What Silence Can Teach Us About Race and Leadership

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Abstract

Our contribution to race and leadership silence is to focus on how critical it is to reclaim silence and distinguish between fear-based silence and sacred silence. Fear-based silence disconnects people from themselves, each other, and the planet. It can be a running away from discomfort, of giving tacit approval to racism and preserving status, privilege, and power. This kind of silence is the world of masks and performativity, and at its worst harbors prejudice, hate, and destruction. Leadership tolerant of fear-based silence is a leadership that allows a festering of racism, ignorance, prejudice, suppression, and deep divides.

Sacred silence by contrast heals and raises consciousness. For the kind of leadership required to consistently and indefatigably push for change and disruption to racism, we need a practice of sacred silence. Sacred silence cultivates the courage to look fearlessly within personal shadows and bravely at what is required to make the world a safe, secure, and just place for all. In this paper we present four themes that emerged from our reflexive inquiry into race, leadership, and silence: listening dialogue, returning to Mother Earth wisdom, honoring potential, and practicing mindfulness in a context of collective wisdom.

Keywords: Indigenous., Black Leadership, Race and Leadership, Mindfulness, Racism, Silence, Wisdom

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> Our advanced technological society is rapidly making objects of most of us and subtly programming us into conformity to the logic of its system. To the degree that this happens, we are also becoming submerged in a new 'culture of silence.'
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> —Richard Shaull, Forward to Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970: 13)

Paolo Freire's insights of the hegemonic forces through which a dominant culture's worldview becomes an isomorphic pull of acquiescence to "normalized" values and norms illuminates the central role of silence and silencing. People subsumed into the dominant whole may internalize a sense of inferiority that silences their own cultural sense of self-worth, self-confidence, and self-belief; but even more than that, as Shaull above highlights, we are made objects of the system when we submit to its silencing progress. We can become the wardens of our own silence. As we collectively experience this silent undertow, our collective awareness that we are also our own liberators emerges railing against this tide. We are responsible for creating a new consciousness, responsible for thinking about the world and activating upon our "critical awareness … as Subjects of the transformation" (Freire, 1970: 97). Leadership work in a Freirean sense is critically transformative, and a result of withstanding, reflecting, and acting upon the system.

"One of the most powerful forms of protest is to capture a space and transform it into something else," said Māori economic activist Teanau Tuiono (as cited in Bargh, 2007: 128). In that spirit, we collectively co-create a sense of sharing consciousness about the space of silence around race. Silence can be a way of dis-engaging and avoiding discomfort—a retreat into passive safety that lends tacit approval to racism by not speaking up. Silence can also be a profound teacher to help us, through creating the time and space for conscious reflection, to inquire into ourselves and explore possibilities for moving forward. Liberation is not just about one oppressed person or peoples, since as Freire said, people in communion liberate each other. This process is difficult, and Freire (in Ledwith, 2016: 59) used a birthing metaphor to capture it: “Liberation is like a childbirth, and a painful one. The person who emerges is a new person, no longer oppressor or oppressed, but a person in the process of achieving freedom.”

These four essays stand together, alone as they interact with time and lived experience. Parallel reverberations on these powerful ideas—race, leadership, silence—are presented with a hope that they connect in the service of social justice, yet we acknowledge that they are partial, hopeful, and not merely enough. Hence, what follows is an article shaped like an edited “book” with each section its own reflective pool of thought and ripples of lived experience. We first provide an overview of silences that stifle and suffocate. In doing so we create an uncomfortable Corridor of Silence. Then, released from the corridor, we open a space into which each author shares a reflexive account of sacred silence and what it can birth.

Chellie Spiller draws upon the wellspring of Māori and Indigenous wisdom traditions and explores silence that breathes. She highlights the continuous receiving and giving in which all of creation exists in a state of reciprocity through the exchange of breath and being grounded *nohopuku*: to sit in the belly, listen, and discern.

Michelle Evans offers us a privileged view into Indigenous Australia, where slowness is welcomed and connection to place is valued. She takes us into the world of “deep spring silence” that calls us to quiet down and really listen, so that from this wellspring of generative silence collective intelligence can emerge.

Kathryn Goldman Schuyler shares how she had to find space outside her mind to discover a world outside the environment in which she grew up: New York, with its crowded busy-ness. Taking up Tibetan Buddhist teachings that have infused her work for decades, she illuminates teachings that call for active inquiry into our mental habits where we disturb the veils that obscure our view of reality as part of the journey towards unity and community.

Lemuel W. Watson explores the notion of becoming the channel—going beyond categories that box our identity, or work contracts that restrict our humanity. He calls us to gather ourselves—not as a who or a what but as a how. This spiritual "becoming" requires cultivation, reflection, listening, vulnerability, and compassion, including self-compassion. He makes the point that institutions too are held by forces of a spiritual nature.

The discussion posits that leaders who are in touch with sacred silence are people who are committed to connectedness, releasing the potential in others, with an abiding belief in relationships of reciprocity and respect. They inquire bravely into their experience, pursuing journeys of transformation and change no matter how uncomfortable, encouraging others to do so as well in service of collaboratively creating a world where all are respected and valued.

Silence that stifles and suffocates

> *In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends*
> *Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.*
> *The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people.*

There comes a time when silence is betrayal.

