CHAPTER 15

# Critical Perspectives for Educational Leadership and Policy in Higher Education

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Speaking to the assumed neutrality and the dominance of whiteness in the neoliberal university, Handel Kashope Wright (2019) spoke of the experiences of Black scholars in the academy and noted Stuart Hall's call for critical engagement, stating, "the university is a critical institution or it is nothing". In his work entitled *Positioning Blackness, Necessarily, Awkwardly, in the Canadian Academy*, Wright acknowledges Hall's call for engagements beyond the university, but also argues for the importance of reorienting the work of faculty and administrators within the neoliberal academic communities toward *the political*, "hence to recognize that there is crucial work to be done in making institutions of higher learning more diverse and equitable, in imbricating academic and intellectual work, in doing what we might call academic activism" (para. 5). This is challenging work, when neoliberal policy agendas assume "common sense" logics that permeate the conditions of higher education (Brown, 2015). Wright's concern is for the necessity of including critical anti-racist theorizing into critiques of neoliberalism in the university, particularly in relation to what it means to be a Black scholar in the academy. In this chapter, we acknowledge and align with Wright's critiques, recognizing that the conditions for depoliticizing the university are driven by complex matrixes

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of power rooted in global capitalism, colonialism and white supremacy, and hetero-patriarchy (Andreotti et al., 2015; Grande, 2015). We examine the call for the university as a critical institution to consider the politics by which faculty and administrators engage in the neoliberal institution of higher education, considering the opportunities for refusal and resistance. We begin from the stance that any engagement with the notion of a critical institution must emerge from acknowledging the dimensions of coloniality and its modernistic assumptions in contemporary higher education contexts, as Andreotti et al. (2015) detail as "universal reason and history, teleological, logocentric, dialectical and anthropocentric thinking, and objectification and commodification of nature and the Cartesian self" (p. 23). We discuss what it means to work as faculty and administrators that engage the institution as critical through the enactment of Indigenous refusal and the notion of resistance against common sense administrative logics. Drawing on decolonial and postcolonial theorizing, as well as critical feminist scholarship, we conceptualize the notions of Indigenous refusal and of resistance and draw on our own experiences as academics and scholars doing administrative and leadership work in higher education. In the conclusion, we discuss the contributions of criticality and the urgent need for faculty and administrators to acknowledge that while criticality can be messy and feel disruptive to hegemonic norms, criticality offers generative perspectives that can lead to transforming the education system in meaningful ways.

## Locating Ourselves Within Educational Institutions

We write this chapter as gendered and raced bodies who are committed to naming the locations of power in academic spaces of the white colonial eliteness of higher education halls. We have taken care in our work not to speak as one voice and so we name ourselves as we write to locate the voices with which we speak.

Waban Geesis nintishnikaas. My name is Candace Brunette-Debassige. I am a Mushkego-ininew iskwew originally from Peetabeck (Treaty 9). As an Indigenous woman, I recognize my complex "intersectional Indigeneity" (Clark, 2016), I am a cis-gender Indigenous woman with mixed Cree, French and Métis lineage who has benefited from a certain degree of "white passing" privilege. While I was born and raised in small town northern Ontario, my connection to my Cree identity, culture and community belonging has been dramatically shaped, regulated and governed by ongoing settler colonial systems of power steeped in white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy. Currently, I live and work in London Ontario Canada lands of the Anishnawbek, Haudenosaunee and Lenapewak people. I have been working in Indigenous education at the K-12 and post-secondary levels for nearly twenty years. For five years, I served as the Director of Indigenous student services at my university. After the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in 2015, I was called to take on a Special Advisor to the Provost

Indigenous Initiatives role and later served as the Acting Vice Provost Indigenous Initiatives. Today, I am an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education with keen interests in critical Indigenous policy and leadership studies. As an Indigenous scholar and leader, I draw from my embodied experiences studying and struggling to change the Euro-Westernized academy from within and advance Indigenous educational sovereignty.

And I am Melody Viczko, a cis-gender non-Indigenous woman, a first-generation university graduate from a working-class family. I work and live in the traditional territories of the Anishanaabeg, Haudenosaunee and Lenapewak People in London, Ontario. I am not from this territory, having moved here for work from the territories of Treaty 6, traditional lands of the Cree, Dene, Nakota, Saulteaux and Ojibwe, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. My family's relationship to the land in Treaty 6 territories is bound in our farming history and I recognize the privilege from which I benefit by my family occupying space on these lands. My experiences as an educator, administrator, researcher and scholar are because of both my experiences of privilege and marginalization in education institutions. In my work as a scholar in the area of critical policy studies, I toil as a gendered white woman that reflects on my background as a first-generation scholar with a deep care for the effects of policy on women as they continue to labor for their place in higher education, as Jones and Maguire (2020) assert, "this is where our loyalties sit—this emotional investment in our work is both classed and gendered within academic women from working-class backgrounds" (p. 49).

