haida, and many more. Later, I came to know the Māori and the Ainu. My journey has been a joyful one. And through the years, I have developed a deep sense of belonging that eluded my mother. So now the circle is complete. One day, I, too, will arrive on the scent of sweetness through the morning windowpanes to greet my loved ones with the morning light.

I am particularly grateful to my Cree big sister, Dr. Verna Kirkness, who embraced me in that wonderful Indian, informal, adoptive way that is so natural, full of love, and intensely intelligent and humorous. And I am ever so grateful to my Haida mother, Dorothy Bell, who adopted me formally into the Haida nation as her daughter. My Haida name is Nang Jada Sa-êts or, in the original, Nangx’aadasa’iid.

Jo-ann Archibald encouraged me to launch this journey into unbound leadership, and Ethel Gardner worked with me in the earliest stages of the project, bringing several contributors along with her. She also helped me in the early stages of editing. I raise my hands in gratitude and respect to you both.

### **Tina Ngaroimata Fraser**

“Ko Maungapōhatu me Hikurangi ngā Maunga” (my ancestral mountains), “Ko Ōhinemataroa me Rangataiki ngā Awa” (my ancestral rivers), “Ko Papakainga me Waiohau ngā Marae” (my place of gathering), “Ko Kourakino me Tama-ki-Hikurangi ngā Whare Tipuna” (my sacred houses), “Ko Ngāti Koura, Ngāti Haka me Patuheuheu ngā Hapū” (my subtribes), “Ko Tūhoe te Iwi” (my main tribe), “Ko Mataatua te Waka” (my ancestral canoe), the canoe that brought my people Tūhoe, the Māori, from Hawaiki to Aōtearoa (the land of the long white cloud) New Zealand. It is respectful for Māori people to identify themselves through a *pepeha* (genealogy). The *pepeha* connects the individual geographically and genealogically to his or her history and kinship ties. These are my ancestors, and I share my lived experience of growing up Tūhoe and learning to respect all things, people, and places, both in Aōtearoa and North America.

I remain humble and particularly grateful for the *aroha* (love) and the *manakitanga* (care) of the Dakelh nation, which comprises twenty bands, communities, and tribal councils in northern British Columbia, Canada. Thank you for allowing me to journey alongside the struggles of colonization, to be a part of decolonization for thirty-seven years. Most notably, I thank those Dakelh Elders who have since passed. I am reminded of the many hours I spent sharing and listening to stories in the hospital, the clinic, and in your homes and communities. Now, I know why. I am teaching your descendants in First Nations studies, Indigenous women's studies, health science, nursing, and education ... Some of your descendants have never had the opportunity to meet you but have heard about the leadership roles each of you played in the community. They have often said to me, "You are so lucky. We never got to meet our granny or great-grandparents. Even though we don't know them, we miss them all."

Since my arrival in Canada in 1974, much of my time has been spent in northern BC, living among the people, the mountains, the forests, and the animals. I loved watching moose, bears, and grouse outside of our log home in the winter and birds flying across the calm waters of Stuart Lake in the spring. Although I am a visitor residing on the traditional lands of the Dakelh nation, the Dakelh and I share common threads of interconnectedness: the rhythm of the land surrounded by beautiful mountains and a variety of native trees; the opportunity to look beyond the horizon for possibilities; the ability to envisage historical events through symbolic carvings; animals who graciously share their hides so we can survive or listen to the beat of the drum in order to remain connected spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally; and lakes, rivers, and the ocean, which help us to maintain our existence. I can see the images of our past, present, and future leaders carved in the Rocky Mountains, the glacier representing our ancestors' tears. But most of all, I can hear the evocative lyrical call of ... All Our Relations.

THE IMPETUS FOR THIS book was a panel presentation at the International Leadership Association Conference, held in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 2008. The session was titled "Teaching and Learning: Indigenous Perspectives on Surviving and Thriving." Five of the original six members – Gail Cheney, Tina Ngaroimata Fraser, Ethel Gardner, Raquel Gutierrez, and Michelle Jacob – wrote chapters for this volume. The project grew over time to include many others.