—Martin Luther King

The silence that Martin Luther King draws our attention to is not the calm, still, quiet, hushed, and peaceful silence that the English dictionary offers to describe silence. Rather, this is the silence that causes suffering, stifles, and suffocates. This silence is like being in an anechoic chamber—a place so quiet you can feel your blood pumping and air bubbles popping in your head. A disorienting, monochrome, sanitized vacuum of deprivation. The reasons for such silences have been well chronicled and include those briefly covered in the following.

The renowned concept and sound artist Marina Abramović created Sound Corridor (War) in 1971—a narrow passageway filled with machine-gun fire. She explains that in the Sound Corridor the shocking assault of noise fills the body so completely that upon leaving the passageway the absence of noise creates an intense silent emptiness. From this place the person who has left the corridor could then receive art. She described how in the Tibetan tradition, meditators would sit in a hut under a waterfall, staying there for many years. The incessant sound of water was inescapable and interrupted their thinking processes. On leaving the hut there was a form of spaciousness, silence, and emptiness that opened them to receiving new things. She describes this process as a cleansing (Artspace editors, 2016).

Taking our lead from Abramović, the following section is modeled as a "Corridor of Stifling Silence". Our intention is that reading it will feel stultifying, arid, and suffocating such that by the time you have finished you will feel viscerally constricted and needing release and to breathe deeply. We are using this literary device to reclaim the silence that creates spaciousness and emptiness so we can receive new things. But first, we must go through the passageway that stifles and suffocates.

The silence of *safety* can be a guard for not wanting to say the wrong thing, a fear of being attacked or judged. This slippery silence presents as a mask of vulnerability seeking self-protection while simultaneously casting a stereotyped shadow on others as potential accusers, judges, and even attackers. This serves to reinforce perceptions that the source of danger and potential violence lies in another person (DiAngelo, 2012).

Calibrating closely with safety is the silence of *discomfort*. Silence borne of discomfort can be a guise for wanting to portray innocence, ignorance, and indifference. DiAngelo (2012: 12) suggests that discomfort ought not to be conflated with danger. Discomfort brings awareness to “unnamed and unexamined racism”. Unexamined, this silence can be a tactic to avoid real engagement and is therefore quietly suppressive and can result in a counter-effect of conveying bias and prejudice (Bradley, 2007; Sue, 2015).

Nestling alongside safety and discomfort is the silence of *performative niceness* which seeks to appeal through “I’m a good person with good intentions.” Underlying this kind of silence is an anxiety that we may be misunderstood and come across as bad people. Menakem (2020) noted in an interview that “I’m glad you’re nice to me. But don’t attribute that niceness as embodied antiracist practice.” Sue (2015) pointed out that avoiding discussions on race is a way some people seek to hold onto their self-image as a good person without inquiring into their own biases and capacity for discrimination.

The silence that preserves *status and privilege* is epidemic and is a form of silence wherein people go underground lest their status be upheaved. CEOs have been coming forth and stepping down from their roles, no longer wishing to collude with a system that preserves privilege. Undergirding such silence is allegiance and conformity to a certain code of rule embedded in the hallowed, hushed and colluding corridors of power (Azarmandi, 2018; DiAngelo, 2012).

The *silent majority* is an example of solidarity through being silent. The silent majority is the large amorphous group of people in a community and a nation who do not express their opinions publicly (King and Anderson, 1971). The silent majority acts as a *collective bystander* who silently observes bullying taking place and fails to interrupt (Chaleff, 2020).

Selective perspectives is another vast silence project that marginalizes cultures, histories and worldview. Australian anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner stunned Australian society in the late sixties when he delivered the Boyer Lectures on the ABC national radio station, coining the term "the great Australian silence" (Stanner, 1968). Stanner (2009: 316) raised the dispossession of Indigenous Australia and, with some "trepidation", the live issue of land rights, stating he could not "defensively pass over it in silence in these lectures." Stanner did far more than allude to that awkward yet determined commitment of non-Indigenous Australia to continue to view through a "window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape" (Stanner, 2009:188-189). He revealed how this way of seeing the world partly obscured, had become "structured into the [collective] identity" (Maddison and Stastny, 2016: 233). Adrienne Harris (2019: 310) also described the roadblock we collectively maintain as a "perverse pact" between the collective disassociation of white privilege and violence. Our complicity through disassociation continues to cement "material conditions for the entrenched dominating presence of whiteness and racism."

The wall of silence that meets the *outsider* can be deafening and impenetrable. There are many ways of othering. There is colonialization which casts some as inside the cultural circle and an "unruly mass" outside of it—immigrants, minorities and Indigenous peoples. To gain entry is to surrender identity and integrate with the dominant mono-cultural way (Lentin, 2008). Despite the influence of postmodernism and globalization, the anchor of colonization weighs down Indigenous cultures and bonds them to nation state territories: their histories, their actions and inactions. It is here where silence is maintained on the founding stories of Indigenous nations and the work of a “great silence” takes place.

The final two silences touched upon here are silences borne of *loathing* and *hate.* As Okwerekwu notes (as cited in Acosta and Ackerman-Barger, 2017: 285) “silence in the face of injustice not only kills any space for productive conversations, but also allows cancerous ideas to grow.” Hate-filled silence is oppressive, brutal, and deadly.

