

A Rose by any Other Name: Repressive Tolerance, Burnout, and Hope in the New West

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Abstract

In this article I reflexively explore my recent experiences as a Métis environmental activist, educator, and academic with the historic rise of the New Democratic Party in Alberta, Canada which was quickly followed by the victory of the federal Liberal Party, toppling conservative dynasties at both levels. This autoethnographic inquiry also considers activist educator burnout and insider/outsider dynamics through a lens informed by Marcuse's theory of repressive tolerance. This line of theoretical inquiry and reflection is significant due to the unprecedented shift in government that recently occurred in Alberta, a region under intense environmental scrutiny, which bears implications for the rest of Canada, North America, and the world.

Résumé

Dans cet article, je scrute à la loupe mes récentes expériences en tant qu'activiste environnemental, éducateur et chercheur d'origine métisse à la lumière de la victoire éclatante du Nouveau Parti démocratique en Alberta et de l'élection d'un gouvernement libéral à Ottawa, qui ont délogé dans les deux cas les conservateurs au pouvoir depuis de nombreuses années. Cette démarche autoethnographique s'intéresse aussi à l'épuisement professionnel de l'éducateur activiste et aux rapports entre les tenants d'une culture et les autres en appuyant les réflexions sur la théorie de la tolérance répressive de Marcuse. L'approche théorique de cette démarche (et la réflexion qu'elle suscite) est particulièrement pertinente en regard du changement de cap marqué qui a eu lieu quant au choix de gouvernement en Alberta, une région où les enjeux environnementaux font l'objet d'une grande attention, et qui a des répercussions sur le reste du Canada, l'Amérique du Nord et le monde entier.

Keywords: Indigenous, environmental, activism, burnout, insider/outsider, Alberta

Overview

In this article I reflexively explore my recent experiences with the historic rise of the New Democratic Party in Alberta that was quickly followed by the victory of the federal Liberal Party, toppling conservative dynasties at both levels. As a Métis environmental activist, educator, and academic born, raised, and recently returned to Alberta, these shifts have been sources of hope, but also completely

disorienting at times. This line of theoretical inquiry and reflection is especially significant due to the unprecedented shift in government that occurred in Alberta, a region under intense environmental scrutiny, which bears implications for the rest of Canada, North America, and the world.

In framing this article I draw on Marcuse's (1965) notion of repressive tolerance, consideration of insider/outsider dynamics and positioning (Maloney, Jordan, & McLaughlin, 1994; Smith, 2012), and insights into activist educator burnout (Gorsky & Chen, 2015) to reflexively explore and articulate my experiences with these recent events as a public scholar and educator.

This autoethnographic (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) inquiry employs a narrative approach to provide a theoretically grounded exploration of past and present personal experiences with the shifting political dynamics in Alberta and Canada. I draw from a variety of sources, including review of my personal journal and social media activity from the past two and a half years, theoretical sources, and, given the recent nature of the topics discussed, popular and independent news media commentary and reporting. I also make reference to past and present research studies and popular media contributions of my own and from other scholars in related areas.

Theoretical Framework

Marcuse's (1965) concept of repressive tolerance provides the primary theoretical grounding for this inquiry. In articulating the concept of repressive tolerance, Marcuse asks whether democratic governments and associated ruling elites intentionally allow a certain amount of resistance to preserve an appearance of diversity and tolerance, while business continues as usual without true change. As he notes in his seminal essay, "what is proclaimed and practiced as tolerance today, is in many of its most effective manifestations serving the cause of oppression" (1965, p. 1). He further explains that:

... the underlying assumption is that the established society is free, and that any improvement, even a change in the social structure and social values would come about in the normal course of events, prepared, defined, and tested in free and equal discussion, on the open marketplace of ideas and goods. (p. 4)

As such, in a manner similar to Eisner's (2002) proposition of the null curricula, that which is not even available for consideration in a given context or discourse, Marcuse questions whether truly significant change is achievable through working within the system rather than stepping outside and working to dramatically overthrow it, and creating a new system altogether. However, in a subsequent lecture on higher education given at Berkeley in 1975, he seems to find some resolution to this dilemma when he states:

It is true that we cannot change the goals of education without changing the society which sets these goals. But it is also true that we cannot wait for the revolution in order to become human beings, to eradicate sexism and racism in ourselves, to learn solidarity with the victims, to free ourselves from the cynicism and hypocrisy of the Established morality. In other words, the radical consciousness, and the vital need for radical change must emerge *within* the existing society and its institutions—there is no without! (Marcuse (1975/2009, p. 39)

Kahn (2010) and others (e.g. Hall, 2009) also emphasize that it is the (re)constructive aspect of social movements that is key wherein activists work not only to deconstruct the present system, but also to reimagine and rebuild a new system based on a positive vision for what it could be, not just what it should not be. Van Heertum (2009) also considers this dialectical tension in a contemporary neoliberal context by bringing Marcuse into conversation with Freire. In so doing, he emphasizes the critical, but also hopeful and constructive aspects of both scholars' theories, and highlights the central importance of the collective in uniting individuals' struggles to transform society.

