

issue. Just as the Nipissing elder reminded us, the goal of radical resurgent education and mobilization cannot be the proletarianization of our people. This is not the new buffalo. The massive shift of Indigenous peoples into the urban wage economy and the middle class cannot be the solution to dispossession, because this consolidates dispossession. We cannot build nations without people, and we cannot build Indigenous nations without people who house and practice Indigenous thought and process, and we also cannot build sustainable Indigenous nations while replicating gender violence. In the next three chapters, I make the case for the dismantling of heteropatriarchy as a core project of the Radical Resurgence Project.

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## SIX

### ENDLESSLY CREATING OUR INDIGENOUS SELVES

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FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, when I talk about gender in Indigenous postsecondary classrooms, primarily classes on self-determination, resurgence, and governance, I lead the students through a simple exercise to begin. As a group, I ask them to list all the stereotypes they have been the target of or have heard about Indigenous women. There is a moment of pause after I outline the exercise, and I always make sure I look into the eyes of Indigenous women, because I know they are wondering if this is a safe thing for them to participate in, and they are wondering why I'm asking them to go to such a horribly painful place inside themselves. Often, I will start by writing the word *shut* on the flip chart or chalkboard and explain that for as long as I remember, going way back into my history as a girl of five or six, people have associated me and my body with this word. I explain that this term is used by colonialism to regulate and control my body and sexual behavior, and I explain that I have sovereignty over my body, my sexuality, and my relationships.<sup>1</sup> I explain that many women and 2SQ people have reclaimed this

word as a mechanism for enacting their own self-determination, values, and ethics over their bodies. There are always nods, and eyes drop to the ground. The class adds to the list: dirty, squaw, bad mothers, lazy, promiscuous, irresponsible, addicts, criminals, prostitutes, easy, bad with money, bad wives, dumb, stupid, hysterical, angry, wild in bed, useless, drunks, worthless, without feeling, violent, weak, partiers, alcoholics. After the first three or four stereotypes are on the list, they come faster, and the energy starts to shift from shame and hurt to an expulsion of those same things. Heads are held up high, as we name and then cast off and cast out the internalized racism and patriarchy of the colonizer.

Then I ask the group to list all of their truths about Indigenous women: intelligent, strong, brave, courageous, sexy, committed, hard-working, good mothers, partners, wives, loving, caring, honest, brilliant, spectacular, empathetic, compassionate, beautiful, smart, kind, gentle, good lovers, organized. We do the same for Indigenous men and for the queer community. Groups come up with between thirty to fifty gendered stereotypes specific to each gender and gender/sexual orientation. They come up with beautiful lists of truths, and in essence all three lists are the same. In one class, at the land-based Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, the women of the group came up with the list of racist stereotypes for Indigenous women.<sup>2</sup> As the instructor, I often have to start the process because it is too painful for young Indigenous women to even speak. With this group, when it came time to list the truths, they were silent, and then something really profound and transformative happened. The Dene men in the group made a beautiful list that left nearly everyone in the room in tears (smart, intelligent, beautiful, sexy, good mothers, good partners, strong, connected, spiritual, good hunters, good fishers, good providers, excellent sisters, aunties, and grandmothers, powerful). When we got to the part of the exercise where we listed the positive things about men, the women did the same, and then the group came together and generated a similar list for 2SQ people.

During our discussion of 2SQ people, we talk about sex,

gender, sexual orientation, and relationship orientation. We talk about terminology and pronouns. We talk about transphobia and how all bodies are real bodies. We talk about how groups with the highest rates of suicide in our communities are 2SQ people and trans youth. We talk about how learning on the land can be a safe space, or it can be a nightmare for trans youth.

This particular time I did the exercise was special. It was moving for everyone involved. As the men listed off positive attribute after positive attribute, the women, myself included, were emotional because we have been told over and over again, through pop culture, the mainstream media, our experiences with the church and Indian Affairs, by teachers and parents that we are all of the things on the negative list. This was perhaps the first time in our lives we had been told directly that we are not any of those things, and to have it come from our Dene male colleagues was extremely meaningful. It felt like they had our backs.

This is one of the most powerful learning experiences that I've had in a classroom in my teaching career. The exercise is simple enough in itself. The act of naming stereotypes is a commanding space because it brings my attention to the very personalized violence of colonialism on my internal thoughts and beliefs about myself. When I write the word *slut* on the chart, I am thinking and feeling every time that word has been used to push me down, control me, and limit my potential. When I write *dumb* on the chart, I can't help but to reflect on how that internalized belief is so implanted in me by settler colonialism that I have to remind myself every time I speak or sit down to write or walk into the classroom that I'm not actually dumb. Each time I participate in this exercise, it reveals to me the degree to which I have unconsciously internalized these lies, and that we as communities of people have unconsciously internalized these lies, and it provides a chance to speak back.

