

Editorial Remarks Conversations with Indigenous Knowledges

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Article abstract

A brief introduction to “Indigenous Knowledges,” a special issue of KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies that includes sixteen contributions in diverse formats, including multimedia. In these editorial remarks, the editors reflect on the discussions that led to the special issue, their responsibility to honour the work of contributors from many different nations and communities, the ways that conventional forms of academic writing can be inhospitable to Indigenous knowledges, and conversation as methodology. This short introduction also links out to the recording of the virtual launch of “Indigenous Knowledges,” hosted and moderated by Shelagh Rogers and featuring editors Robert L. A. Hancock, Ry Moran, Carey Newman, and Andrea Walsh and contributors Jessie Loyer, Darrell Loyer, and Barry Pottle.

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EDITORIAL

Editorial Remarks: Conversations with Indigenous Knowledges

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A brief introduction to “Indigenous Knowledges,” a special issue of *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* that includes sixteen contributions in diverse formats, including multimedia. In these editorial remarks, the editors reflect on the discussions that led to the special issue, their responsibility to honour the work of contributors from many different nations and communities, the ways that conventional forms of academic writing can be inhospitable to Indigenous knowledges, and conversation as methodology. This short introduction also links out to the recording of the virtual launch of “Indigenous Knowledges,” hosted and moderated by Shelagh Rogers and featuring editors Robert L. A. Hancock, Ry Moran, Carey Newman, and Andrea Walsh and contributors Jessie Loyer, Darrell Loyer, and Barry Pottle.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge

This special issue started with a conversation. In 2019, Ry, Carey, and Shelagh came together to talk about reconciliation and Indigenous collections in cultural memory institutions in the public panel discussion “Building Reconciliation Through the Archive: The Past, Present, and Future of Indigenous Documentary Heritage,” organized by the University of Victoria Libraries for the University Librarian’s Lecture Series and held in the First Peoples House on campus.¹ Over two hours, they addressed a range of topics: the complicity of archives in the deliberate erasure of Indigenous languages and cultures and the myth of archives as an antidote to the “loss” of cultural heritage; the importance of living heritage, particularly the knowledge of Elders, and the need to create space in libraries and archives for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage; Indigenous perspectives of land as a source of knowledge and wisdom, connected to culture, language, and

¹The lecture was inspired by the Building Reconciliation Forum, an annual national forum that works toward implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (TRC) Calls to Action within post-secondary institutions. The University of Victoria hosted the fourth annual forum in 2018, the theme of which was *Ts’its’u’ watul tseep*, a Hul’q’umi’num teaching that means “to help one another.”

worldview—a kind of archival record—and environmental destruction as a threat to the land and the knowledge it holds; the challenge of building a future based on reconciliation when many non-Indigenous people still do not understand Canada's colonial history or how the concentric harms of colonial genocide continue to affect the lives of Indigenous peoples; and the various ways that individual Indigenous communities view ownership of tangible objects/land and intangible stories/songs. This conversation inspired subsequent conversations among Ry, Carey, and Shelagh with friends and colleagues Andrea, Rob, and Jonathan Bengtson, university librarian and editor-in-chief of *KULA*. These exchanges led to the idea to carry that dialogue forward in a special issue of the journal, expanding the scope of the conversation to invite other voices from both within and outside of the academy to contribute and honour the plurality of Indigenous knowledges.

The contributions presented in this special issue of *KULA* challenge both convention and contemporary practice within social memory keeping institutions. Many of the contributions address poor past practice through these institutions. Lack of engagement with Indigenous peoples, taking materials from Indigenous communities, and inaccurate descriptions or narrations about Indigenous peoples absent meaningful engagement are all examples of past practice that needs to stop and requires repair. Correcting these past mistakes is not an act of reconciliation per se, but does mark an important step in the journey towards reconciliation. The establishment of respectful relationships can and must start with acknowledging the harms done and taking necessary steps to correct them. Many contributions in this issue highlight how acts of working together to repair those past mistakes can form a basis for improved relations moving forward. Central in this, we wish to caution against framing these acts through a lens of benevolence. Instead, these acts can and must be seen as essential steps towards the realization of human rights articulated in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). The rights enshrined in UNDRIP place responsibilities on state actors, public servants, and institutions, just as they articulate the specific rights that Indigenous peoples have to accuracy of description and corresponding rights to determine how they wish to be referred to.

Other contributions raise important questions that delve more deeply into matters embedded within the articulation of these rights within Indigenous nations and, more broadly defined, Indigenous communities. For example, questions surrounding how best to cite traditional knowledge contained within certain contributions left the editors feeling that some contemporary practices in publishing are inadequate to express concepts of relationship and responsibility of an author to the knowledge and/or knowledge keeper cited. At worst, citation practices that centre authors as the “creators” of long-standing community-based knowledge may in fact perpetuate colonial harms through failing to properly recognize the existence and care of knowledge within communities. The editors concluded that there is a need for more nuanced mechanisms to cite traditional knowledge and the relationships that come with it.