## Unveiling the University Administration

In this chapter, we situate an urgency for Hall's valuing of criticality, and the assertion of a critical institution within which we call for all university actors, especially administrators complicit in maintaining the university system of power, to acknowledge and interrogate its deeper allegiances to global capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy and nationalism embedded within the neoliberal university. Andreotti et al. (2015) fetter the modern university's life support system to these deeper roots and common sense understandings modernity. Furthermore, they assert that, "efforts to name and disrupt the university's life support system often get dismissed [by administration] as violent, unproductive and uncivil" (p. 26). Leigh Patel (2015) exposes the relationship between settler colonialism and whiteness in higher education in the United States. In her essay on *Desiring Diversity and Backlash*, Patel (2015) reveals how white settler entitlement built on notions of white property becomes threatened and lashes out against Indigenous and Black bodies in diversity work in the United States. At its core, she argues, "education is and represents property, and more specifically in the US, white property" (p. 658). Patel draws on settler colonial and critical race theories to show how the academy's underlying logic "trains people to see each other, the land and knowledge as property, to be in constant insatiable competition

for limited resources" (p. 72). In Canada, settler colonialism operates similarly as an ongoing structure (Wolfe, 2006) and in education as a metaphorizing process (Tuck & Yang, 2012) inextricably tied to the extraction and ownership of Indigenous lands, resources and knowledges. These logics have been imposed on Indigenous People through settler colonial nation state laws and policies reinforced through educational aims that serve to appropriate Indigenous lands and knowledges and erase and eliminate Indigenous People voices in society through education. In this paper, we assert universities as Westernized institutions of knowledge production and dissemination that have long served to advance global imperial colonial networks of European domination, acting as key sites of authority (Grosfoguel, 2016) that uphold the stranglehold of white colonial patriarchal and capitalist interests and systems of power (Grande, 2015; Malott, 2010). Furthermore, relationships among the various stakeholder groups in higher education have been formed and forged through these global imperial colonial networks of Euro-Western domination, creating categorizations and hierarchies that stifle meaningful engagements beyond economic and Euro-centric knowledge production. Higher education around the world has long been used as a tool for maintaining dominant systems of power and excluding marginalized groups and voices. For Indigenous People in Canada, education has acted as a primary tool of assimilation and cultural genocide (TRC, 2015) used to rationalize settler colonial aims and control Indigenous People and lands. We argue therefore that it is dire to not only interrogate the underlying matrices of power that fuel the academy, but also to expose how settler colonial logics often shape common sense understandings of authority and control in administration and policy today.

Not only do universities play a central role in asserting an empire of knowledges entrenched in enduring settler colonial interests and ideologies, universities have entangled pasts connected to the dispossession of Indigenous land (Nash, 2019; Patel, 2015). In a known Canadian university context, institutions continue to be uniquely positioned under settler colonial jurisdiction-specific acts and charters tied to ongoing settler white property rights. Operating under a bicameral governance system, Canadian universities exercise rights to operate as both a public institution and corporation; its policies and administrative hierarchies further these interests by decoupling decision-making where academic decisions are forwarded to the Senate, and corporate fiscal decisions are despatched to the Board of Governors (BOG) (Jones et al., 2001). While academic freedom offers individual faculty members protection to teach, research and share ideas that may be controversial and even challenge authority, the academy continues to be less capable of protecting collective Indigenous rights under its white liberal academic norms. In both Senate and BOG governance contexts, Indigenous People and other marginalized voices continue to be chronically underrepresented under a veil of colonial discourses that espouse "democratic" and "collegial governance" ideals. These academic governance systems are difficult for Indigenous

individuals and collectives to penetrate and continue to exclude these voices in academic decision-making processes, thereby reproducing dominant orders that subject different bodies.

## Connecting Managerialist Logics to Neoliberal Ideologies in Higher Education

Within this academic administrative context, the clutch of power is often practiced through common sense approaches and underlying managerialist ideologies that can be tied to colonial discourses including "civilizing the profession; promoting hierarchies of knowledge; and sustaining interconnections between neoliberal educational policies and global colonialism" (Shahjahan, 2011, p. 182). As Indigenous and other equity and diversity work continues to be institutionalized, we have observed an impetus toward measuring new policies, noting the ways in which "managerialism reflects a particular formation of masculinity that is competitive, ritualistic, unreflexive and false" (Ozga & Walker, 1999, p. 107). Situated within rationalist notions of increasing measurability, quantifiability and predictability, measuring progress is often situated within evidence-based regimes rooted in colonial vestiges of educational policy, research and neoliberal reform (Shahjahan, 2011). Shahjahan (2014) articulates neoliberalism as the continual encroachment of material developments that privilege market principles, privatization and human capital development and logic developments that perpetuate inequitable materialities. In this way, neoliberalism is a form of colonial domination within higher education as it draws upon its institutional rights including ability to hold land property, accumulate associated resources and compete in growing global imperial markets.