What then, to do when the system *does* undergo rapid change through democratic means, largely, but not completely, in the spirit that you have envisioned?

Given the case under examination, considering insider/outsider dynamics as described by Indigenous scholars such as Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and public policy theorists (e.g., Maloney et al., 1994) provides further theoretical insight. As Tuhiwai Smith suggests, being an insider within a given community can provide certain advantages of association, initial trust, and understanding of cultural norms. However, this trust can also be fragile at times and expectations for proper conduct for insiders can be higher than those for outsiders. While outsiders may not experience the initial ease of access and understanding that insiders enjoy, being met with initial reticence and skepticism, they are often also held to arguably lower standards than insiders, being more easily dismissed from the community or conversation if things go awry. Maloney et al. provide further consideration of insider/outsider dynamics by emphasizing the variable positions and levels of access and influence for both insiders and outsiders within political systems. Such insights assist me in the following to further understand and articulate my own political positioning in relation to the recent shifts in power at both the provincial level in Alberta and federally across Canada.

This inquiry is also informed by the work of Gorsky and Chen (2015), who draw attention to the underexplored area of activist educator burnout. In a recent inquiry into the experiences of activist educators with burnout, they identify common symptoms of burnout, such as mental, physical, and emotional deterioration, cynicism, and disillusionment. They also note that many activist educators struggle to avoid and overcome burnout due to a variety of factors such as a lack of mentorship, cultures of martyrdom, limited discussion of such challenges in activist educator circles, and a subsequent lack of self-care. Understanding and addressing such dynamics are highly important because, as Gorsky and Chen note:

If we hope to develop strategies to sustain social [and environmental] justice movements in education, we must begin, at least in part, by understanding the impact of those movements on the activists who are involved in them so that we might identify the supports that will keep them, as one of our participants put it, “in the game.” (p. 391)

While my experiences as an activist educator do not align perfectly with all of the symptoms and dynamics related to burnout described by Gorsky and Chen, they provide a useful framework for consideration and discussion.

I draw on the three related theoretical areas described above in reflexively examining my own recent experiences through an autoethnographic narrative.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a socially critical research method that combines elements of autobiography and ethnography to explore the experiences of the self in the broader context of a group or culture (Ellis et al., 2011; Roth, 2005). After years of critique from post-positivistic scholars, autoethnography is now firmly established and accepted in qualitative research circles (Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis, 2008).

Roth (2005) argues that autoethnography opposes “false division between subjective and objective, self and other” (pp. 6-7) and, with reference to Derrida, that “the observer and the observed cannot be separated” (p. 8). Such perspectives are in keeping with many Indigenous peoples’ belief in the inextricable connection and interaction between self, community, and the broader world (Cajete, 1994). Autoethnography enacts this profound connection for Indigenous scholars; it serves as a liberating method that allows us to give voice to our stories and experiences after centuries of colonization and suppression (Graveline, 1998; Houston, 2007; Tsalach, 2013). As such, it was with caution and a modicum of trepidation that I selected passages from my personal journal and other sources to share in the following. While these experiences and reflections are my own, perhaps others will discover points of resonance.

A Return to Wild Rose Country

The province of Alberta in western Canada is often called “Wild Rose Country” in honour of its provincial flower, which to some seems an apt representation of the region’s conception of itself as one resplendent with natural beauty and tough, prickly roots. While growing up in Alberta I was accustomed to seeing the wild rose, both in natural settings and emblazoned on a variety of provincial documents, signboards, and license plates. Other iconic images of the Rocky Mountains, grizzly bears, cattle ranches nestled in the sweeping foothills and

prairies, and internationally renowned national parks such as Banff and Jasper might also be readily associated with our province. As such, tourists have flocked annually for over a century to ski, hike, and sightsee throughout this region.