Many contributions challenged us as an editorial team as we grappled with tensions between past, present, and future states of Indigenous rights and community-based practices. While such tensions may be celebrated, they also evoke feelings of changes that are needed. Collectively, such tensions signal that the work of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships is actively underway, with the recognition that some of the most important work has not yet begun. Framing the call for submissions to this issue on Indigenous Knowledges was challenging. We wished to include as wide a range of contributions as possible, while recognizing that we were simultaneously neither able to foresee all of the potential forms that these could take, nor able to avoid placing limits around what we would be able to consider and ultimately include. Once we began working with the submissions, we recognized that we were responsible for working across several systems of knowledge. We had to consider how we were responsible for, and to, the knowledge shared through the contributions, and accountable to the relationships the authors carried, which formed the basis for the submissions. A central concern for the editorial team were the constraints we felt around re-presenting oral knowledges and forms of expression.

We did receive proposals and submissions that did not fit within the categories already used by the journal. In these cases we were able to negotiate the creation of a new category for *KULA*, *Conversations*, which foregrounds the process of establishing and nurturing relationships as a key component of the contributions featured in it. This new section recognizes knowledge produced within Indigenous communities that is not premised on “research” fundamentals, but is nonetheless foregrounded by the intention to share experiences and understandings that are framed by different departure points of inquiry. Knowledges presented in *Conversations* reflect the everyday sharing of ideas and passing of information through relational contexts.

The editorial process also came to embody the values and knowledges that were reflected and forwarded through the work done by the contributors and their collaborators. From the outset, the editorial team came together through a network of existing and emerging relationships, and scheduled meetings evolved into the form of a visit, with all of the humour, respect, and care that Indigenous communities attach to that form of engagement with friends and family.

A primary takeaway for the editorial team was that conversation, relationship, and sharing (and humour) are absolutely vital within this broad process of promoting and celebrating Indigenous knowledges. The generative

role of collective work and reciprocity within the editorial team was foundational in our approach to the special issue. To be certain, no member of the editorial team possessed the range of knowledge and skill necessary to fully address the complexity of matters that arose during the process of engaging with the knowledges within this special issue. Instead, extensive conversation and reflection were present throughout this entire process—at times slowing the work down, at times even resulting in delayed responses to contributors and others. Despite some of the challenges posed by the highly relational nature of the editorial process, the team feels that it was of significant and lasting value—both in terms of long-term knowledge production and in terms of deepening the relationships so vital in enabling full transmission of thought, experience, and knowledge. To that end, each member's gifts are cherished and valued as a unique element of a larger whole. Gifts such as Shelagh Rogers's innate ability to create space for dialogue, conversation, and reflection was of significant benefit to this work, equal to the strong theoretical and scholarly approaches other members of the team brought.

Central to the reflexivity inherent in the editing work was our sense of responsibility to future generations, namely through the establishment and maintenance of respectful relationships as part of the overall process of truth telling and reconciliation. We tried to be attendant to our responsibilities related to the intergenerational transmission of knowledge.

During the production of this issue, the revelation of 215+ unmarked graves of children who attended the former Kamloops Indian Residential School weighed heavily on our collective hearts and minds. This event, and the ensuing discoveries of gravesites at other schools, impressed on us another form of relationship/responsibility that must be respected when we seek to create knowledge that involves Indigenous peoples' lives and histories; this is the responsibility of the academy to be responsive to what is happening outside of it, in timely ways. To this end, the editorial team struggled alongside authors with the timelines for publishing research. We received a contribution to the issue at the outset of the editorial process that demonstrated institutional attempts to critically rethink the purpose of a particular church archive in light of Indigenous-led truth telling. Yet, in light of the ongoing confirmation of graves associated with a residential school run by that church, we felt a responsibility to press pause on publishing this material. Central in this decision was a recognition that a lack of attention or failure to consider all aspects of an idea may in fact create injury or harm to future generations. While the transmission of ideas that enhance the realization of human rights is a desirable action, being on guard against ideas that may, in a delicate or submerged manner, limit the exercise of human rights is of significant importance in the care and handling of Indigenous knowledges. The collective past and present remain full of assumptions and perspectives that echo patterns of intergenerational ignorance, prejudice, and racism that continue to surface through intentional and unintentional actions.

What is clear from both the important contributions contained within this issue and the discussions among the members of the editorial team is that the work is far from over. There remains a long and winding road ahead. But perhaps in this, it is the deceptively complex question so often asked by Shelagh Rogers and explored in the conversation that kicked off this special issue that yields a particular promise for the future: the question of “what's love got to do with it?” Does love—love of the pursuit of knowledge, love for the promotion and cherishing of broadly recognized and affirmed human rights, love for all of creation and the very earth itself, love of one another in finding pathways of lasting respect, reciprocity, and generosity of spirit—offer a pathway? Of the many pathways that can be followed into the future, the editorial team is convinced that love and respect are essential starting points.

Watch the virtual launch of “Indigenous Knowledges” here.

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