

CAUT Indigenization Conference (Ottawa, October 18-19, 2018)

As a junior Indigenous scholar here at Laurier, I consider the CAUT conference on Indigenizing the academy to have been a deeply enriching experience, both on the personal and professional levels. Indigenous scholar Linda Tuihai Smith (1999) believes that all Indigenous thinkers are innately involved in a process of ‘struggling to make sense of our own world while attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful’ (p. 38-9). This is a sentiment that was shared by many panelists and other participants in the CAUT Indigenization conference in Ottawa. To me, the most compelling pane, which was the first of the conference, focused on elucidating the challenges faced by junior Indigenous academics across Canada. It was certainly enlightening for me, and it was uplifting to hear that there are many other Indigenous academics all over Canada who share some of my concerns and challenges related to finding a balance between meeting academic standards and furthering our careers and maintaining relational accountability to the Indigenous community, both on- and off-campus.

Another important idea brought up by one of the panelists on the second day is that the processes and practices of colonialism have been applied by different European powers throughout the world. For example, the experiences of the Maori with British colonialism are very similar to those of the Haida, and we can draw meaningful parallels between different Indigenous groups and their experiences with colonialism.

Also, one panellist on the second day reminded us that we are fortunate because as Indigenous academics we have the opportunity to use our privileged position to influence and continue to make changes within the academy. Although, as Dr. David

Newhouse, the conference organizer, reminded us that it is clear that, in practice, a clean break from (neo)colonial discourses in academia remains a formidable challenge, we are beginning to witness scenarios in which universities are taking formal initiatives to decolonize dominant social, economic and environmental visions. However, as was discussed various times during the conference, a continued effort of understanding Indigenous relational worldviews is indispensable in meaningfully decolonizing—and, indeed, Indigenizing—the academy. In my case, as an Indigenous geographer, I am thankful that the process of Indigenization has already begun in my field (and Department), with its growing consideration and incorporation of Indigenous environmental perspectives and research methods, and I hope that more disciplines will soon follow suit.

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