Feminist scholar, Jill Blackmore (2020) also notes the progression of the higher education from "state welfarism (a caring state) to state-managed capitalism (individual responsibility for self-care)" (p. 1332), illustrating the effects of neoliberal policies on higher education to privilege the economy, "as if it is distinct from society and human rights" (p. 1332). Importantly she critiques the responses from university institutions to address racial, gender and ethnic disparities through policies that aim at equity because they miss the mark: their aim is to increase production in the capitalist institution, not to shape universities as socially inclusive. As she states, "equity becomes an institutional asset, a brand, rather than a matter of rights and an ethical practice of care" (p. 1332). The field of higher education is dominated by a concern for administrative processes in the midst of neoliberal reform and priorities. Olssen and Peters (2005) identify the radical cultural shift in higher education toward measurements and performance metrics, stating, "The ascendency of neoliberalism and the associated discourses of 'new public management', during the 1980s and 1990s has produced a fundamental shift [whereby]…the traditional professional culture of open intellectual enquiry and debate has been replaced with institutional stress on performativity" (p. 313). Admittedly, the

concern on performances and its metrics makes sense when administrators are overburdened with new managerialism ideals that push higher education institutions toward priorities that stress corporate governance models as though they are self-managing institutions. Governance relations have changed under new managerialism, including league tables to rank research and teaching and creating audit culture technologies for measuring performance (Blackmore et al., 2010; Wright & Øberg, 2017). For example, in 2019, The Times Higher Education developed the Impact Rankings that assess universities against the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in areas such as "peace, justice and strong institutions" (Times Higher Education, 2021). The focus on performance works to shift the governing relations within university institutions toward metrics-based practices aimed at making visible the efficiencies and accountabilities present in global knowledge economy driven institutions, all of which have been inequitable (Blackmore, 2010). As Blackmore et al. (2010) state, "Managerialism, marketisation, privatisation and diversification have changed universities' roles in relation to states, individuals, economies and communities" (p. 6).

Moreover, the continuation of colonial ideologies in educational policy and leadership, reinforce widely assumed paternalistic relationships between settler institutions and Indigenous People and other marginalized groups. Considering this complex ongoing reality, we assert an urgent need for critical and decolonial approaches to understand enact educational policy and leadership that can transform the system. This assertion is borne out of our experiences working and doing research in higher education and aligns with Samier's (2017) critiques of the field of educational administration that is premised on problematic assumptions that limit epistemological perspectives to those dominated by Western ideals of managerialism: "a progressivist view of educational development predicated upon Western models; the reassertion of good administration instead of leadership, which is derived from the neoliberal managerialism movement; assuming stable nation state conditions instead of the political realities of many countries undergoing significant transitions, destabilisations and disintegrations; and universalist assumptions about the configuration of social institutions that politically, culturally and legally reflect Western bias" (p. 269).

## The Nature of Power Relations in Administrative Practice

The need for criticality connects to the fact that the university is an ongoing site of power relations that has been dominated by epistemic whiteness, patriarchal and colonial perspectives. While there are increasing pockets of support for marginalized and Indigenous groups in Canada, power dynamics continue to play out in ongoing structures of power. Moreover, there is a chronic lack of understanding of power relations, and a lack of appreciation even resistance of criticality in administrative theory and practice. In the field of

organizational change and leadership studies, Colleen Capper (2019) identified a critical "epistemological unconsciousness" among scholars (and we argue leaders) who claim to be "equity" or "social justice" minded. In this research, Capper exposes a tendency toward maintaining structural functionalist and interpretivist epistemologies in organizational change and leadership research where hierarchal and individual leader-centric accounts prevail along with normative understandings on the nature of change and knowledge. As a result, social justice and equity leadership research often claim to be addressing the needs of marginalized groups, yet they continue to keep allegiance to maintaining the administrative structures "ontology of hierarchy" (Malott, 2010) and epistemic dominances that condition injustices in the first place.

Similar tendencies of self-proclaimed equity and diversity research work in education have been critiqued by Tuck and Yang (2018) who craft together the complexities of understanding, using and materializing the principle and commitments to social justice in education practice. As Tuck and Yang articulate, "how justice and injustice materializes, matters" (p. 6). Their review of the multiple meanings and realities of social justice as it is infused in education research is insightful in laying out the ways in which social justice thinking separates spaces for education projects that challenge dominant ways of being in education. and they note how they have done similar critiques of , Acknowledging eclectic contributions from fields such as social sciences and law, Tuck and Yang suggest that social justice is a space to mark distinctions between mainstreamed positivist and developmental approaches to thinking about education work and "other" ways, as "a way to signal to ourselves and to one another this epistemological and political difference" (p. 5). We call attention to how Tuck and Yang frame how the notion of social justice can be considered in education work:

> Social justice education— whether or not we continue to use those words to define it— is the crux of the future of our field. Social justice is not the other of the field of education, it is the field. There is no future of the field of education without the contributions of people who are doing their work under the rising sign of social justice. There is no legitimacy to the field of education if it cannot meaningfully attend to social contexts, historical and contemporary structures of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and antiblackness. Social justice is not the catchall; it is the all. (Tuck & Yang, 2018, p. 5)