Reflections on sacred silence

Having reflected on the limiting, suppressing discourses that seep their way into our lives and our thinking, inhibiting our sense of reflexivity, we now reclaim the silence that is generative, filled with wisdom, the silence from which we can feel supported and can grow. Following is a series of four reflexive accounts of sacred silence from the standpoint of our own intersectionality.

Chellie: Silence that breathes

The adage to “fight fire with fire” came to mind when I contemplated Martin Luther King’s comments on silence. I wondered what it might look like to “fight silence with silence”. Drawing upon the wellspring of Māori and other Indigenous wisdom traditions, I inquire into the silence that breathes and explore the implications for race and leadership.

I start at the beginning—with the Māori concept of *Te Korekore*—the realm of potential. Marsden (2003: 20) explains *Te Korekore* as “the realm between non-being and being: that is, the realm of potential being … It is here that the seedstuff of the universe and all created things gestate. It is the womb from which all things proceed.” Aleut wisdom keeper, Ilarion Merculieff (2013) also speaks about the Womb at the Center of the

Universe which is the place where people received the original instructions on how to breathe well and live well in this world.

Unlike the silence that stifles, suffocates, and gives rise to disconnection, isolation, suppression, fear, and hate, another silence beckons: the silence that breathes. This is the breath of life. In *te reo* Māori language *hau* can literally mean breath (Williams dictionary, 2004) and reflects the interconnectedness, interdependence, and reciprocity that occurs through the sharing of breath. Every aspect of creation is breathing in and breathing out in multifarious ways, and this is an aspect of the state of gifted exchange and reciprocity upon which human well-being depends. *Hau* (one of many energies in *te ao Māori*, the Māori worldview) is a process of continuous receiving and giving in which all of creation exists in a state of reciprocity through the exchange of life-energy (Spiller, 2010).

The word *hā* is also associated with breath. To demonstrate how deeply appreciated this is in terms of our relationships, the word *aroha* or love, conveys the importance of breath. Tai (in Spiller et al., 2015) breaks down the meaning of aroha (love). *Aro* refers to thought, life principle, to pay attention, to focus, to concentrate. *Ro* is inner, within, introspection. *Hā* is life force, breath, energy. *Oha* is generosity, prosperity, abundance, wealth. With this understanding in mind, we can now see why early colonial settlers in New Zealand were called *Pākehā*. One explanation for this word is *pā* meaning to come in to contact, *ke* which means different, or unique and *hā* to share and exchange the breath. The combination of these elements is: "To come in to contact with a unique essence of the hā." (Costello, 2018). Therein is the basis of race relations from a Māori worldview: to welcome others as a unique essence and manifestation of life.

Tewa author and scholar Gregory Cajete (2015: 260) explains "the breath represents the most tangible expression of the spirit in all living things … learning begins with reflecting on the spirit's expression in the human and natural community through the understanding and use of ‘breath’ in all its forms ….” It is from a spiritual base that humans communicate holistically where “language is an expression of the sacred because it contains the power to express human thought and feeling and to emotionally affect others” (Cajete, 2015: 260). This language takes many forms, such as through our thoughts, prayers, ritual, arts, and work.

Silence that breathes permeates our consciousness: it influences our intention, how we speak, what we are in service of through our words. Cajete (2000: 73) says of Indigenous traditions, “what we think and believe and how we act in the world impacts on literally everything. We bring our reality into being by our thoughts, actions, and intentions.” He calls for us to “think the highest thought” as this is the place we are creating from—not from a destructive, excommunicated, excruciating place. Rather, we stand on spiritual ground that recognizes independency—our lives and our well-being are interconnected with those of all others.

Māori culture cultivates the space for collective reflective inquiry through the ancient process of *wānanga,* which broadly translates as “to collectively deliberate deeply with intention”. I cherish those times of *wānanga*, of sacred inquiry. Sitting in a *wharenui*, a communal meetinghouse, surrounded by the carvings of ancestors and woven *tukutuku* panels that endow spiritual meaning—such as the steps to heaven design—I feel held in a timeless sanctity invoked through *tikanga*, cultural protocols such as *karakia*, ancient incantations, and guided by *tohunga* wisdom keepers and experts (Spiller et al., 2020). Around me people lean forward listening. Others’ heads have dropped to their chests. Sometimes they look as if they are sleeping, yet really many are what I call “alpha level listening”. On many occasions I have marveled when elders whose heads have bowed to the chest suddenly rise up to make a statement so profound it leaves me in a state of awe. I feel part of a textural whole, even though what is being said might be very challenging.

There are qualities of silence present in *wānanga,* such as *nohopuku*, which translates as “sit in the belly and be silent, quiet, inactive”. It can also mean “to fast”. I see this as a fasting from speaking simply for the sake of it—or talking over others—it is a reminder to speak from a grounded, humble place. Another word for silence *whakamūmū* is explained by Milroy (2016): *E mōhio rawa ana te awe ki te huarahi whakaora i a ia anō. Ko te tutukinga waewae i konei, ko te whakamūmū i te hinengaro*. The soul always knows what to do to heal itself. The challenge is to silence the mind (Māori dictionary n.d.). We are encouraged, therefore, to reflect and develop a capacity for discernment, to speak from a place of wisdom, respect, integrity, and humility.

Michelle: The great silence

How we see the world
how we come to know the world
shapes how we act upon the world.