We particularly want to extend our thanks to the Native women who contributed to this volume. They all write in an unbound way without taking up dominating theoretical positions. They write about what it takes and whom it takes to build strong communities – women, men, children, grandchildren, Elders, and ancestors.

This collection of case studies and stories is a testimonial to the power of Indigenous women and others to build strong communities. And it is a testimony to the strength of our spirits as Indigenous peoples – to not only survive but also to thrive, sometimes against all odds. The source of our strength arrives in quiet moments at the dawn of a new day for all peoples.

*We would also like to acknowledge the financial support for this project from the University of Northern British Columbia and Antioch University.*

# Living Indigenous Leadership



# 1

## *Liberating Leadership Theory*

*Carolyn Kenny*

IN MY WORK WITHIN Native communities, I have had opportunities to interact with leaders from many Indigenous nations. I have seen leadership from behind the scenes, upfront, and everywhere in between. These leadership situations require character, tenacity, compassion, intelligence, courage, and imagination.

Over hundreds of years, the practice of leadership in Native communities has taken on different forms based on changing historical tides – autonomy, imperialism, colonization, resistance, and renaissance. As Native people, we live on shifting sands. For thousands of years prior to colonization, leadership in Indigenous communities was based on the character of the land and the needs of the people in their traditional territories. Today, Native nations strive for solidarity and the right to govern themselves once again. This solidarity, the state of being in which we govern our own lives in our own chosen places, is becoming a reality. Aboriginal women are at the forefront of change – politically, academically, educationally, and in every other way (see Ah Nee-Benham and Cooper 1998; Smith 1999; Voyageur 2008; see also Battiste 2000).

Aboriginal knowledge often finds its source in the challenges of complexity. The implementation of complex change is no small task. This book contributes to conversations about leadership by highlighting the situations and practices of Native peoples in Canada, the United States, and New Zealand. The stories contained in these pages reveal some of the faces of leadership in Native communities. Each chapter tells a story of leadership through collaboration and community action. The telling is woven into a tapestry of scholarship appropriate to an Indigenous style and point of view. Stories are a creative act of leadership through which we manifest our solidarity and strengthen our people to take their next steps in encouraging good and healthy lives. “Without addressing context,

our theories of leadership remain incomplete, making it more difficult to offer practical guidelines to address the leadership demands of changing organizations in contemporary society” (Ospina and Foldy 2009, 876).

The stories of Native leadership presented in this volume are free from dominating theories. They are grounded in experience and represent specific contexts, particular tribes, diverse lands, inherent values and beliefs, a variety of protocols, a plethora of languages, and a tremendous variety of circumstances. Theorizing in this context is tough. We do not offer a general Indigenous theory of leadership. However, we do offer concepts that can be adapted to particular contexts (see Fitzgerald 2006).

I do not critique Native and non-Native leadership theories. Nor do I focus on the arguments contained in leadership theories and concepts.<sup>1</sup> Rather, I propose, along with all contributors in this volume, ideas that spring from experiences on the ground. On the one hand, these ideas are written in a declarative style that represents story. On the other hand, these stories are connotative rather than denotative in order to free the reader to interpret our stories and apply the concepts to his or her own context. I hope that you will recognize some of the concepts presented in this chapter and throughout the volume, that they will resonate with your spirit, heart, and soul, and that you will find a place to implement them in your own community. The stories gathered here reflect the innate strengths of the individuals who wrote them and the communities that they represent. The story begins ...

### **Let the Children Lead: Land, Ancestors, Elders, Story**

THANK YOU, EARTH

Thank you, Earth, for being here.  
Thank you for your ruby sky.  
Thank you for the rain  
That hammers down on me  
And ripens everything  
Around me.

Thank you for your core  
That burns like the sun.  
Thank you for the pounce  
Of nature all around me.