More recently, Alberta's oil or "tar sands" have gained international repute as a black mark on our province and nation's environmental record; images of clear-cuts, pipelines, oil-soaked ducks, and associated protests might now be most readily associated with our province on a global stage. In an effort to highlight the province's self-acclaimed pioneering and entrepreneurial roots and, most likely, to downplay negative press, Calgary, the arguable centre of financial and educational activity for the Canadian petroleum industry, has recently adopted city mottos, such as "Heart of the New West" and "Be Part of the Energy" (Jarvie, 2015).

For the past 44 years the oil and gas industry was bolstered in Alberta by the Progressive Conservative government, a centre-right party (Uechi, 2015). As such, low personal and corporate tax rates, very low oil royalty rates, declining government services with ever-increasing privatization, and lip service to Indigenous and environmental concerns were the norm to which Albertans, myself included, became accustomed.

Growing up and during my early adulthood, I had become very used to assuming an adversarial position in relation to both the previous provincial and federal governments that grew out of Alberta's conservative tradition, with whom they were closely associated. Having grown up in the heart of the Progressive Conservative era in a family of left-leaning teachers, academics, and health care professionals, I was accustomed to feeling like a political outsider in my home province, constantly railing against an endlessly predictable series of cuts to education, health care, and other social services amidst the volatile boom and bust cycle of Alberta's economy that relies so heavily on oil and gas.

Upon returning home to Alberta several years ago as a place-minded yet reluctantly nomadic academic (Greenwood, 2015), it took me a while to acclimatize to my new, albeit familiar, academic, sociocultural, and geographical surroundings. I began attending protests, regularly wrote letters to the editor (Lowan-Trudeau, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), and engaged with other media (Lopez & Dubin, 2014; Marzolla & Dubin, 2014) to express my concern for provincial and federal policies related to Indigenous and environmental issues. As an academic and educator, I also engaged with such issues in my teaching, despite often experiencing resistance from some students and colleagues (Lowan-Trudeau, 2015a) for daring to challenge the neoliberal status quo in this province, city, and institution (Jubas & Seidel, 2016). I often felt as though I walked a dangerous line when openly criticizing the government from which I draw my pay, but was also routinely surprised by the support and encouragement that I received from my institution. However, I was constantly left wondering whether the support was genuine or merely another form of repressive tolerance (Marcuse, 1965).

Burn to Shine¹

Gorsky and Chen (2015) note that:

Activists who are part of marginalized communities must contend with additional layers of anxiety, stress, and emotional exhaustion related, not just to the oppressions their activism is targeting, but also to the oppressions they are experiencing, sometimes even within activist communities and organizations. (p. 390)

As a cisgendered, able-bodied, straight, fair-skinned, Métis academic working in the field of environmental education through a sociocritical lens, I recognize both my intersectional privilege and oppression (Helfand, 2009). For example, while my university position provides me with many opportunities, working from a critical perspective in the area of Indigenous environmental education in a context where many families are deeply connected to the oil and gas industry often results in tension and resistance (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2004; Moore, 1997) from students. As other Indigenous academics also relate, it is difficult and exhausting at times to walk the blurred line between activist and academic (Corntassel, 2009) as well as shouldering greater scrutiny, responsibility, and duties than might be faced by non-Indigenous colleagues in similar positions (Devine, 2010), in addition to the lateral tensions that can arise in such settings (St. Denis, 2007). While institutional enthusiasm and support for Indigenous initiatives is promising, it can also create overload and increased pressure and feelings of guilt for Indigenous academics. As I noted in my journal at one point:

[I am] feeling ... maxed and overloaded at the moment. [I know this is] partly self-imposed with working on writing etc. ... but also feels like there is still [too much] going on ... I find myself feeling deflated and demoralized with ... the constant ... requests ... [It] seems like no matter how many times I say, "No thank you, my plate is full," people just keep lining up with more ... So, that ... leaves me saying "no" [more than yes] ... It's hard to be that way without feeling [guilty], as though you are alienating yourself.

Such dynamics and pressures can lead to physical and emotional burnout. Indeed, during my first two years back in Alberta, friends and family members routinely expressed concern for my physical and emotional wellbeing. Excerpts from my journal during this period reveal signs of burnout identified by Gorsky and Chen (2015), such as deteriorating morale and increasing cynicism:

I've found this [spring] much more stressful than expected. Can't quite pinpoint what it is exactly, but I do think I am run down after not really taking a break since Christmas. Important to [remember this] next year.