Our collective silence on race has resulted in asphalt or concrete over the land with highways, fences parceling land into individually owned areas, delineating “the workings of power” (Delaney, 2005: 1) through a clean outline of what is owned by whom. Our collective silence on race perpetuates the invisibility of the power of whiteness and perpetuates the race construct through performative repetition (Ahmed, 2004) demonstrating our complicity, our resignation to the growing trench between Black and white. Even this paper is performative on race, potentially critically, but still as we work to lift the lid on the silencing nature of the race construct, we are swimming in the consequences of centuries of racism. It’s suffocating, inescapable, and disturbingly normal.

How do we find a way to “see the water” that we are all swimming in? How do we collectively commit to unpicking the “possessive logic’”(Moreton-Robinson, 2015) that informs and underpins our sociocultural economic and political systems, creating racialized subjects and discourses that maintain white sovereignty? When these realities “freeze us into inaction” (Kendi, 2019: 9), what do we do? What can we do? We can develop critical reflexivity, to act upon the world through anti-racist eyes and through our “sovereign ontologies through which we know ourselves within our respective knowledge systems” (Moreton-Robinson, 2015: 192).

Addressing these questions from an individual positionality is heavy, silencing, depressing. It commits us to the existential question “Who am I?” It commits us to delving into ourselves and our complex intersections to uphold our individual rarefication. Could we create space to investigate what Moreton-Robinson (2015) calls “our sovereign ontologies”? The more helpful question is “Who are We?” and by exploring how and who we connect to, and “who we are now” (Smith et al., 2016: 137), our place, our families, and our communities will open the door to explore these deep questions.

Silence as a doorway to connection

Sometimes we are not aware of the impact we have on others. One of the reasons I did my doctoral work investigating leadership through the work of Indigenous artists is because of the sovereign ontology evident in Indigenous arts practice and how that helps us all better understand leadership in a profound way. An instructive example of this tells how the stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander returned service personnel in Australia, raised in the public imagination in the late nineties, were effectively silenced by the Australian government. Not welcome to “Returned Service League events and not encouraged to march in uniform on ANZAC commemoration” (Syron, 2015: 224), our

First Australian ex-service personnel had their stories silenced. In Syron’s review of Tom Wright’s play *Black Diggers* she quotes director Wesley Enoch who claims the work as leadership: “the aim of Indigenous theatre is to write on the public record neglected or forgotten stories” (Syron, 2015: 230). When you see the performance of an Indigenous story, do you see that as leadership? For Indigenous people, for myself, how can I not see it as leadership?

For Indigenous leaders, the crushing expectations and limiting stereotypes make leadership work both challenging and often invisible through the conventional lens of leadership. I have had many Indigenous elders teach me the same lesson again and again to slow down, quiet down that mind alive in order to truly listen, to let go of my need to “act now” in favor of being in time and place, together. I want so badly to do, to demonstrate, to be an activist, an advocate, to change things ….

And sometimes we are not aware of the impact we have on others, that being and working from the sources of who we are in and of itself can inspire others. Aboriginal boxer Lionel Rose said it best: “I wasn’t aware of the impact that I had made on the lives of Aboriginal people until I did a bit of travelling … To see the way that my people looked at me and to know that I made a difference to them was an honor.”

Connecting with those that we have impact upon is critical to the practice of leadership: quietening down to hear and see and feel how who we are and what we do is received and perceived.

I was invited to give a keynote talk at an important Indigenous arts conference that draws together Aboriginal art centers from across Central Australia—their boards, workers, artists—in Alice Springs once a year. I had just completed my PhD and had a theory of Indigenous arts leadership, so I was excited to share it. The room was full; with two big tables split up into two major language groups with a couple of interpreters working with the participants to facilitate communication. I got about five minutes into my talk when the hand of one of the senior artists rose high in the air bringing silence to the room. I stopped. Heart racing.

Trying to be calm to remain present rather than let my anxiety run me away into self-doubt and self-criticism. An exchange between the artist and the interpreter ensued and I waited. I was experiencing a certain feeling of being an outsider, despite my shared Aboriginal cultural identity. The interpreter said, “The gentleman wishes for me to translate your talk because it seems important, but I need you to slow down. I need you to not race along. The gentleman has asked for more examples because what you are saying is a little too abstract and the translation is complex.”

What a transformative moment. What happened over the next half hour or so was a dialogue between the audience, the translator, and me. My presentation became a springboard for a conversation together, for many questions, for my examples and examples from the audience. We theorized together.

Leadership emerged between us—what could have been a performance of expertise from me, landing flat without engagement, became an opportunity for us to think together.

How many times do we hear what we want to hear, our minds racing ahead or diving into the archives of our memories, not being in the here and now?

Perhaps our habitual “action” is getting in the way of truly listening … finding a generative space … finding a timeless place inside ourselves …

> … *dadirri* … It is inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness.
>
> Dadirri recognizes the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it

> calls to us … It is something like what you call "contemplation". When I experience dadirri, I am made whole again. I can sit on the riverbank or walk through the trees; even if someone close to me has passed away, I can find my peace in this silent awareness. There is no need of words. A big part of dadirri is listening. (Ungunmmerr-Bauman, 2002: 1)

Ungunmerr-Baumann writes about the patience of Aboriginal people:

My people are used to the struggle, and the long waiting. We still wait for the white people to understand us better.

We are River people.