I will never regret  
The keen blessing that dwells  
All around us and sneaks  
Upon me like tears  
And a heart beat.

Without you,  
We would never be here.

– Isabella Venable, Grade 4

I begin my theorizing with the words of a child (see Cohen 2001). Imagine my gratitude when I heard my ten-year-old granddaughter reciting her poem titled “Thank You, Earth” at the Santa Barbara Art Museum. Isabella’s poem embodies important concepts. In the Indigenous world, there is a principle called the seven generations. It instructs us to reflect on our actions and to be aware of the consequences of these actions seven generations hence. As a grandmother, hearing Isabella’s words, I felt confident that all was well in the world.

A sense of place brings coherence to Aboriginal people and suggests an aesthetic engagement with the land – an intimate spiritual commitment to relationships with all living things (Kenny 1998). As we create more virtual spaces, this intimate relationship with the land becomes even more important because we have to work harder to accomplish it.

To maintain this sense of coherence, we can accept the earth as our first embodied concept of leadership. We follow Earth. We respond to the guidance of the processes expressed in our home place. Many say we listen and respond to our Mother. Everything begins here. We mirror the patterns, textures, colours, sounds, and processes of the earth as embodied beings. As Isabella wrote: “Without you, we would never be here.” This is an idea, a feeling, and a concept to embed in our leadership theories and practices.

We then look to our ancestors as leaders (Alfred 1999). Ancestors often guide us with deep respect for what they themselves have left behind. They communicate with us through dreams, through the teachings that have come down through the generations, through spirit. Our constant guides in our life journeys of spiritual discovery, our sense of wonder with the animation of the world, often arrive through the presence of our ancestors and Elders, who carry the knowledge that we need for continuity

and integration. Traditional knowledge weaves its way into the contemporary context for our present and future endeavours (see Schaefer 2006; Sterling 1992).

Our Elders often bring these teachings to us through stories. Stories provide many of the guiding lights to show us our way on Earth – to lead truly good lives (Archibald 2008). These stories are embodied in oral traditions, in arts, in traditional practices of all kinds. Stories, especially in the oral tradition, provide powerful bridges that connect our histories, our legends, our senses, our practices, our values, and, fundamentally, our sustainability as peoples. The power of narrative knowing is not confined to the Native world (see Polkinghorne 1988; see also Gabriel 2004). Stories presented in the oral tradition provide an opportunity for immediacy – a direct and immediate relationship with listeners. The storyteller can make immediate adjustments in the elements of the story based on relational needs and contexts.

The road to leadership is paved with land, ancestors, Elders, and story – concepts that are rarely mentioned in the mainstream leadership literature. They are embodied concepts unique to Native leadership.

### **Walking between the Worlds**

Contemporary leadership demands that Aboriginal leaders make bridges between many worlds. The dilemmas involved in this bridge-building are often referred to as “living between two worlds.” There is plenty of leadership work to do in order to walk between Indian country and the mainstream societies in which we find ourselves today. Each context is different. In addition to walking between two worlds, we now must walk among many worlds. The global context and virtual contexts offer even more complexities. Many stories in this volume describe these dilemmas and reflect the specific circumstances, thoughts, and feelings of Aboriginal people who experience dualities that are incompatible in terms of values, beliefs, lifestyle choices, governance systems, child-rearing practices, educational pedagogies, and much more. Aboriginal activists and cultural workers in education, health, government, and a host of other contexts often find themselves caught between what they often call Western values and Indigenous values. In these dialogues and debates, one can observe that colonization still exists in the layers just beneath the surface of things.

One must resist the romance and seduction of a kind of fool’s gold in which only surface issues are discussed and resolved. Well-intended

beginnings cannot overcome the ongoing lack of mutuality and shared responsibility between the worlds. Examples are rampant in policies and procedures. Take, for instance, the push and pull between solidarity on the one hand and fiduciary responsibilities on the other. Aboriginal people strive for ethical transitions into self-governance while governmental agencies continue to dominate negotiations (see Kenny 2002).