The notion that social justice *is the field* in education may then be extrapolated to leadership in higher education spaces. Feminist and Indigenous scholars in educational leadership have argued that leadership is about social justice (Blackmore, 2021; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Ottmann, 2009; Shields, 2012; Shultz & Viczko, 2016). Yet leadership in higher education has come to be structured around the neoliberal decisions of "building a corporate university that is able to respond to market principles, economic ideology driven policies and practices, alliance with the big business and industry" (Shultz & Viczko,

2016, p. 1). Theories of social justice that examine the distribution of benefits and burdens in society can inform leadership practice in a way that focuses decision-making on “social justice as the field” in education. Postcolonial, decolonial, and anti-oppression theorists lead the way to explore “how justice must also overcome and reconcile the historical, social and material legacies of colonial practices based on imperialism, patriarchy and racism that continue to exert organizing strength” (p. 2) in higher education institutions. Davies (2005) suggests we may “rethink our vision of life and reconsider ‘the terms of our existence’” (p. 13) in higher education institutions, in order to shift away from techno-rational points of view, arguing that “existential questions” offer the boundaries in which to reconstruct our subjectivity.

Admittedly, the concerns with neoliberal pressures make sense when administrators are overburdened with new managerialism ideals that push higher education institutions toward priorities that stress corporate governance models as though they are self-managing institutions separating social justice from larger systems of power and internal micropolitics (Ryan & Armstrong, 2016). However, the calls among scholars for criticality in university policy and administrative practice continue to be echoed even though they are often refuted by administrators based on their assumption that criticality is at best “lofty idealistic” “impractical” or at worst “uncollegial” and “divisive” thereby reducing these voices to simply a play of “identity politics” (e.g., subtext of this discursive move is to blame the individual versus making the system and its actors accountable to change). In the neoliberal market-driven conditions in which economic and political decision-making are pursed from “social costs” of higher education (p. 3), Giroux (2013) argues the university exists in conditions of depoliticization, “removing social relations from configurations of power” (p. 3), whereby emotional and personal vocabularies are substituted for political ones (Brown, 2006). In the context of the depoliticization that occurs, Giroux argues that resistance to capitalist ideals becomes near impossible, rendering students in university institutions bereft of the conditions for a social imagination that can “translate private troubles into public concerns” (p. 3). Higher education has a long history of oppression “in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, religion and ability” (Shahjahan, 2014, p. 227). Under these conditions, some scholars call for a university that enacts itself as critical institution or it risks dying altogether (Giroux, 2013), while others, from different decolonial perspectives, note the necessary dismantling of systems of power resulting from historical foundations of colonialism, whiteness and patriarchy that continue on in higher education today (Andreotti et al., 2015; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Grande, 2018a, ; Stein, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Regardless of the various debates in the degree of reform and dismantling, scholars continue to stress the need and value for questioning normalized hegemonies embedded in institutional structures and practices and resisting them in order to transform the university to be more inclusive of Indigenous and marginalized people and knowledges. Sharon Stein (2019) challenges universities to interrogate how colonial relations shape underlying theories

of change. She marks three levels of change at play in higher education: minor, major and beyond reform, and advocates for engaging strategically across different theories of change and increasing stamina to hold tensions for divergent perspectives. Nonetheless, in an academic setting that naturalizes administrative "ontology of hierarchy" (Malott, 2010) and authority, critical questioning is all too often received as threats to positional power. Nonetheless, critical scholars have argued for perspectives that challenge normative tendencies in higher education policy and administration and lean into the messiness and epistemological questioning of these underlying administrative logics.

Refusal and resistance are themes that have been taken up in academic scholarship aimed at examining the ways in which faculty and administrators may counter the hegemonic practices of managerialism that perpetuate conditions of colonial institutions of higher education. The perspectives are varied and diffuse. Refusal and resistance have been taken up in higher education scholarship to interrogate the politics of the neoliberal and neocolonial university through multi-modal research (Brown & Strega, 2005; Metcalfe, 2018). Literature has also documented how Indigenous resistance emerges in relation to Western colonial research practices (Bubar & Martinez, 2017; Grande, 2018a, b; Johnston, et al., 2018; Simpson, 2014), in research related to capitalist ideals (Giroux, 2013); in student movements against neoliberal reform that make way for the privatization and corporatization of universities (Amsler, 2011); and in the areas of teaching (and learning) (Gibbs & Lehtonen, 2020).