As further demonstrated in my journal, these feelings of burnout were exacerbated by frustration related to the political dynamics at the time:

Today the federal government announced [conditional] approval of the Northern Gateway pipeline. No surprise there, but still depressing and frustrating. I feel very moved to act, but not quite sure how just yet. Letter writing, protest etc. ... Need to do something here. So wrong on so many levels ...

Despite such challenges and tensions, I had resigned myself to continue my work at a similar pace. However, my journal also reveals awareness of my burnout and strategies that I successfully employed to avoid the final symptom identified by Gorsky and Chen: disillusionment. While Gorsky and Chen note that most of their participants struggled to identify self-care strategies to avoid activist educator burnout, my journal documents a range of practices that I employ, to varying degrees of success, such as:

- exercising regularly,
- spending time outside on the Land and Water with my family,
- journaling,
- playing guitar,
- eating and sleeping well,
- strictly managing my work commitments,
- taking extended breaks away from work and email,
- socializing routinely in settings that make me feel good, and
- spending time with Elders.

My journal also indicates that I have been learning over time how to better manage the stresses and demands of my position. For example, after a one-week break in late in the spring of 2015, I noted:

Just wrapping up our week [off]. [It] has been great ... We spent the first few days recovering and sleeping a lot. [It was] just enough time to pause, rest [and] recharge [before] get[ting] back to it. One week isn't quite enough to absolutely decompress, but it has been great nonetheless. Looking forward to [a longer break in the] summer ... also planning ahead for next year's Christmas and earlier spring break. That is a lesson from this year for sure. Need [to take] an earlier spring break [next year].

Despite my frustrations, these sorts of strategies and experiences assist me in maintaining an ultimately optimistic socio-political outlook, even during times when I feel cynicism with regards to my work and/or current political dynamics. However, recent changes at both the provincial and federal level upended my sense of antagonism and frustration with the ruling governments, forcing me to reconsider and adjust my stance as an academic, activist, and educator.

Sunny Ways and the Orange Wave

On May 5th, 2015, history was made when Albertans resoundingly voted in the New Democratic Party (NDP), left-wing social democrats, for the first time in our

provincial history, amidst promises of a higher minimum wage, increased funding for health care and education, improved relations with Indigenous peoples, increased corporate taxes, and an ambivalent approach to oil and gas (Alberta NDP, 2015). The nation, others around the globe, and most amusingly, even we, ourselves, were shocked. Headlines around the world touted the new socialist government of “Canada’s Texas” (Fund, 2015). I, for one, was ecstatic.

However, the sudden arrival of the NDP also left me feeling completely disoriented; all of my previous socio-political bearings had shifted. After a near-sleepless night, I felt as though I had awoken to a new province. As my friend and colleague David Jardine said in passing that morning, “the hills look different today” (personal communication, May 6, 2015). Indeed, they did. I felt as though, for the first time in my life, I had become a relative insider in my home province; I could now see myself and imagine having a voice in our provincial government. It was a strange and elating, but also deeply unsettling, feeling. As such, it was ultimately with guarded hope that I embraced our new government.

I experienced similar, though perhaps even more restrained feelings when the federal Liberals also secured a surprising victory several months later in the fall of 2015. The morning after their victory I commented on social media:

[I] woke up today with a strong sense of relief ... Here in Calgary we have two Liberal representatives for the first time in over 40 years and there were other close races (ours was a matter of 1 %!). Many of us made tough decisions and set aside partisan nuances to vote for hope and change. Let’s hold our new leader and government accountable to the many promises they have made, advocate to repair the cultural, political, and environmental damage done over the past decade, and re-vision a nation that is healthy, welcoming, and respectful for all.

Now that both parties have had a chance to settle into power, my mixed feelings have persisted and perhaps intensified, primarily due to both parties’ somewhat ambiguous environmental records. However, this was not without foreshadowing. For example, during their campaign, I had noted that the Alberta NDP’s environmental stance was somewhat unclear. For example, they pledged ambivalence toward Enbridge’s Northern Gateway pipeline and Trans Canada’s Keystone XL, but advocated for another Trans Canada project, Energy East, which would carry tar sands oil from Alberta across central and Eastern Canada to refineries on the East Coast (Ewart, 2015). They also made vague promises to promote oil refinement in province, revisit climate change policy, and consider enhancing renewable energy development (Alberta NDP, 2015).

