



The Every Day As Sacred: Trailing Back by the Spiritual Proof Fence in the Academy

Riyad Ahmed Shahjahan
Department of Theory and Policy Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Abstract

The purpose of my research is to understand how a socially diverse group of spiritually-minded activist scholars integrate their spirituality into their academic activities in the Canadian university context. My primary goal here is to make visible the experiences of spiritually minded academics as they integrate spirituality into academic spaces in the face of hegemonic structures thus revealing the role of spirituality in social transformation within and outside of the academy.

Fifteen racially minoritized faculty from different disciplines, ethnicities and spiritual traditions participated in this qualitative based study which employed a spiritually based epistemological framework. I interviewed these scholars using an open ended format for approximately three to six hours each and collected documents such as life notes, curriculum vitae, published articles and syllabi constructed by participants. I analyzed this sacred data using a combination of theoretical frameworks, including anti-colonial, indigenous knowledge, critical faith-based and sacred subjectivity perspectives.

I found that spiritually-minded activist scholars were engaging in a *spiritual praxis* to transgress the norms of the academy in their academic practices. A spiritual praxis 1) encompasses a spiritual worldview, ways of knowing, and a way of being in the every day world; 2) recognizes that being spiritual is a difficult process that involves engaging with and preventing the daily oppression of oneself and others (humans and non-humans). This involves recognizing spirituality as the source of healing or as a way of being grounded in a philosophy of possibility; 3) recognizes one's agency has spiritual roots. I examine and provide examples of how a spiritual praxis was operationalized in the context of teaching inside and outside the classroom, in research practices, academic theorization, development of curriculum and assignments, activism within the academy, resisting academic capitalism and individual productivity, and undoing student harassment. I end with a discussion of the scholarly implications of this research and strategies and recommendations for centering spirituality in the academy.