In her work about the resistance of equity workers who lead diversity policy work in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom, Sara Ahmed (2018) speaks about how racialized members of equity and diversity committees in higher education are seen as "disagreeable" in their difficult work of having to speak about, point to, and name the transgressions carried out in the name of "doing diversity work". Those who are tasked with making complaints and are then deemed problems in institutions for their work. In these conditions, Ahmed illustrates, "the word race might be used because it does more. The word race carries a complaint; race as refusal of the smile of diversity….a complaint seem to amplify what makes you not fit". Sandy Grande (2018a, b) and Eve Tuck (2018) call for "refusing the university" as an Indigenous praxis necessary to advance Indigenous futurity in research releasing Indigenous People from the shackles of colonial and patriarchal strangleholds. In another article, Brent Debassige and Candace Brunette-Debassige (2018) position Indigenizing leadership in universities as "willful" work (Ahmed, 2014)—the will, they draw from Ahmed to argue "has been historically used to define a problem and has acted as a pedagogic tool to characterize someone as not conforming to the dominant European hetero-patriarchal system" (p. 123). They further assert that as Indigenous administrators drawing on Indigenous ways of knowing and being in their leadership, they have observed how Indigenous People often get automatically positioned as a problem because they are

received by the administration, when they object to normative rules, as a threat to the settler colonial status quo.

McGranahan (2016) argues that refusal is not the same as resistance, though they are genealogically linked, referring to Lila Abu-Lughod's (1990) foundational piece in which she theorized "the nature and forms of domination" (McGranahan, 2016, p. 320) involved in refusals. The idea of refusal allows for a complexity that includes political action aimed at structures and systems, including decolonization and self-determination, both at and beyond the level of the state. Also, as McGranahan notes, Sherry Ortner (1995) speaks about the ways in which refusals are enacted on those who resist, as in a "bizarre refusal" to academic research that reveals resistance to political dominance. Those who aim at or speak to resistance to power become silenced in the refusal to acknowledge research that aims at understanding embedded ways of knowing.

Shahjahan (2011, 2014) theorizes resistance as an analytical form in tackling and changing systemic oppression in higher education institutions. Shahjahan (2014) argues that discourses of resistance permeate educational spaces yet remain under-theorized in higher education as they are often taken up as descriptive rather than analytical tools. He proposes, resistance to neoliberal conditions possible in higher education by drawing on David Jeffress' (2008) book *Postcolonial resistance: Culture, liberation and transformation* to examine four modes of resistance: (1) resistance as rewriting and undermining colonial narratives; (2) resistance as subversion; (3) resistance as opposition; and (4) resistance as transformation. Shahjahan acknowledges limitations of how resistance has been conceived and suggests the fourth mode of transformational resistance remains marginal, yet necessary, in how scholars working within neoliberal higher education have taken up critiques. He argues that transformational resistance may lead to "new ways of being, knowing and doing within increasingly neoliberalized HE contexts" (p. 230) that focus on the rights and responsibilities academic faculty and administration possess to make shifts in neoliberal institutional cultures of performativity. The notion of resistance offered by Shahjahan is not wholly new, but the linking of resistance to decolonial aims may center epistemological challenges to the academy, as a way of resisting the colonization of our imagination and thinking in higher education systems (Abdi, 2016). As McNish and Spooner (2018) note, universities have not fully given up their potential to disrupt hierarchy and inequity, whereby alternate ways of knowing and being exist.

While addressing different institutional realities and conditions, each of these scholars shares an appeal against an assumed rationality in academic administration and decision-making underpinned by a concern for the complex hegemonies prevalent in the structural and cultural aspects of academic institutions. Scholars call for an embracing of a criticality in administrative policy and leadership theory and practice. We turn next to sites of possibility we see in our own professional experiences as scholar, researcher and administrator.

## Indigenous Refusal

In my (Candace's) doctoral research focusing on Indigenous women administrators' experiences enacting Indigenous policies in Canadian universities (Brunette-Debassige, 2021), Indigenous women leaders interviewed underscored their need to enact a criticality through "Indigenous refusals" (Grande, 2018a, b; Simpson, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2014b). Indigenous refusals therefore emerged as a necessary leadership and policy enactment disposition that helped Indigenous People collectively advance Indigenous educational sovereignty and move institutions toward deeper levels of Indigenization (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Tuck and Yang (2014b) describe Indigenous refusal as

> the stance that pushes us to limit settler territorialization of Indigenous/Native community knowledge, and expand the space for other forms of knowledge, thought-worlds to live. Refusal makes space for recognition, and for reciprocity. Refusal turns the gaze back upon power, specifically colonial modalities of knowing persons as bodies to be differentially counted, violated, saved and put to work. (p. 817)

In this study, Indigenous women administrators talked about the need to enact Indigenous refusal in similar ways such as asserting limits in their work, interrupting settler colonial status quo in practice and pushing back against hegemonic norms embedded in the administrative academy. The need to enact Indigenous refusals emerged in relation to settler colonial power relations. Participants recounted refusing the administrative academy in numerous ways including: refusing to ascribe to reconciliation discourses that tended toward performing Indigenization and "institutional speech acts" (Ahmed, 2006); refusing tokenistic approaches to Indigenous community engagement; and refusing cooptation of Indigenous projects by refusing what Graham Smith (2003) describes as "politics of distraction" where settler colonial needs attempt to invade Indigenous administrators' time, focus and attention.

One participant in the study explained the ongoing critical self-reflexivity required to enact Indigenous refusals in this way: "So you have to pick your battles: Okay I'll let that one go, this one, I'm going to stand. You have to be conscious all the time" (Pimahamowi Pisim).

