



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

**ERYNNE GILPIN**

MA (University of Victoria, 2014)  
BA (Western University, 2012)

**“Land as Body: Indigenous Womxn’s Leadership, Land-Based  
Wellness and Embodied Governance”**

Indigenous Governance

Friday, November 22, 2019  
1:00 P.M.  
First Peoples House  
Ceremonial Hall

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Charlotte Loppie, School of Public Health and Social Policy, University of Victoria (Supervisor)  
Dr. Jeff Corntassel, Indigenous Governance Program, UVic (Member)  
Dr. Noelani Goodyear-Ka’ōpua, Indigenous Governance Program, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Kim Anderson, Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Abdul Roudsari, School of Health Information Science, UVic

## Abstract

As many Indigenous voices and teachings reveal, individual practices of leadership are an everyday commitment to cultural resurgence and actualize within the personal spaces of the home, kitchen table, garden, birth-room, workplace and relationships. Individual enactments of leadership are further determined by personal sense of agency derived from feelings of personal wellness, community well-being, relational balance and alignment of the mental, spiritual, emotional and physical selves. Healthy environments, including territories that encompass Land and Water, are essential for overall community wellness. This dissertation examines emergent themes of Indigenous wellness, governance and gender to broaden current definitions of Indigenous governance and leadership towards a gendered, storied and embodied understanding. Countering the notion that governance and wellness are separate entities within the field of Indigenous Governance, this paper draws the Indigenous body into focus as a crucial site for self-determination in what I define as *embodied governance*. In doing so, we situate the Indigenous body within a self-determination framework that brings together critical Indigenous studies, Indigenous governance and culturally grounded wellness practices. Utilizing narrative inquiry, storytelling methods, relationship based models of accountability, this research project included the guided conversations of 17 self-identified Indigenous Womxn between 21-60 years of age from 10 different Nations, to explore: definitions of leadership in their everyday lives, the conditions for their personal wellness and community well-being, and finally, how these notions are predicated upon meaningful relationship to Land/Waters. Weaving together shared conceptions of Land-based wellness, individual understandings of everyday leadership and the shared, lived and felt experiences of Indigineity, the author situates the body as a site of governance, self-determination and cultural agency. My research defines wellness and well-being within the Cree-Michif framework of Miyo-Pimatisiwin (personal wellness, self-care, healing, internal balance) and Miyo-Wîchêtowin (care for others, accountability and belonging, kinship, relational governance, external balance). These concepts inform what I define as an *embodied governance* framework of self-determination to engage in ongoing efforts of personal, community, Land/Water-based healing for the purpose of protecting the future of generations to come. The final analysis celebrates and honours on-the-ground practices of embodied governance by focusing on rooted examples of creative resurgence, Land-Water based healing practices and a focus on an emergent theme of

embodied birth and reproductive governance. These learnings support that determinants of individual leadership must be supported by a sense of personal wellness contained by relationship to Land and Waters. The dissertation begins with a critical examination of the colonial underpinnings that sabotage community healing, wellness and traditions of governance as derived by relationship to home Lands and Waters. In doing so, the author aims to interrupt the predominant trope of the Indigenous body or community as continuously in crisis. Instead, this paper situates Indigenous healing practices as radical sites of governance. The research argues for the reconsideration of self-determination as embodied governance, which begins with the body as a site of regeneration, resurgence and renewal.