We cannot hurry the river.

We have to move with its current and understand its ways. (Ungunmmerr-Bauman, 2017: 15)

Take a breath as you step towards a place where you can be. Sit, be still; walk, move freely; find the way you induce a sense of calm. Silence. Where are you? Really? Do you know this place? The Aboriginal name for this place? The Aboriginal people of this place? No? Silence. Disconnection. Self, walking being still, self in environment. Does the quiet feel isolating? Do you feel dislocated? Silence. Connection. You are in time and space, this particular place that is living and breathing, alive with connection. Does your silence connect you to place? Do you understand place, your place, my place? Dadirri invites you to feel that calm, a place for repose, a quiet awareness of how related we are to all things. Dadirri invites you to notice that far from being alone or isolated, you are connected to the place you find yourself, how your body occupies this place, how you are in relation to time and place.

You belong. You are because you belong.

Kathryn: Silence as a source of nourishment

Reflecting on what I find important to convey about silence at this time, in this time and place, I wanted to first immerse myself in the words and wisdom of poets. I've been fascinated for years by the question of what moves us into fear and hostility towards others and saw this comment by Rumi (1995:3): "Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking. Live in silence." After pausing to look out the window at the sky, I looked back at the screen and saw, immediately below this quote, a large bold ad stating "Assure you're carrying legally—Travel with your gun—free state carry laws map (2020 edition)." In a microcosm, I had the sense of what I see in our world. In the very moment that I wish to reflect on how silence can nourish us during the challenges presented by the pandemic and the following increasing awareness of racism, the computer presents me with what many in my country, the United States, are doing instead when they sense fear: buying and carrying a gun.

I take a long breath and again look outside. Why outside? I am interested in the spaces outside my own mind, my own study, my own version of the world. I need silence and space to be able to find my way, think for myself, know what really matters.

Some years ago, I had the good fortune to be part of small group that met monthly with Huston Smith, who introduced many people to the experiential, personal study of the religions of the world. A devout Christian who was born and spent his childhood in China with missionary parents, Smith was probably the first to invite large numbers of people to reflect in open-minded ways about the value brought to the world by the variety of religions through his book *The Religions of Man* (Smith, 1958). What struck me most in knowing him was the story he told us about how his mother introduced him at school:

"This is my son Huston. You have to go slow with him, but then he'll understand." Here was one of the more brilliant (and gentle) scholars of religion and the spirit globally, comfortable introducing himself by telling this story. It resonated inside of me. People perceive me as moving, acting, and thinking fast, as a New Yorker who speaks fast compared with the pace of spoken English in Texas (where I lived for years)—yet I too want to go slow.

Silence and our social environments

While my co-authors feel rooted in their heritage and ancestors, although I loved the museums and theater of New York and the way I was taught that Judaism highly valued intellectual curiosity, I was always seeking new perspectives. In high school and college, I focused on learning languages and seeing the world through others' eyes. I was not alone in feeling as though I had no real reference group: what is now sometimes called "white culture" then was regarded as standing for culture in general, and a main theme was alienation: many of us felt like outsiders, disconnected from other human beings and the planet itself (Wilson, 1956/1982). The America of the 1950s when I was young felt like someone else's country, with foods like white bread, salads made of boring green lettuce and tasteless tomatoes, and lots of meat.

Looking for cultures with a value for silence and wisdom traditions, I grew interested in Tibet and the contribution it had made around the world to people's awareness through the painful exile its people and its leader, the Dalai Lama, have had to endure for over fifty years. When I saw the film *Kundun* (1997), I was struck by the comment within it: "They have taken away our silence," as we watched loudspeakers being installed to blare announcements and music throughout the capital city of Lhasa (the name means "the place where the gods reside"). I studied the culture and the teachings that are at its heart, seeking treasures that might be of value for leaders around the world (Goldman Schuyler, 2012). In the process, I grew to appreciate their nuanced and deep practices for training the mind and heart. Although mindfulness has become popularized in business as something that is mastered in eight weeks or less, in my experience with masters who have devoted their lives to practice, it seems that what such awareness practices really offer takes time and patience. They are a gateway to wisdom, not just to stress management and increased performance. What is wisdom? Understanding the nature of what it is to be a human being on this planet, what it is to be conscious, and where we fit in the evolution of life in the universe.

How can we access the part of ourselves that perceives before we are taught what we should feel when we see another? Before we learn what is considered "same" and "different" in our own culture? Before being taught about skin color or sameness or difference? So many pre-verbal memories hidden deep inside. If we could connect with this place, might this move us beyond fear-based hostility towards those who look different? What generates fear, and how can we learn to listen at those moments just before we fear—see another just like me? Can we unlearn the fear-based tribal way of perceiving?

Why do people from many countries not want to live next door to someone of another race as a neighbor? According to international values polls quoted in *The Economist* (June 11, 2020), percentages of individuals who do not want a culturally different neighbor range from about 6% in the USA, to 17% in Russia, 21% in Nigeria, 25% in India, and 34% in South Korea. Might it help if children are taught mind and heart training skills in schools, regardless of what they experience in their families? Among the wisdom traditions, Tibetan Buddhism addresses this in a document known as the Prayer of

Kuntuzangpo, which speaks of what the first Buddha noticed, before our time, about how beings sensed “otherness” and developed fear, then anger, then war (Kuntuzangpo ND/2006: 79-84). From the first time I read it, I found its suggestion of a “sudden fainting away and then a subtle consciousness of wavering fear” which leads to “a separation of self and the perception of others as enemies” to be very compelling. It feels deeply familiar.