Another participant described the critical assessment involved before enacting Indigenous refusals as a careful weighing out of risks and benefits, an ethical process of asking herself, "is it a hill worth dying on?" (Athiki Pisim). Opawahcikianasis another participant in this doctoral work explained her assessment process as weighing out "on a scale of 1 to 10; how significant is this particular issue?" Asking herself "should I say something or hold my peace".

While Indigenous women's stories of enacting Indigenous refusals in the administrative academy show some discretion, they often underscored deeper Indigenous ethical accountabilities to the Indigenous collective and land in

their decision-making processes. This finding points to underlying aims of enacting Indigenous refusal and their connections to Indigenous ethics.

At the same time, many Indigenous women involved in this study recounted the dangers of enacting Indigenous refusals in the academy, underscoring the ongoing systems of settler colonial, hetero-patriarchal and capitalistic power within which they operated. Therefore, despite an influx of Indigenous senior leadership positions emerging in Canadian universities since the release of the TRC (Smith, 2019), this research highlighted how Indigenous women administrators continued to struggle operating within a normative Euro-Western administrative context. From this "contentious ground" (Ottmann, 2013), Indigenous women administrators highlighted how they were sometimes problematized and casted in gendered and colonial ways for enacting Indigenous refusals. As a result, several participants talked explicitly with me about their concerns of being labeled "difficult", "resistant", "militant", and "activist" in their leadership. Activism in leadership was deemed a dirty word. For example, one participant described being problematized by a colleague at her university:

> I have a colleague. She slips and—I don't know if she thought I realized, but she made a comment like, 'You know you're so great to work with.' She was praising me, only to come to the fact that – 'I don't understand when some people say you're so difficult to work with.' And I was like, interesting. (Niski Pisim)

Another participant admitted that she tried to dispel troubling colonial stereotypes often imposed on Indigenous administrators by actively creating collaborative relationships: "I try to create trust with certain people who automatically assume that I'm going to be the big militant" (Thithikopiwi Pisim). And yet another participant admitted she had become so concerned about being labeled an activist at her university that she literally changed the way she dressed to avoid negative associations and messages. The unseen dimension of participants' worrying about what to wear and how they might be misperceived in racial and colonial ways, I argue contributes to an emotional labor—the management of one's feelings and expressions as requirement of administration work.

In this research, I argue that the common sense academic administrative norms operationalize through an epistemic dominance based in structural functionalist and interpretivist approaches to organizational change and leadership. These dominant epistemologies hinge on including Indigenous administrators through "conditional inclusion" (Stein, 2019) that preserve the university's hierarchal and authority system, not necessarily work toward "decolonial Indigenization" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018) which aim to reposition Indigenous communities and Indigenous nations in decision-making positions of power.

While Indigenous women administrators described struggling to work in academic administrative settings, some participants practiced Indigenous refusals in more nuanced and subtle ways as a strategic diplomatic intervention and survival mechanism. In this sense, participants enacted Indigenous refusals in multiple ways—explicitly, discretely and strategically working with the collective—demonstrating that Indigenous refusals were taken up in complex and nuanced ways in leadership practices. Indeed, participants shared common stories of struggle, resistance and strategic astuteness in the face of ongoing settler colonial power.

Interestingly, some participants in this doctoral study pointed to the protection they felt that academic freedom offered some administrators when refusing. The knowing that administrators could return to their academic appointments should they be removed from administration, allowed some participants to speak more freely and challenge hegemonic colonial norms.

Furthermore, several participants commonly described a need to engage in ongoing critical self-reflexivity around their practice of Indigenous refusals. They described a need to examine and evaluate, on an ongoing, case-by-case basis, the needs and implications of enacting Indigenous refusals. They also identified a need to reflect on their own complex intersectional positionalities and relational dynamics, and to examine ethical implications of their leadership practices and decision-making in relation to decolonial aims, and attempt to elevate Indigenous voices and agency in education. Their insights, I assert, offer critical direction for decolonial approaches in educational leadership theory and practice as well as leadership training in the context of Indigenization movements in future.

From this study, I assert that Indigenous refusals are directly related to settler colonial power dynamics in the academy; they are a (re)action to unequal power relations or dominant hegemonic norms that have gone unquestioned, which are situated within ongoing settler colonial academic contexts. At the same time, Indigenous refusals were generative as they often interrupted settler common sense (Simpson, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2018) and shifted projects and practices toward advancing Indigenous educational sovereignty. Indigenous refusals are therefore, not simply resistance for resistance sake. Indigenous refusals have purpose, their aim is to assert Indigenous collective autonomy in decision-making and make space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being in dominant whitestream educational settings. While Indigenous women administrators shared many stories of enacting Indigenous refusals, they also highlighted consequences they endured in terms of being casted in negative ways for daring to do so.