The next layer is a collective realization that we all to varying degrees carry around these unconscious colonial beliefs about ourselves, despite the fact that some of us have obtained measures of success in Indigenous worlds, settler colonial society,

or both. This begins to shift the power dynamics between the students and me and how the class sees me as an Indigenous women instructor. I am no longer “better” than them because I have a PhD or because of these false successes. I have not been removed from the violences of settler colonial life. I carry the same damage as they do, and I am not ashamed of that damage, because the shame does not rest within Indigenous peoples but with settler colonial Canada.

As the group moves through the exercise, the energy of the class moves from shame and humiliation, to celebration and joy, to happiness. We talk about how *good it feels* to recognize when our own people recognize our positive attributes and see us through Dene or Nishnaabeg eyes rather than through the eyes of settler colonialism. We talk about how good that feels in ourselves, and we pause and feel it. We link our personal feelings and experiences with the other subjects of the course—the Indian Act, residential schools, the public education system, self-government policy, the criminalization of Indigeneity, environmental destruction, gender violence—and students begin to realize that the negative beliefs they carry within themselves were planted in them and the generations that came before them for a very specific reason: dispossession of their lands. We talk about how shame prevents us from connecting to our loved ones, learning our languages, and being on the land. We are honest about the stereotypes of other genders and sexual orientations that we carry and amplify in our own lives.

People bring up stories of grandmothers chopping wood, hunting, trapping, and fishing, and of grandfathers cooking, sewing, and doing childcare. We talk about binaries and fluidity around gender and how in Indigenous contexts it is often important that we all have a baseline of skill and knowledge about how to live. Oftentimes someone will bring up a relative who didn’t fit so easily into the colonial gender binary, and we talk about how the community, the church, and the state responded and responds to this. We talk about how we gender the land in English and if this is the same in their languages.

We talk about Indigenous men and how all genders have

experienced and do experience gender violence, although it affects individuals in asymmetric ways because of the hierarchy it instills. We talk about how Indigenous peoples are in a difficult position: simultaneously being targeted by gender violence and therefore carrying trauma, benefiting to varying degrees from hierarchy, and oftentimes knowingly or unknowingly perpetuating gender discrimination, violence, and anti-queerness. We talk about how difficult it can be to hear that an action or a phrase is hurting Indigenous women or 2SQ people. We talk more about shame.

Inevitably someone will ask if some of the stereotypes are true, often referring to the epidemic of gender violence in our communities, and if the students themselves don’t bring that up, I do, because I know someone is thinking about that. We talk about the nature of stereotypes. We talk about how we are not the sum of the list of stereotypes. We talk about how stereotypes are not just “backwards thinking” but a system of social control. We talk about consent, accountability, self-determination, responsibility. We acknowledge how all genders, including Indigenous men, have been the target for sexualized and gender violence. We talk about how that is not an excuse for perpetuating it. We account for things. I ask them to pick one of the stereotypes from the negative list. I use my own nation as an example and draw a rough trajectory that cuts through four centuries of heteropatriarchy as a tool of dispossession:

- Nishnaabeg people have self-determination over their bodies and sexuality. Sex is not shameful within Nishnaabewin. All genders and ages hold political power and influence. There is a diversity of genders, sexual orientations, and relationship orientations and respect for body sovereignty.<sup>3</sup>
- Colonizers want land, but Indigenous bodies forming nations are in the way because they have a strong attachment to land and because they replicate Indigeneity. All Indigenous genders as political orders also replicate Indigenous nationhood, but the colonizers are

looking through the eyes of heteropatriarchy, so they see Indigenous women's and girl's bodies as the bodies that reproduce nations, and they see 2SQ bodies as the biggest threat to their assimilation and dispossession project.<sup>4</sup>

- Colonizers notice that women, children, and 2SQ people hold power and influence in Indigenous governance. They notice this is not the same in European nations. Hierarchy is key to their system of control.<sup>5</sup>
- During times of violent conflict, sexual and gender-based violence is widely recognized as a tactic of both war and genocide because it is frequently used as "a military tactic to harm, humiliate and shame" and because violence and war weaken systems of "protection, security and justice."<sup>6</sup> Sexual violence is an effective colonial tool in genocide and dispossession because the damage it causes to families is so overwhelming that it makes it very difficult to have the emotional capital to continue to resist.
- Indigenous nations are attacked physically and symbolically through things like the Indian Act, policy, colonial laws, and fraudulent and unfair treaty negotiations at the same time as they are coping with violence, land loss, loss of an economic base, and disease.
- Indigenous nations lose political power and can no longer hold settlers accountable in their lands. There are fewer Indigenous bodies on Indigenous lands. We are confined to reserves. We are "governed" by the heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism of the Indian Act. Our children are in residential or day schools. We are rewarded with recognition when we assimilate.
- The gender binary is introduced and reinforced through residential schools, the church, and the Indian

