

**MATRIARCHY AND MISOGYNY:
Asserting Lateral Kindness and Addressing White Supremacy**

Tansi, Aanin, and Watchiya,

My names are Shawna, Peloquin, and Walking with Turtles Woman. I belong to the teachings of the Eagle clan and carry Eeyouh and Quebecer roots and stories. I am two-spirit, dedicated to belonging to a world where none of our children have to survive the violence of our most irresponsible passions: the race for power and the oppression it provokes. On October 2020, I became the fourth Indigenous President elected to serve the University of Winnipeg Students' Association (UWSA) and part of the first executive group elected in a by-election since 2004. The duties I carried as the main ambassador and CEO of the UWSA, and the reality of the global pandemic, gave me a lot of insight into the expectations and barriers of authority and leadership. As President, I stood as an authority figure in a system that is known to be colonial. I was aware that this position would demand emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual labor as I navigated a system that was built to exclude people like myself, and so many others, from participating in decision-making spaces.

As UWSA President, I was tasked with representing students and I my representation authority was sought after by the decision-making structures that unite our campus communities, namely those of the academy and the economy. This made me reflect a lot on the ways we lean on governance for a security that is financial, and how we lean on governance for a sense of belonging that is intellectual, yet all of us are vibrant beings with an intersectionality of needs and we are worthy of being served this way by the structure we impose on ourselves. Our governance systems are showing how much they are disconnected from the ground reality - inequalities are screaming during this pandemic that, "We" are all in this together, yet we haven't learned to see or care for each other, or to be self-sovereign together.

The truth is I can't represent all students in a system that does not acknowledge all students, and I am one of a multitude. I can't be expected to represent all students because I am able-bodied,

I am a “Canadian” citizen and in most space, I present as a white passing cis-gender woman. What I can do is learn to recognize the barriers I am not subject to, listen to those it impacts, and be cognizant of the responsibility I have to act against these barriers as I learn to perceive them. I’ve also been very cognizant to my own trauma and the legacy of colonization that we are confronted with as Indigenous people in this power-centric settler society. These realities don’t change with the titles I hold, they only become more evident with the weight they carry.

The truth is we can’t expect our governance systems to represent all people in a culture that does not Love all people, and we are a culture of White Supremacy where “inclusion” relies on the labor of the marginalized and the perpetuation of systemic oppression. We don’t live in a patriarchal society; we’re not all men and we all carry masculine and feminine gifts. We live in a misogynistic society where violence leads the discourse of social equality and individuals hide behind the “security” of its consistency. The truth is we govern ourselves, and our institutions cannot uphold settler-colonialism without the bodies that operate it: us.

If we want real change, we must confront our social environment and rely on each other to respect and uphold each other’s position in this fight for authentic, safe, solidarity; in liberation from the political structures that keep us stuck in boxes where we are uphold systems that we know to be harmful. We need to go back to the heart of our “whys”, to start asking each other what it means for us to be a part of communities, to support each other, and to be safe. It’s time to have honest conversations about how we feel and how our feelings make the world that surrounds us.

As an organization we face the nightmares that touch our societal egos. The UWSA has had allegations of racism and harassment, and has learned that harms don’t happen in positions, but in layered spectrums of experiences that must be recognized and addressed. The UWSA has opened structures within that were not challenged before and took the brave step to choose to move away from them despite the fear, imperfection and discomfort of being vulnerable holistically, as an organization. It belongs to all of us to recognize and assert our positions and

claim the roles our hearts call us to. At the UWSA I learned that my matriarchy is fluid; that it moves like the wind that blows throughout the gaps of my barriers. It's the voice I've been gifted, and it takes shape in the assertion of my intersectionality. We are all being invited to claim our voices back into self-sovereignty. I've become the first UWSA President to transition from an executive role to a director role, and I am succeeded by the first Punjabi UWSA President. This will allow other barriers to be challenged for the first time, and it shows me that we have a lot more work ahead to truly, "be in this together".

Among the many barriers, we must face is the non-existence of wheelchair accessible planes, marginalized communities, and victims having to stand alone in the face of institutional violence and isolation. We must face students and individuals paying out of pocket for the priorities their governments want to privatize, and grassroots efforts being taken for granted to bridge the gap between social need and the shortcomings of elected governments. We are reacting to a pandemic that we escalate and deescalate in cycle and we can do so much better. We can do more than react to barriers and obstacles ahead. We can move with intention toward making things better for the most vulnerable, for ourselves and our communities of support. For this we need to allow ourselves to be wholeheartedly vulnerable, as individual, as communities and start unpacking our barriers and recognize our shortcomings. Let's grow our self-sovereignty like gardens, by nurturing the seeds not the sun.

Let's do this together and for the things we need when we're apart.

Stoodis, Ekosany,

With Kindness,

2020-2021 UWSA President Shawna Peloquin