## Teaching Policy as Resistance

In my (Melody) teaching in critical policy studies in education/higher education, I aim at including opportunities to interrogate relevant and

contemporary pressing policies that influence governance in public (education) institutions. In an article examining the effects of neoliberal government policies and discourses on the spaces for intellectual engagements in higher education, over 15 years ago, Davies (2005) wrote about how neoliberal agendas co-opt the desires and values of faculty, administrators and students. (Note: I am indebted to Shahjahan [2014] for introducing me to Davies' text and am excited for the questions she asks that can frame critical policy studies courses.) Davies beckons for an intellectual engagement to awaken our constitution even as we are neoliberal subjects, asking, "What is it we long for, then, in universities? And what part does neoliberalism play in shaping our longing, or in counteracting it, even obliterating it? What kind of social fabric is it that neoliberalism envisages?" (p. 3). Reflecting on Davies' queries and more recent literature that locates our work as "neoliberal academics" (Ball, 2016, p. 258), I am arguing here for a response within our teaching in the neoliberal university to consider how we may engage in processes that ask how we can decolonize our own institutional practices. By decolonize, I mean to become aware of the totalizing force of our own institutional policies as they shape what we come to think and know about ourselves as we live in university institutions. We have much to learn from writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2007) who remind us that language matters in coming to shape which knowledges are valued and legitimized, including our own existence. Here I argue that we can learn from decolonizing scholars to consider how to decolonize policy discourses within our own institutions and to seek opportunities in teaching within higher education policy courses to rethink the oppressive policies that constitute our neoliberal subjectivity as students and scholars. As Davies (2005) suggests, "It is not a choice between compliance and resistance, between colonizing and being colonized, between taking up the master narratives and resisting them. It is in our own existence, the terms of our existence, that we need to begin the work, together, of decomposing those elements of our world that make us, and our students, vulnerable to the latest discourse and that inhibit conscience and limit consciousness" (Davies, 2005, p. 13).

In both researching and working in higher education, there is opportunity to examine powerful policy discourses shaping our institutional work, both as we constitute them and are subjected to them. In the Canadian province of Ontario, the Conservative-party government (2019) announced its plans to be a "national leader" by tying 60% of provincial funding for post-secondary institutions to their performance by the 2024–2025 academic year. Performance-based funding (PBF) is an approach to transfers of public funding from government to university institutions that is based on a system of metrics by which university institutional output is measured in order to calculate the work that is being produced and how funding will be provided from government to support this work. In Ontario, the move to PBF was noted in the provincial government's 2019 budget, in which the Strategic Mandate Agreements, set up as bi-lateral agreements between the provincial government and universities and colleges, established performance indicators

that include measures tied to funding. These include graduate employment earning, experiential learning, skills and competencies, graduate employment rates, graduation rates, research funding and output, funding from the private sectors, as well as locally determined metrics as identified by each institution.

As a reform steeped in the new managerialism principles of efficiencies and productivity tied to the labor market, shifts towards PBF as a means of rationing public funds to public education institutions demonstrate a modern manifestation of neoliberal ideals in higher education. The connections to neoliberal rationalities have been well engaged. PBF faces sharp critiques from countries where such policies have had detrimental effects on the teaching, research and service mandates. Spooner (2020) expertly crafts critique of PBF in the Canadian context, drawing attention to surveys conducted with UK academic and international researchers that show how PBF initiatives have diminished policy efforts at institutions to address issues of equity and diversity. The focus in PBF on student graduation and employment rates, along with experiential learning and skills, is located in the global shift of policy agendas towards building twenty-first-century skills, as supported by the global institutions such as the OECD and UNESCO. Yet, these globalized discourses may take on totalizing, dominating effects in constituting the lifeworld (Amsler, 2008) of those of us who work and learn in higher education institutions. The focus on skill and competency development that can be measured to support PBF initiatives needs to be named as neoliberal agenda that homogenize and reduce knowledges into measurable categories, as experiences in higher education institutions are deeply intertwined with student subjectivity and privilege (Viczko et al., 2019).

Yet, as a critical policy studies scholar, my work entails critique of reforms in higher education with concern for understanding how such reforms change governing within institutions. In a review of the encroachment of neoliberal policies in English universities and the struggles of faculty and staff to resist such advancement, Amsler (2008) queried how students and academics have become "so ill-equipped" to respond to impending neoliberal policies while others have been able to "undertake bold experiments in political resistance" (p. 67). Amsler suggests a multitude of narratives provide insights about how neoliberal logics displace critical perspectives, as a "colonization of the cultural lifeworld by systems of industry, finance, and governance; or an enclosure by corporate power" (p. 67). In teaching about critical policy studies, we might ask how different policies support others in their enactment, but also the tensions that emerge as they co-exist within institutional practices. How do governing practices shift away from institutional commitments to justice in institutional practices when authoritarian policies are mandated? Archer (2007) speaks of the tensions in the discourses of diversity, such as "choice", "social mobility" and "student diversity" as they are appropriated by neoliberal ideals. Such discourses can be brought for interrogation into policy studies classes to examine how these policies rub up against pervasive institutional commitments for Indigenization and decolonization on campuses? Also, how do PBF

policies perpetuate the colonial hierarchies of dominant and subjugated knowledges, as choice and social mobility are tied to limited means of measuring student skills and employment as they are attached only to the needs of the labor market/knowledge economy?