### **Networks of Strength: Themes from the Indigenous Leadership Literature**

Martha McLeod (2002, 11), quoting Barbra Wakshul's "Winds of Change," lists the ways in which Indian leadership differs from mainstream leadership: "(a) Indian leaders need to know both their own community (values and history) as well as the Euro-American community because they must function in both societies; (b) Indian leaders need to be holistic because Indian communities are small. Indians value interconnectedness, and Indians work on a wide variety of issues; (c) Indian leaders belong to communal societies that must accommodate both tribal values and Euro-American systems in which Indians and non-Indians coexist."

Most Aboriginal people are familiar with the phrase *the moccasin telegraph*. This concept refers to a tightly knit communications system and a communal attitude in which word travels fast through Indian country, through networks of family, friends, co-workers, Elders, tribal leaders, and others in the community or communities. Within these networks of affiliation, Native leaders often function with powerful influence and persuasion. In fact, Linda Sue Warner and Keith Grint claim that persuasion is more important than position for Indigenous leaders. Positions change based on changing circumstances (Warner and Grint 2006), but influence is garnered by gaining respect over time. Shifts in position and influence create a fluid state in many communities. Influential leaders are not always the ones in visible positions of authority. Miles Bryant (1998) agrees with Warner and Grint's impressions of Native leadership but adds the concept of context or situational leadership, a theme we emphasize here and elsewhere in the volume.

Jacqueline Ottman (2005) mentions spiritual leadership through the presence and guidance of family and Elders. This style of leadership is also implied in a great deal of literature that does not emphasize leadership in an explicit way (Alfred 1999). Spiritual leadership through family, Elders, and networks of connection is a recurring theme in any aspect of Native life.

Nonhierarchical leadership is another important theme in Indian country. In the literature, this theme is succinctly characterized by scholars such as Martha McLeod and Warner and Grint (McLeod 2002; Warner and Grint 2006). Canada's Indian Act stands as an excellent example of the discontinuities between traditional Native and Western-based governance systems. Before legislators embedded the Indian Act into Canadian law, First Nations did not, as a rule, function as elected democracies. They had sophisticated systems of governance commonly based on inherited succession, consensus, and accountability to a council of Elders. In many tribes, women were considered to be the final word in moral authority (see Kenny 2006). Men often held formal positions of power while the women created a strong circle of accountability around the more visible male leaders. The women were reluctant to be identified as formal leaders. The forced creation of hierarchies by the Canadian state destroyed traditional tribal governance systems, usually without positive outcomes. The governmental and Christian attitudes that led to the creation of residential schools for Native people around the world also reflected hierarchies of privilege that dehumanized Native youth while systematically decimating their attachment to their cultural contexts.

The majority of Indigenous scholarship emphasizes the spiritual principle of the interconnectedness of all things. This principle is important in most Indigenous societies and contained in Indigenous religious and spiritual belief systems. "All things are related" expresses this principle in many prayers and ceremonies. Native peoples are reminded of the significance of the principle of interconnectivity throughout their lifelong learning, including in contexts of higher education. McLeod makes this point in reference to leadership in Native higher education (McLeod 2002), and Ottman (2005) describes the importance of interconnectivity in a contemporary context.

Joyce Grahn and colleagues and McLeod describe the burden of Native leadership (Grahn et al. 2001; McLeod 2002). Often, communities choose leaders because of their integrity, their accomplishments, and their specific attributes and skills. These leaders serve because of their commitment to the community, not because of any desire to have position or power. There is a kind of modesty in this aspect of leadership. Bryant (1998) notes that the burden of Native leadership often results in decentralizing the authority of the group. In this sense, immanent or inherent value is a primary

attribute of leaders who serve. Through networks of affiliation, leaders are chosen to play a role for a time. They are chosen through influence and persuasion.