Is there a sacred silence that anyone can tune into, if they pause long enough? Writing with colleagues who focus on these questions from their own cultural history, I suddenly became aware how I had felt the need to search outside of my own culture, to one radically different and very far away, in order to find practices and a community with regard to silence and wisdom.

Finding silence

In the 17th century, the French mathematician and physicist Blaise Pascal (1670/1962: 1138) wrote “All of people’s unhappiness comes from one thing, which is that they don’t know how to remain at rest, in a room.” So this question of how to sit and listen, in silence, is neither new nor limited to one culture.

Growing up, there was no silence in my mind. There was always an inner tape playing that would repeat whatever songs I had heard most recently, or words and sentences. While I was in college, I found a fascinating science fiction book about this phenomenon: *The Mind Parasites* by Colin Wilson (1967) described how people had been invaded by beings from space that were now inside our minds. Only by going out into space could their minds finally find silence. This intrigued me. It made it seem possible to have a deep silence inside. Many years later I became intrigued by Tibetan Buddhist practices as a science or highly refined art for calming the mind, opening the heart, and developing wisdom. But it took years to find.

In order to be nourished by silence, rather than unnerved or even frightened, I had to learn to let myself breathe and fully experience whatever was happening—over and over again. Instead of thinking about what others might be saying, or planning future actions, I discovered that like Thoreau, with or without a Walden Pond and even in the middle of a city or a meeting, I could simply breathe and feel and notice. As Mary Oliver wrote, "You do not have to be good. … You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves" (Oliver, 1992:110). I appreciate the disciplined approach that Vajrayana practices bring to training the mind and heart to let go of fear and be present to the fullness of each moment. They offer many varied paths toward knowing oneself as what might be described as light, emptiness, or all possibilities.

Perhaps the highest form of awareness practice is to perturb our habitual mental and emotional responses so that we see clearly something that has been veiled by habits of mind that we don't realize we have. This is why travel historically has helped people to see life differently: they went to a new place where their old habits of mind weren't triggered, and they could see and hear what they faced with fresh eyes. That's really the purpose of awareness practices like mindfulness: not stress relief and enhanced performance, but waking up! Waking up to life, to other people, to what the effects of our actions are, individually and collectively.

Lemuel: Leadership through becoming

> I think a Native American leader has a difficult job. The job is this: to realize at each moment that you are not in control. To listen to the Spirit and spirits; to listen to the choices of wisdom from one's past; to listen and

> in a sense be, "letting go and letting God" but it's more than that. Indigenous leadership means trusting yourself enough to trust all these and find a way for the person and /or people you are leading, to find these things out for themselves. (Dr. Randy Woodley, quoted in Dobrenen, 2016: iv)

This notion of becoming the channel is fascinating to me as a leader. So, work becomes spiritual, a calling, a vocation, and a purpose that supersedes the written contract between the organization and me. The notion and act of becoming is an awareness, a change, and a condition that requires me to be cognizant of how dynamic the environment is while compelling me to be present within my own body, mind, and spirit in a way that offers wisdom to situations and circumstances. We are not separate from our character, our values, or our way of being as leaders. Recognizing our humanity as we strive to humanize our organizations is the most pressing issue for transformative practices for leaders. In becoming, one is not separated or singular in the experience, because a person turns back to legacy and history and gathers something of the past and carries it forward in spirit and mind.

Gert Biesta (2019) reminds us that it is not who we are, but how we are as educators and leaders, how we exist, what we will do with who we have become, with the competencies and wisdom we have obtained, while also acknowledging what we don’t know. We must remember that the self does not lie passively in waiting for us to discover it. Selfhood is made in the active, ongoing process of struggles to learn on the way to becoming (Kaag, 2018). As we lead, we must be conscious of the fact that we are also growing, learning, exploring, testing, our knowledge, and theories daily with the unknowns of our organizations, their constituents, and the context in which they are surrounded. The pedagogy used as we engage with our employees is active and should be at its core humanistic.

My becoming

One has to be self-realized and comfortable with standing in the rain and sun with no shelter. In her book and TED talk, Brene Brown (2012) encapsulates this experience with one term: vulnerability. It requires a display of deep authenticity, and many of us are not used to showing vulnerability at work. The notion of authenticity and vulnerability provides an avenue for individuals to connect with compassion, because they can take the mask off to share real challenges. Compassion also calls upon our spirit to lessen the suffering of other fellow humans. We must also be mindful that cultivating compassion begins with self-compassion. Self-compassion allows us to make space in our lives to observe and reflect upon our suffering while learning how to offer self-care with the “grandmother’s” mind and spirit. According to Marturano (2014), compassion tends to be one of the top resources that leaders might use in their organization, but they lack the understanding, and therefore, significantly undervalue the opportunity to embrace it with their teams.

Being a leader and becoming a leader that is led by spirit, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness for better or worse. As a leader, I project the conditions of my soul onto those individuals I interact with because this contact becomes a means for dialogue about important and critical issues. Viewed from this angle, the role of a leader, de facto mentor, or educator, holds a mirror to the soul (Palmer, 1998). I want to make sure that I share whatever wisdom and spirit I have gained with my staff and students. As Rene Dubos (1981: 133) noted, "human institutions must be held together by forces of a spiritual nature"—an insightful way of thinking about leadership.