While Alberta’s new NDP government has already held true to many of their campaign promises, such as instituting progressive increases to the minimum wage, increasing funding for health care and education, and working to affirm and support Indigenous rights (Morin, 2015), they have also proved less environmentally proactive than some, myself included, might have hoped. For example, our new Premier, Rachel Notley, made headlines soon after assuming office through several strong speeches made in the Legislature (Ewart, 2015)

and to local and visiting business leaders during the Calgary Stampede (Bakx, 2015), touting the economic riches of the oil/tar sands and pledging to increase production during her term. She also recently joined our new Liberal Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, with whom I also find myself cautiously aligned on several, but not all issues, in expressing disappointment when U.S. President Obama rejected the proposed Keystone XL pipeline (Bellefontaine, 2015; Harris, 2015).

Such news fell on cringing ears for those like myself who hope to see our new governments take an even stronger environmental stance than promised in their campaigns. As I noted in a popular media article soon after the federal Liberals' victory:

After a decade of Conservative rule, I find myself, like many other Indigenous people in Canada [Wilson, 2015], cautiously optimistic for the future social and ecological well-being of our nation and its role on the international stage. However, our new government will face significant challenges in living up to and improving upon their campaign promises ... Since taking over in early November, their early actions such as the unmuzzling of government scientists, appointment of Indigenous lawyer Jody Wilson-Raybould as Minister of Justice, and the new ministerial portfolio of environment and climate change are hopeful signs indeed. The time has come for them to follow through on their campaign promises, and then some. (Lowan-Trudeau, 2016, pp. 49-50)

An optimist at heart, I want to believe in our new Prime Minister's "sunny ways" (Timson, 2015) and our Premier's pledge to work earnestly in supporting Indigenous and environmental rights. However, my optimism is tempered by caution informed by both the past and present contradictions and disappointments described above.

The Inside Outsider

This brings me to the key concern of this paper. I now find myself in the largely unfamiliar place of simultaneously supporting both our provincial and federal governments for the most part, feeling cautiously hopeful for the future, but also holding deep concerns about some of their environmental policies and strategies. As such, I am left with questions regarding my role as a public academic in this new setting. Do I fall back on old habits of writing public letters, attending protests, and other forms of outsider advocacy? Or do I attempt to work within the system, taking stronger steps to influence policy through internal letter writing, participation in community groups and advisory boards, and continuing to foster critical engagement in my teaching? Or perhaps both?

Maloney et al. (1994) provide a highly insightful consideration of these kinds of insider/outsider dynamics in political systems. Their nuanced work is also reminiscent of Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and other Indigenous scholars' discussions of the dynamic roles of insider/outsider researchers in Indigenous contexts

(e.g., Innes, 2009). Like Smith, Maloney et al. suggest that insider/outsider dynamics in political contexts exist more commonly along a continuum, rather than in a firmly oppositional dichotomy. They also note that not all insiders enjoy the same level of influence over government; while some are consulted and/or have access to government agencies as ideological insiders, they may not actually influence policy development in the end.

In their review of foundational scholarship on insider/outsider access to and influence upon government, Maloney et al. (1994) describe several sub-groups within both insider and outsider positions. In their view, insiders include:

- Core: broad and highly influential insiders, most often with high levels of “resource” status—social connections, economic wealth, desirable skills,
- Specialist: technical experts who influence very specific policies, and/or
- Peripheral: ideological allies who may be consulted, but are ultimately not highly influential on policy.

They also suggest that outsiders fall into two groups:

- Ideological: those whose beliefs greatly conflict with the ruling group, and/or
- Strategic: those who make a conscious choice to operate as outsiders, regardless of their ideological alignment with a particular government.

Maloney et al. also note that some individuals and groups intentionally adopt ambivalent or “threshold” insider/outsider stances for ideological and strategic reasons. One example that they provide is that of many trade unions that strategically avoid absolute insider or outsider status, lobbying, engaging, or protesting governments on particular issues as most appropriate to satisfy their particular agendas.

In a manner reminiscent of considerations present within Marcuse’s (1965) theory of repressive tolerance, wherein one must choose whether or not to work within or outside of a repressive system (Kahn, 2010; Marcuse, 1975/2009), Maloney et al. (1994) also note that individuals and groups must decide whether they are interested in radical or incremental change. They state:

Groups who wish to pursue radical policy change exclude themselves by definition from participating in the insider, political accommodation game. The pursuit of “incremental” style goals gives a group eligibility for legitimate insider status. The key variable, to securing core rather than peripheral status, is however, that of resources. (p. 36)

These terms and concepts are very useful for this inquiry as they help me to further understand and articulate my reactions to and experiences with different levels of insider and outsider status in Alberta.