Sometimes, charismatic tendencies are revealed through the power and beauty of oration. Charismatic leaders inspire people to act collectively when change is needed. Sometimes, being the best leader means stepping down, but it often means stepping up into a role that one may not be so happy to play for a time. Indigenous leadership is aesthetic in nature because it has its source in coherence. With the flow and flux of changing circumstances, Native leaders must constantly monitor the pulse of the interconnectedness of all things and gauge how these connections challenge our communities.

Miriam Jorgenson and Rachel Starks characterize Native leadership as an aesthetic engagement – one that brings us to the beauty of our lives – on the land, with each other, and in relationship to all living things. “Art and the relationships embedded in its creation provide the power to restore and transform people and communities” (Jorgenson and Starks 2008, 16). Art expressions are often how we maintain not only a sense of coherence but also our resilience and, ultimately, confidence and strength. Art expressions such as drumming, singing, dancing, carving, and painting are another way to communicate the principle of interconnectivity.

Last, but not least, is the ever-constant power of story (Archibald 2008). Narrative is a theme throughout Indigenous scholarship. All cultures are sustained through stories that integrate past, present, and future (see Gabriel 2004; Polkinghorne 1988). Stories are bridges that connect our histories, our legends, our senses, our practices, our values and, in essence, our sustainability as people.

Indigenous leadership literature is a slowly emerging field of study, yet there are many scholarly texts written by Indigenous scholars that contain implications for leadership (Alfred 1999). The ones discussed here outline the explicit territory of a type of Indigenous leadership that is fluid and liberating, a type of leadership that may overcome the disparities between the many worlds. At its core, Indigenous leadership is relational. In healthy tribal societies, individuals acted on behalf of others in the community. Their leadership was the glue that helped to keep the nation together.

### Collaboration and Complexity: Themes from the Non-Indigenous Leadership Literature

When I began my job, in 2003, as a professor in the PhD in Leadership and Change program at Antioch University, I decided to reflect on my own memories and awareness of the concept of leadership. As a child, I was a member of a paramilitary family. Lockheed Aircraft Corporation was our “community.” My mother, father, brother, and myself together clocked one hundred hours of service at Lockheed, working in different company departments. My knowledge of leadership began there. Our branch of Lockheed Aircraft Corporation was next door to Dobbins Air Force base in Marietta, Georgia, and, as a child, I heard the term *leadership* a lot in my parents’ after-work conversations. Later, as a college graduate, I worked for the *Marietta Daily Journal*. Many of the stories in our newspaper mentioned the term *leadership* in reference to military personnel in our region. So, my earliest images of leadership were of warriors in uniforms who risked their lives to keep us safe.

As a professor in the Leadership and Change program, I observe Native students attempting to weave their way through the growing literature on leadership, attempting to locate concepts that will help them in their own leadership practices in Indigenous communities. Initially, one or two categories described in the massive *Encyclopedia of Leadership* (Goethals, Sorenson, and MacGregor Burns 2004) catch their eye. But after a more thorough exploration of numerous theories, most of which are not grounded in empirical data, the spark of interest fades. Why? My sense is that even though many of these theories offer useful information, the literature as a whole rarely fits with our experience as Aboriginal people.

The scholarly tradition in leadership studies is planted firmly in business and management. Perhaps this is why, in the end, these studies seem lacking. A quick perusal of types of leadership – adaptive, servant, transactional, transformative, reconstructive, tyrannical, charismatic, autocratic, visionary, spiritual, invisible, socioeconomic, democratic, implicit, authentic, complex, and so on – does suggest that the literature has some promise. The most recent entry in the encyclopedia is “narrative.” Although the leadership scholarship developed over the last thirty years in the context of business and management, earlier scholars did attempt to have a broader approach. Most notably, Max Weber, the prolific interdisciplinary scholar, studied charismatic leadership (see Gerth and Mills 1946). More recent studies of leadership also contain some promising analyses

that go beyond Great Man theories, which are based on highly individualistic notions of leadership; trait theories, which are also influenced by individualism; or theories embedded with semiotic historical implications such as servant leadership (Eicher-Catt 2005).