Act. 2SQ people are disappeared. Indigenous women are domesticated into the role of Victorian housewives. Native men are domesticated into the wage economy and taught their only power is to ally with white men in the oppression of Indigenous women through church, school, law, and policy.<sup>7</sup>

- Christian beliefs about heterosexual, monogamous, church relationships and sexuality are infused into the community through missions and residential schools and reinforced by Indian agents.<sup>8</sup>
- Propagation of negative stereotypes of Indigenous women, men, and 2SQ people is widespread in popular culture, as evidenced in the first newspaper reporting on Indigenous peoples in Canada.<sup>9</sup>
- Canadian society through the media, books, and oral culture continues to justify the strangulation of Indigenous women's body sovereignty and to justify the violence against Indigenous women, which has led to the epidemic of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls.<sup>10</sup>
- Indigenous women are blamed by the state for causing the violence by making poor lifestyle choices, and Indigenous men are named as the perpetrators of this violence.<sup>11</sup>
- Canadian citizens born into heteropatriarchy and normalized gender and sexualized violence against Indigenous peoples replicate this violence in their personal lives with structural support of the state's legal, education, and political systems.
- Disconnected from land and our knowledge systems, and the targets of four centuries of state violence, we replicate the violence we've experienced in our communities.

- We as a class can list in less than thirty minutes nearly a hundred stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, and many of us hold particular ones inside us that make us feel not good enough.

At first, they are surprised the Nishnaabeg prof from the south with degrees and the privilege credentials gives me still sometimes believes the worst about myself because colonialism has conditioned me to do so. This reframing, though, illuminates the deliberate nature of this on the part of the colonizer to get land, and that when we repeat it and live it, we are helping the colonizers.<sup>12</sup> This critical reframing, drawing on issues already discussed in class, then offers students a new orientation to themselves and their communities, one in which the interrogation of colonialism, the historical context, and the resistance of Indigenous peoples figure prominently. It is the approach Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson takes in her fantastic book *Mohawk Interruptus*: that there are signposts in our nations, communities, and bodies of colonialism's ongoing existence and simultaneous failure. She writes,

Colonialism survives in a settler form. In this form, it fails at what it is supposed to do: eliminate Indigenous people; take all their land; absorb them into a white, property-owning body politic. Kahnawa:ke's *debates over membership* index colonialism's life as well its failure and their own life through their grip on this failure.<sup>13</sup>

This is a subtle and elegant shift in our analysis of Indigenous politics because it provides the proper and truthful context within which our analysis can take place. This approach also nests and confounds polarity: colonialism is violent and evil, and Indigenous peoples agree on that, and we have a range of *responses* to that horrific and ongoing violence that is ultimately rooted in a fog of love, anger, fear, shame, pride, and humiliation. For Simpson, the issue of membership is not about whether we should kick white people off the reserve; the fundamental question her people are grappling with is how do we continue to

exist as *Kanien'kehá:ka* people in the face of settler colonialism elimination?

Simpson emphasizes "debates over membership" because this could be any issue in Indigenous political life. You can replace that phrase with "debates over land protection," "debates over governance," "debates over gender violence" because her intervention is that we need to shift our lens of analysis from one that plays into the limits of Western thought to one that is holy and diversely Indigenous at its core, both in experience and in intellectual thought, but that brings with it the most robust critical analysis of our times.

Following Simpson's intervention on framing, I want to use the pain and anger that heteropatriarchy strikes to reject the replication of settler colonial gender violence within our bodies, communities, and nations. We need all genders to do this, and we all need to think critically about how we replicate this in our communities and in our daily lives. Placing the interrogation of heteropatriarchy at the center of our nation-building movements ensures that our nation building counters the impact the settler colonial political economy has on Indigenous bodies, intimacies, sexualities, and gender. It counters the continual violent attack on bodies, intimacies, sexualities, and gender as a dispossessing force. We have a choice. We can choose to uphold white, heterosexual, masculine control over Indigenous bodies, or we can choose to collectively engage in the dismantling of heteropatriarchy as a nation-building project. Nation building in Indigenous contexts is a collective effort, and in critically undoing the gender hierarchy, what happens to Indigenous women, children, and 2SQ bodies is the measure of our success as nations.

Stereotypes are not attitudes that can be changed by using a different terminology. They are windows into the pervasive logics of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy and how they operate through time and space in Canada on my body and mind as an Indigenous woman. These terms are part of a much more omnipresent and ubiquitous system of control that has stolen not only my land from me but also my body and the way I think

about my body. I am not murdered, and I am not missing, but parts of me have been disappeared, and I remain a target because I was born a Native women, and I live as kwe.