There are multiple tensions that most leaders deal with in their lives that makes them part of silence on some things and silence breakers on others. Those of us who are open and live with the notion of spiritual knowledge must always be mindful of how we interact with others as we lead in secular organizations and choose the right moments to shatter silence for a greater cause. I know my purpose in life is to be a bridge between worlds. This tension is real for any of us who must live in two worlds at once and who have the courage to claim all of our rights to our heritage and identities: We must learn how to use silence. Some scholars define this existence as double consciousness (Dubois, 1903) or twoness: being born and raised in one culture but learning to survive in another (Eastman a.k.a. Ohíye S'a, 1916).

Yet, as I ponder, there have been those moments where an incident or experience awakened me to the full extent of how some people perceived me and how I view myself in this world. As a Black man who is mixed race, during this time of racial unrest I stand up for justice and affirm that Black Lives Matter and the killing of Black and brown people, by police and by each other, must end.

As I continued to experience life and to develop the contradictions or tensions of my "becoming", I always sought to first please God and second to ask the question of how this will reflect upon my ancestors. The simple matter here is it takes guts to break the silence and to express myself and possibly put a future at risk. As I open up and share myself with the world, I do believe it will affect my life in many ways. This becomes the most powerful question when one is out in the world. I am reflecting on what I could have done, given my position, to avoid our current racial tensions by speaking so that others are uplifted and empowered. And reflecting on what I may do now. Can I speak up and take the criticism when I am too tired to fight? Correct someone even when I know they do not have malice in their heart or intention—not miss the opportunity to educate? Remain gentle and silent instead of speaking up loudly? In short, how do I live my life every day so that I can make a difference in my world, organizations, and communities to lessen racism, pain, suffering, and isolation of individuals and groups?

There comes a time when society has reached a point where enough is enough with regard to how individuals are treated. The consciousness of our world is highly sensitive right now. I think everyone wants to feel as if they matter, are valued, and belong. For this to happen, we must embrace the fact that we experience events together. We should respect, care for, and acknowledge each other, and understand that we are not responsible for our past but clearly are affected by our histories, be they positive or negative. We need to embrace this moment unapologetically and acknowledge that there are serious inequities that are just too harsh for anyone to ignore. It is not acceptable to kill Black and brown children, men, or women as if they do not matter. How do we engage and lead for transformation to address equity, inclusion, and anti-racist policies, procedures, and activities? Equally important are the issues of internal culture that inhibit a sense of belonging by people of color. How then does our current thinking as leaders fail us in creatively addressing the current issues of our society, specifically anti-racist behaviors and thinking?

In reflecting on police brutality, the racist criminal system, and the educational system, have we ever stopped to think what our role is in supporting or disrupting the greater system? How then are we manifesting civic education and citizenship; more importantly, who is teaching and in control of how good citizenship looks? I do not believe one single person is okay with the idea that to keep one’s knee on someone's neck for 8:47 minutes is good citizenship or humanistic. The harder question is, what role did I or any other leader have in how our society has been shaped that would allow such behavior to happen? This is the question we all must deal with in what has been passed down from one generation to the next. We must first own this problem and our role in it.

Discussion

Our contribution to race and leadership silence is to focus on how critical it is to reclaim silence and distinguish between fear-based silence and sacred silence. Fear-based silence disconnects people from themselves, each other, and the planet. It can be a running away from discomfort, a covering up of trepidation and anxiety, of giving tacit approval to racism and preserving status, privilege, and power. It can be a form of collective amnesia and willful ignorance. This kind of silence is the world of masks and superficiality, and at its worst harbors prejudice, hate, and destruction. The implication for race and leadership is that leadership that is founded upon or tolerates fear-based silence is a leadership that allows a festering of racism, ignorance, intolerance, suppression, and deep divides. This is not healthy leadership.

Sacred silence by contrast heals and raises consciousness. We present how this is critical for change—both at the personal level, but more generatively in the company of others, our communities. For change and disruption to the ever-violent race construct, we need leadership. For the kind of leadership required to consistently and indefatigably push for change and disruption to the race construct, we need a practice of sacred silence. Sacred silence cultivates the courage required to look fearlessly within personal shadows and bravely at what is required to make the world a safe, secure, and just place for all.

Four themes have surfaced from our independent reflections on race, leadership, and silence. They are listening dialogue, returning to Mother Earth wisdom, honoring potential, and practicing mindfulness in a context of collective wisdom. Below we briefly examine each of these themes as an invitation to developing a collective practice for change.

Listening dialogue

Sacred silence is a dialogue of listening to the heart and from the heart. This dialogue is with oneself and with others in a collective endeavor. “Dialogue is at the heart of the process of critical consciousness. It involves mutual, respectful communication between people, engaging the heart and mind, the intellect and emotions” (Ledwith, 2016: 57). This generative kind of silence, like a deep spring, waits in stillness until something emerges or something impacts. By slowing down and connecting we can remember who we are, causing ripples in ourselves and for others.

Carol Gilligan’s guiding words encourage us in this listening endeavor: “my interest lies in the interactions of experiences and thought, in different voices and the dialogues to which they give rise, in the way we listen to ourselves and others in the stories we tell about our lives” (Gilligan, 1982: 2). Our voices matter, the voices of diverse leaders matter.