At the moment, after years as an ideological outsider at both the federal and provincial level, I would describe myself as falling somewhere between a

peripheral and specialist insider. As described above, I do see myself aligning ideologically with our new federal and provincial governments in many, but not all, areas. That being said, I now find myself serving as an advisor for several non-profit civil and environmental groups, in the somewhat novel position of contributing specialist knowledge to reports that may actually influence provincial government policy in areas such as renewable energy, climate change, and environmental education; at times we are consulted directly, and at others we provide unsolicited statements through various media and policy-related channels. For the first time ever, I feel as though my views might actually be seriously considered.

However, I also continue to speak out honestly in the media (Lowan-Trudeau, 2015), warmly recognizing the hopeful directions set out by our new federal and provincial governments, but also providing strong suggestions for improvement. The success of this strategy remains to be seen. Navigating the insider/outsider continuum is indeed a tricky affair and I find myself concerned that, even under these new regimes, I and others will still be subjected to a certain level of repressive tolerance (Marcuse, 1965). As Carroll and Ratner (2007) suggest in their research into the relationships between social movements and government during a sustained period of NDP rule in British Columbia, in a neoliberal context, even dramatic shifts in government such as we have experienced and, indeed, created for ourselves are sometimes still not enough to create deep cultural and systemic change. As such, I may find myself back in the streets with placard in hand before long.

Closing Thoughts

“Cautious optimism” seems to be the most commonly printed phrase by media outlets in Canada of late; I am also guilty of using it quite frequently. Indeed, like many Albertans and Canadians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, I have felt a sense of relief due to the changes in both our provincial and federal governments. Such shifts have given me hope for the possibility of true societal change, allowed me to catch my breath, and contributed to a reduction in my activist educator burnout.

However, as noted above, I remain concerned with some of our sitting governments’ environmental policies. For example, while I celebrate both the new provincial NDP and Liberal government’s general orientation to forge new respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples and enact true consultation on environmental issues (Globe and Mail, 2015), I remain concerned with their support for the continued expansion of oil and gas infrastructure in the form of projects like the Keystone XL and Energy East pipelines. However, after over 40 years provincially and a decade federally of Conservative rule, I can’t help but feel cautiously optimistic at times and hopeful for our collective future. I want to believe that things will be different.

And so, as a somewhat reluctant, newly minted insider, I continue to feel disoriented at times. As an educator, I will recognize and celebrate the monumental political changes that we have experienced this past year while continuing to raise Indigenous and environmental issues in my courses, inviting students to think critically for themselves and about our current leaders, their policies, and actions. I will also take advantage of this window of opportunity, especially at the provincial level, to contribute to policy development. This is especially timely given that our province is currently in the middle of a curriculum redesign (Alberta Education, 2016). We have the opportunity to set a fresh direction for our educational system, introducing a generation of students to a new way of thinking about environmental issues in our province, nation, and beyond, fostering a sense of critical optimism by offering “youth the tools and time to contemplate a different future and their role in actualizing it” (Van Heertum, 2009, p. 112).

As an activist, like Thomas-Muller (2015, 1:21), I will “continue to send a serious, but gentle message to [our] newly elected” governments, writing letters to the editor, and attending peaceful events to raise awareness for critical issues while also recognizing the great strides that have been made and promised over the past six months here in Alberta and across Canada. I will also heed Gorsky and Chen’s (2015) insights into activist educator burnout by striving to take care of myself, recognize and support the work of others, and encourage open discussion of and avoidance of the pitfalls of activist martyrdom. As Van Heertum (2009) notes with reference to Marcuse and Freire, we must come together to support each other collectively if we hope to truly transform society.

And, finally, as a scholar, I will also strive for hope while, as I noted recently in my journal, “continu[ing] to resist through my research and writing [which] is an anchor point for me. The freedom to write and express my thoughts and feelings is [both] a privilege and a survival mechanism. I will continue to shake the cage ...”

While I am an optimist at heart, I remain wary and, with reference to Aoki (1983) and a nod to Shakespeare, wonder if it is indeed true that, while one might prune and reshape a wild rose, a wild rose it will always be.

Note

- ¹ Harper, B. (1999). *Burn to shine* [CD]. Hollywood, CA: Virgin Records

Notes on Contributor

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