Students at Dechinta have already heard me talk about consent and individual self-determination within the context of Indigenous politics, and so we then talk about creating these alternative systems of accountability. I use the example of the Community Holistic Circle Healing project in Hollow Water First Nation, an Nishnaabeg community on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, in Manitoba. We talk about how this group found that 80 percent of their residents had experience with sexual abuse, and how they used Nishnaabeg processes of accountability to create a community-based alternative to the Canadian criminal justice systems for cases of sexual violence.<sup>14</sup> We talk about how this system requires the admission of guilt on the part of the perpetrator to proceed. There is a truth telling as the first step. The circle of healing involves support for all of the individuals and families involved. It involves the perpetrator witnessing the full impacts of his actions. It involves the larger community witnessing the full impacts of sexualized violence and an accounting for how we contribute to the epidemic levels of violence in our communities. It involves ceremony and Nishnaabeg practices of regeneration. It involves regenerating relationships.

Students often share their frustrations with the criminal justice system and with our communities in terms of how we handle these issues. They often have a wealth of ideas for visioning systems of accountability in their own lives.

Thinking back to the bush classroom at Dechinta and Denendeh, I learned something else important that day. I learned that I *want*, but don't necessarily need, Indigenous men to have my back. I don't want to be continually seeking out the solidarity, the recognition of white women because I want the solidarity of straight cisgendered Indigenous men. I want them to stop exploiting, abusing, and degrading women and children. I want them to stop engaging in systemic, structural and casual sexism and patriarchy. I want them to hold each other accountable when there are no women around, and casual and

not-so-casual sexism in the form of the objectification, ongoing criticism, and other forms of white patriarchy enter their social, personal, and professional lives. I want them to hold each other accountable when casual and not-so-casual homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and all forms of anti-queerness appear. I want them to support and assist and to be critically engaged in, but not lead, the dismantling of heteropatriarchy as the crucial nation-building exercise of our time. I want them to see that they have been targeted by white men working strategically and persistently to make allies out of Indigenous men, with clear rewards for those who come into white masculinity imbued with heteropatriarchy and violence, in order to infiltrate our communities and nations with heteropatriarchy and then to replicate it through the generations, with the purpose of destroying our nations and gaining easy access to our land.

White supremacy, rape culture (although Sarah Hunt recently reminded me that when rape happens to us, it is rarely named as "rape"), and the attack on gender, sexual identity, agency, and consent are very powerful tools of colonialism, settler colonialism, and capitalism primarily because they work very efficiently to remove Indigenous peoples from our territories and to prevent reclamation of those territories through mobilization.

These forces have the intergenerational staying power to destroy generations of families, as they work to prevent us from intimately connecting to each other. They work to prevent mobilization because communities coping with epidemics of gender violence don't have the physical or emotional capital to organize. They destroy the base of our nations and our political systems because they destroy our relationships to the land and to each other by fostering epidemic levels of anxiety, hopelessness, apathy, distrust, and suicide. They work to destroy the fabric of Indigenous nationhoods by attempting to destroy our relationality by making it difficult to form sustainable, strong relationships with each other.

Dismantling heteropatriarchy and generating modes of scholarship, organizing, mobilizing, and living that no longer

replicate it must be a core project of radical resurgence. Centering the voices of children, women, and 2SQ people within the Radical Resurgence Project is a mechanism through which to counter the gendered nature of heteropatriarchy and build systems of consent, accountability, and agency so that all Indigenous political orders are valued, cherished, and celebrated as a crucial part of our communities and nations, and fully engaged in the regeneration of alternative Indigenous worlds. Indigenous freedom means that my sovereignty over my body, mind, spirit, and land is affirmed and respected in all of my relationships.

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## SEVEN

### THE SOVEREIGNTY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' BODIES

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MY MATERNAL FAMILY can trace our ancestry to the original families in the Grape Island Mission and the Bay of Quinte Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. The attempts to assimilate us were the responsibility of Indian agents, the Methodist missionaries, and the education system because settlers wanted our lands. In the four generations of living Nishnaabekwewag in my family, I can so clearly see the devastating impacts of policies and regulation of Nishnaabeg gender, sexuality, and relationships and of the assimilatory nature of domesticity in myself, my mother, and my grandmother. We grew up believing the stereotypes and believing that if we existed outside of the domestic sphere, outside of heteropatriarchal, monogamous Christian marriage, we embodied the dirty, stupid, useless, promiscuous, and irresponsible assumptions built into the word *squaw*. I grew up believing the worst of the stereotypes. It is not something I was able to dig myself out of until the 1990s when my sisters and I began to critically question these assumptions and our experiences in activist communities and in women's studies programs