Return to Mother Earth wisdom

Throughout this paper has been a call for us all, as leaders, to be present, to connect to original instructions — the wellspring of ancient Mother Earth wisdom that guides us in how to be in relationship with each other and the world. Freire (1993), Kaur (2017), Marsden (2003), and Merculieff (2013) have each, from across time and space, encouraged us to enter the womb, a womb of silence deep in Mother Earth wisdom. We remember that we are a part of the whole: of the earth and sky and stars and rocks—bringing a different understanding of time, of influence, and of change.

In this belonging, relational view of what Marsden (2003) calls a “Woven Universe” we self-actualize through relationships with our kin and friendship networks, our work and community interactions, and our sense of belonging to place and cosmos. Sacred silence honors this interweaving of all of creation. It gives rise to leaders who are spiritually grounded and present, and who move from a base of wisdom.

Silence can be a beckoning for connection—with ourselves, with the place we find ourselves in, with the people we belong with and to. Knowing dwells in silence. As we are “being” in time and space, we can connect to a deeper understanding of knowing, remembering who we are through relationship. Indigenous ideas of intelligence and knowing are founded in and through relationship. It is through interdependence that “responsibility for others, allowing your thinking to be validated by others, and seeing yourself through the lens of *other*” (Meyer, 2003: 169) becomes a channel for collective intelligence. So we consider what we bring to the community, and through deep listening we can develop “a purposeful plan to act, with actions informed by learning, wisdom, and the informed responsibility that comes with knowledge” (Atkinson, 2002: 16).

Honoring potential

Incorporating the "self" into what we do as leaders is essential to our becoming. "It is the highest function of the executive to develop a deep understanding of self and one’s colleagues" (Hodgkinson, 1991: 112). To further demonstrate this point of self in our practices, James MacGregor Burns (1978: 20) underscores that "transcending leadership is dynamic leadership in the sense that leaders throw themselves into a relationship with followers, who will feel ‘elevated’ by it and often become more active themselves, thereby creating new cadres of leaders."

The paradigm of cultivation for leadership focuses on how human beings become who they are and continue to become through their engagement with the world around them (Biesta, 2019). John Dewey also offers a theory of reflective learning or wisdom. In simple terms, by allowing the human to experience new social settings or environments, one learns to adapt and gain knowledge, experiences, and wisdom—to grow while reflecting on this development (Dewey, 1958). This notion becomes one of the most salient of tools for today's leaders because of the constantly changing environment of society, organizations, and families. Therefore, individuals who depend on traditional principles of leadership and management and ignore the changing context of our times and knowledge that emerges from wisdom, face a difficult and uncertain future (Fullan, 2006; Fullan and Scott, 2009; Schon, 1990).

Mindfulness practices in a context of collective wisdom

A reflective leader is one who spends time getting to understand the self and the needs of the organization while creating an environment where various multigenerational constituents feel welcome to engage in difficult conversations.

At this moment in time, in a world struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic, the ravages of racism, and troubled economies everywhere, practices to support wise leadership are more important than ever. Yet few have researched the value of ongoing practice that connects a leader with herself, her world, and the people around her: Most research is about specific practices, such as the mindfulness-based stress reduction developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn and its offshoots (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). In their critical assessment of the research on mindfulness and how the notion has been used in recent years, Richard Badham and Elizabeth King (2019: 1-2) bring out the potential for such practices to enhance the wisdom of organizations, while they critique most of the research as being grounded in "firmly held and deeply established narratives about mindfulness" and conducted within the context of one discipline substituting "academic precision for relevance and comprehensiveness."

Embodied awareness practices and leadership coaching in the context of developing wisdom are key to developing the resilience and broad view needed for significant change leadership. Such practices have the power to connect one with inner silence, with the vibrant beauty of our planet and life itself, and with other beings.

Conclusion

Our times call for leaders who seek to think the highest thoughts and to create multidimensional well-being in the service of healthy communities, workplaces, and the environment. These are leaders who refuse to countenance any form of silence that suffocates and perpetuates unhealthy systems of alienation, disconnection, fear, hate, judgment, and oppression. In such a world it is not that a person liberates only himself or herself, or someone else, but that people "in communion liberate each other" (Freire, 1970: 133). Each of us, as leaders in our own ways, can step into the vanguard of change and be beacons of light that illuminate the way and take effective action.

And it is here that we can begin, collectively, to create a map. Though this paper is not presented as a map, we, more than ever, collectively need to create a map. Our map needs to be about our change practice—not a destination we know the location of, but more a collation of the territories we must walk through together. Dreaming of utopian visions is a folly, and dwelling upon only violence is dangerous. We must collectively look forward, not blind to the past nor to what is happening in front of our eyes, but with a stubborn steel commitment to change, drawing upon the wisdom of Native American US

Poet Laureate Joy Harjo, as she writes in this excerpt of her poem "A Map to the Next World" (Harjo, 2001: 19-20):

> Once we knew everything in this lush promise.
>
> What I am telling you is real and is printed in a warning on the map. Our forgetfulness stalks us, walks the earth behind us, leaving a trail of paper diapers, needles, and wasted blood.
>
> An imperfect map will have to do, little one.

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