What does it mean for an institution to think and act critically in an era of PBF reforms? Resistance requires acknowledging the process as a form of oppression that reinforces imperial logics of hierarchies of knowledge systems. We need resistances to cease the assault of neoliberal policies that determine us all to be only "homo economicus" (Brown, 2015) but while that occurs (and takes time to do), as we build the capacities for resistance within against the oppression of PBF, we may begin to consider how we interrogate the data that forms the premise of measuring performance. PBF is a clear manifestation of the colonial state's reach into HE, as a means of ownership of what knowledges count enough to be measured. As a matter of sovereignty, who owns the data about us that determines our successes and contributions? Whose performance counts in our institutions and who owns the knowledge upon which that success is measured? D'Ignazio and Klein (2020) argue for forms of data feminism that begin by interrogating how power operates in the world through data we collect, asking who stands to be most impacted by the data? Furthermore, important questions are raised about Indigenous data sovereignty in higher education, including data ownership, usage and storage (Carroll et al., 2020; Wilks et al., 2018), especially considering a resistance to data that erases Indigenous outcomes associated with Indigenous ways of knowing. What if metrics we collect through PBF became powerful spaces for resistance, in thinking about: what do we do with the data? How do we respond to metrics? In what ways can we consider that we can resist the determinist ways in which such neoliberal measures oppress our ways of being and learning, colonizing the very visions we have ourselves as students, faculty and researchers? How are those most implicated in the data delivered justice through our engagements with it?

Shahjahan's (2014) position that transformational resistance is necessary to lead to "new ways of being, knowing and doing within increasingly neoliberalized HE contexts" (p. 230) requires that academic faculty and administration resist neoliberal institutional cultures of performativity, including the narrow metrics in tenure and promotion, and publication in so called "top-tier" journals, supervising students within narrow terms of what time is needed to complete a degree, etc. But transformational resistance may also take the form of our own teaching as critical policy and leadership scholars, to provide spaces for students to query what happens in our own institutions, how we are continually perpetual neoliberal subjects for measurement and performativity. Resistance is not easy, but Grande reminds us that for Marcuse, "refusal should not be confused with 'passive withdrawal or retreat' but rather understood as an active instantiation of a 'radically different mode-of-being and mode-of-doing'" (p. 58). The naming and locating of the logics of the colonial

institution can take various forms, including resistance in our classrooms to transform our relationship to our institutions.

## Conclusion

Considering the university's complex lineage and ongoing structures, we argue that the university is not innately critical, in fact if unchecked we assert that the institution will succumb to its hegemonic white colonial nature. Moreover, the notion of a critical university relies on the courageous commitments of social actors to engage in critical thinking and praxis and thereby be willing to ask difficult questions and even at times, enact Indigenous refusal and of resistance in their work. Drawing on Maori scholars Linda T. Smith and Graham H. Smith (2018), we understand criticality through the "need to have a good understanding of the historical, social, cultural, economic, and political relations of inequality, privilege and colonialism and an understanding of how these relations get produced and reproduced" (p. 22) and moreover to have the courage to exercise our limited power through praxis that aims to question and interrupt dominant systems of power. We further position the utility of Indigenous refusal and resistance as agentic dispositions helping preserve and (re)shape an ongoing critical institution—preserving the university's role as both critic and ethical and political conscience of society. While we recognize that common sense administrative tendencies tend toward masking politics through so-called neutrality and apolitical positions, we acknowledge higher education as an ongoing field of practice forever shaped by political actors.

Furthermore, Smith and Smith (2018) also call for the need to continually return to evaluating transformative decolonial work, that inherently involves commitments to self-reflecting. Sandy Grande (2015) similarly stresses the vital importance of continuing to be critical in leadership when she identifies three repeating and overlapping steps necessary in educational leadership: (1) being aware of existing power dynamics; (2) working to make these power dynamics transparent; and (3) making an honest attempt to negotiate power dynamics and structures of power. Grande offers important considerations for Indigenous People who take a critical approach to leadership, that they are not necessarily simply assimilating within the colonial institutions of the academy, but their actions as leaders offer moments of negotiating power, and survival in the educational system. Much work has yet to be done in the praxis of non-Indigenous leaders who seek to decolonize the university system, as well, to learn from scholars who theorize decolonial engagement in HE and from Indigenous scholars and leaders. In writing together, we have pointed to divergence and alignment as we consider the moments of both possibility and incoherence for allyship and commitments to criticality, as we forge spaces for solidarities and co-resistance. The politics of Indigenous refusals and resistance are tenuous and require a commitment toward shared understandings of what it means to work and learn, indeed to be, in a critical university institution. Grande's (2018a,b) call for *justice as refusal* is one that we should not miss,

in our work as scholars and administrators, considering the possibilities such resistance may open.

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