Unlike the canon in leadership studies, written primarily by men, women have formulated theoretical ideas of their own. As early as 1918, Mary Parker Follett advocated a type of relational leadership, and before the dawn of formal leadership studies, women wrote about scholarly themes that directly related to leadership. However, as is often the case, these women's works were marginalized. Follett (1868-1933), a social worker turned management theorist, developed the idea of lateral processes within hierarchical organizations, the importance of informal processes within organizations, and many other important concepts that led to theories of collaborative and relational leadership in the context of organizations of all types.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Joyce Fletcher, whose book *Disappearing Acts: Gender, Power, and Relational Practice at Work* (1999) offers empirical evidence about female engineers, has revealed the importance of emotional intelligence and relational behaviour (relational leadership) within organizational cultures. Her work emphasizes the important role of collaborative and shared leadership in organizations for the present and future generations.

Hans Hansen, Arja Ropo, and Erika Sauer (2007) provide a scathing critique of current leadership theory. They claim that leadership research in general waters down the rich phenomenon of leadership partly because of its lack of empirical findings and partly because of its complete denial of the body and the senses. They offer the concept of aesthetic leadership, which is oriented towards the senses and coherence.<sup>3</sup> Amanda Sinclair's book *Leadership for the Disillusioned: Moving beyond Myths and Heroes to Leading that Liberates* invites us to expand our thinking: "Leadership can liberate us from confining or oppressive conditions – imposed by structures, others and ourselves. Rather than being used as a means to compel compliance and conformity, to dominate or prescribe, leadership can invite us to imagine, initiate, and contest" (Sinclair 2007, xix).

In *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (2006), Margaret Wheatley applies New Science complexity theory to leadership and shows us how to reflect the natural world in our leadership practice. In addition to Fletcher's invitation to re-imagine and Wheatley's reminder of our connection to the natural world, Sumru Erkut suggests

in her study *Inside Women's Power: Learning from Leaders* (2001) that we need entirely new language to discuss leadership. After interviewing sixty women from across the professional spectrum, she reports that her participants preferred using mothering metaphors to describe their type of leadership and mothering and sibling models in their leadership training. These women resisted using the masculine language commonly used in leadership studies (Erkut and Winds of Change Foundation 2001). Resistance to masculine and militaristic language such as *indefensible*, *argument*, *target*, *shot down*, and *attacked* as figures of speech is discussed by Gerri Perreault in "Rethinking Leadership: Leadership as Friendship" (Perreault 2005).

Finally, Barbara Kellerman, who has written extensively on women and leadership, suggests in her latest book, *The End of Leadership* (2012), that the leadership industry in the twenty-first century should investigate how to change patterns of dominance and deference. She also suggests that there are no simple solutions and emphasizes the complexities of cultures and contexts.

### **Themes of *Living Indigenous Leadership***

The leadership stories in this volume explore a rich tapestry of themes and serve as examples of exactly how to build strong Aboriginal communities. All of the contributors are Aboriginal women, and many of their stories are about women. However, some of their stories are about men.

A brief word about Aboriginal feminism is appropriate. Aboriginal women, as a whole, take diverse positions regarding feminist ideologies and theories. In this collection, however, not one contributor mentions feminist theories. This silence is interesting, given that the contributors are all women. In the 1970s, Indigenous women who were scholars in the academy began to address the issues of feminism and use feminist analyses in their research. They gathered empirical data about Aboriginal positions on feminism, and many authors of these early articles and books regarded the concept of colonization as the primary mode of critique and analysis. They did not want feminist ideas to water down social action to mediate the negative effects of colonization (see Oulette 2007).

Aboriginal women resisted feminist ideology for a host of other reasons. In a dialogue between Kim Anderson and Bonita Lawrence, Lawrence states: "And when it comes to empowerment, they [feminists] don't often support poor men. Feminism still sees even poor men as the enemy – a competitor for power. But where does that leave our men?" (Anderson

2011, 277). Native women do not want to be bound by dominant theories that limit their capacity to function well in the community in their own ways and informed by their own values. The conversation between Anderson and Lawrence reflects a desire to retain traditional values and resist ideologies that encourage inauthentic adaptation to contemporary theoretical opportunities. Aboriginal women often perceive Western feminism as a phenomenon created by white women who are intellectuals in the academy and who see the world through an individualistic lens, as opposed to a community-based lens. Indigenous women struggle to find their own places within dialogues on feminist theories.

In 2007, Joyce Green published *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. The book, the result of the “Aboriginal Feminism Symposium” at the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy, concluded that it was time for Aboriginal women to make feminist theories their own. Many of the critiques contained in the book reflected ongoing concerns about feminism, as a grand narrative that would compromise the voices of Aboriginal women. Yet participants agreed that there were many positive aspects of feminist thinking (Green 2007). Bonita Lawrence and Kim Anderson had offered this conclusion two years earlier: “Ultimately, we have found the arguments by Aboriginal women, which either attach or support feminism, to be less useful than the importance of Native women finding their own strengths from within their own heritage. Furthermore, like postcolonial theory, feminism in general may have both positive and negative aspects for Native women to work through, accept or discard” (Lawrence and Anderson 2005, 5).

I am, however, haunted by the words of Laura Tohe, who wrote in the philosophically oriented *Wicaso Sa Review*: “Within the Four Sacred Mountains of the Diné, lay the red canyon walls of Canyon de Chelly, carved by the strength of the wind and water, it is the same strength we see carved into the lives of the Diné women. There was no need for feminism because of our matrilineal culture. And it continues. For Diné women, there is no word for feminism” (Tohe 2000, 110). As Tohe implies, we can imagine that Native societies with strong traditions never had a need for something called “feminism.”

### **Embodied Concepts**

The themes in *Living Indigenous Leadership* crisscross with themes explored in the emerging literature on Indigenous leadership. The contributions include explicit and implicit references to the interconnection of all

things, the power of influence, the burden of leadership, the role of persuasion, Native perspectives on position, the fluidity of situational leadership, examples of nonhierarchical community-based initiatives, the persistence of immanent value, the continuity of narrative and story, the efficacy of the arts, and spiritual principles. Some of the chapters' themes also overlap with those of the non-Indigenous leadership literature. This volume's uniqueness, however, lies in its introduction of foundational themes or concepts that serve to ground Aboriginal communities, themes that are rarely mentioned in mainstream studies of leadership. These concepts are embodied – they are premised on the idea that the parts of our being cannot be separated. We are whole. Our mental concepts are one with our bodies, hearts, spirits, and souls. Land, ancestors, Elders, stories, women, grandmothers, parents, language, education, community, performing arts, knowledge, relationships, friends, culture, collaboration, healing, and resilience – these are the concepts that unite our worlds. The notion of embodied concepts animates our leadership theories with a richness that keeps our worlds vital, integrated, and whole.

I hope that you will be inspired by our stories and will be tempted to interpret our embodied concepts and themes within the context of your own community.

### Notes

- 1 Deborah Tannen (1999) objects to what she calls an argument culture in the United States. We often hear the language of this culture in the academy. I encourage my students to develop sustained arguments in their major papers and theses, but it never feels right. So, I try to use the concept of sustained thinking or logic instead.
- 2 See Pauline Graham (1995) for a thorough study of the life and works of Mary Parker Follett.
- 3 Within the philosophical discourse on aesthetics, we learn that sensory data cannot be adequately represented by nonpoetic words on a flat page. For example, music offers knowledge that words cannot express (Elliott 1991).

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ISBN 0-7748-2348-7 (PDF); ISBN 0-7748-2349-4 (EPUB.)

Cataloguing-in-publication data for this book is available from Library and Archives Canada.

**Canada**

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

UBC Press  
The University of British Columbia  
2029 West Mall  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2  
[www.ubcpress.ca](http://www.ubcpress.ca)