

Introduction

From the Guest Editor

This inaugural issue *Indigenous Knowledge: Other Ways of Knowing*, a publication of the Penn State Libraries' Interinstitutional Center for Indigenous Knowledge (ICIK) highlights the vital role that storytelling plays in articulating and representing indigenous rights. Storytelling is a narrative form that all cultures practice. Storytelling, at its core, recounts events and the characters that shape, and are shaped by, such events (Bal 5). Societies cannot survive without practicing storytelling, since this practice involves all forms of narration and serves to convey the attitudes, beliefs, healing remedies, sacred acts, mythological lessons and figures, philosophies, and otherwise daily activities that come together to create identities. However, indigenous storytelling is also a primary method to convey lived realities, core values, and also informs and shapes tribal governing principles (Corntassel 138). Therefore, indigenous storytelling is a vital practice for defining political, historical, cultural, and even economic concerns, and it has been crucial to international rights discourses between indigenous leaders and rights organizations. Though storytelling has evolved in modern times to include new media, such as television and film, the basic elements and forms are ancient and have not changed. This inaugural issue of *Indigenous Knowledge: Other Ways of Knowing* draws our attention to indigenous storytelling because of its power to convey a core principal of indigenous rights' doctrine: the preservation and continuance of tribal cultural practices, including language preservation, and, as a result, the assertion of unique indigenous identities.

The [spring 2014](#) and [summer 2014](#) issues of ICIK E-News highlighted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and began a conversation about this document. UN DRIP, as the declaration is commonly called, cautions indigenous peoples and their allies that, "The adoption of the Declaration by the General Assembly does not guarantee that all nations will ratify the Declaration (the U.S. Congress has not done so), or that those nations that have ratified UN DRIP, will necessarily be bound by its precepts." It is only through continuous dialogue and interventions that rights may be realized by indigenous peoples everywhere. While the 2014 issues of ICIK E-News described UN DRIP, the inaugural issue of *Indigenous Knowledge: Other Ways of Knowing* features four essays contributed by scholars who use their skill as critics to examine narrative expressions of indigenous rights in North America, South America, and Eurasia (Fennoscandia: the far north of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and northwestern Russia).

This project began in the summer of 2013 with inquiries sent to several organizations (including ICIK's list serve subscribers), publications and scholars. The authors were selected for their ability to broach interdisciplinary themes of language, literature, and indigenous rights doctrine that did not readily lend themselves to easily manageable critiques. Their essays reflect the skill and care necessary to handle concepts not often in direct tension, nor are these concepts typically in synthesis, which, when taken together, posed challenges to the development of form and content. Therefore, I would like to thank the authors, Sarah Anderson, Ida Day, Christopher Greiner, and Juanita Pahdopony, for dedicating their time, energy, skills, and research to this issue.

According to [UN DRIP](#), the development of a unique indigenous identity through the preservation and continuance of language and cultural practices lies at the core of rights' doctrine, which states "indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such." In addition, rights discourses within traditional and modern indigenous narratives are not merely a reflection of global similarities in indigenous struggles for agency and autonomy; they are also a reflection of the evolution of ancient traditions when they are brought into modern lived experiences; and, they are in constant revision and dialogue with modern narrative forms and current knowledge. When indigenous peoples practice storytelling, whether through the oral tradition or in written form, they are performing essential roles as cultural activists, asserting identity within a local and national context. This activism through story platforms encourages indigenous peoples to maintain acts of transculturation between tribal communal forms and practices and national cultures, rather than acts of assimilation, which have historically proven to be a force that results in indigenous extinction.

The attention to storytelling practices also brings language rights to the forefront of this issue's focus. All of the essays in this issue note the presence of both Western and indigenous languages (narratives written in English also include Comanche, Anishinaabe, and Sami languages; and, narratives written in Spanish include varying amounts of Zapotec and Quechuan). This issue of *Indigenous Knowledge: Other Ways of Knowing* is simultaneously helping to draw attention to language rights while exposing the historical and contemporary loss of indigenous languages in our 21st century world. Of the 6,000+ languages used in the world today, half will likely be [extinct](#) by the end of this century. A majority of these will be indigenous languages (UNESCO). Many languages have already been lost or are dying with the elders who speak them. The death of languages is synonymous with the loss of unique indigenous identities; and, indeed, it signals a loss of indigenous knowledges, including knowledge of our world's biodiversity (Moskowitz).

In this issue, scholars from diverse fields examine four narrative forms: personal memoir and the oral tradition, testimonial, poetry, and film. Each article analyzes different

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indigenous rights themes, ranging from the importance of intergenerational storytelling, indigenous testimonios as activist narratives, women's roles as keepers of cultural knowledge and as liberators, and poetry as an art that narrates indigenous relations with biodiverse lands. Each author in this issue utilizes the tools of both humanities and social science disciplines, even disciplines within science. The interdisciplinary nature of the essays in this issue is not necessarily new. Yet what is emergent is how each essay shifts between narrative analysis and the effects the narrative has in the assertion of indigenous rights claims, both locally and globally. By recognizing the bridging that is occurring in their research, the authors, and arguably the readers, are becoming aware of the simultaneous, yet separate effects that such research has as it shifts in perspective between Western (European) and non-Western (indigenous) discourses.

It is in this spirit that the first essay in this issue of *Indigenous Knowledge: Other Ways of Knowing*, is Juanita Pahdopony's personal memoir, "Kwasinapoo (Snake Medicine)." Pahdopony's reflective essay appears first because it directs us to traditional oral storytelling and its roots as an intergenerational performance. Her grandfather retells the story of Kwasinapoo with her father present in the room, and this act of kinship and oral performance made her aware of the transformative significance of their meeting. Pahdopony confirms the validity and power of Comanche intergenerational storytelling by recounting the learning and communal affiliation that resulted from this traditional Comanche storytelling act and how it shaped her adult identity.

Ida Day's essay on Javier Castellano's monograph of testimonials, *El cultivo del maíz en Yojovi* (The Cultivation of Corn in Yojovi) addresses the testimonial as a form for asserting Yojovi rights to practice traditional corn farming in contrast to contemporary farming practices linked to modern genetic crop modification. In addition, Day argues that Castellano's collection of Zapotec corn farmers' testimonials helps counter negative stereotypes in mainstream media that depict indigenous peoples using protagonists that are cast as either "good," "ridiculous," or "nostalgic." For Day, Zapotec farmers in Castellano's book use testimony as a method of resistance and dialogue with modern science, with the hope that the world's ecological problems may find viable solutions in the face of non-sustainable ecological practices.

Sarah Anderson's article, "Quechuan Voices: The Art of Storytelling Through Song," depicts Claudia Llosa's 2009 film, *The Milk of Sorrow* (*La teta asustada*). Anderson examines Llosa's film for its focus on Quechuan female agency after marginalization, rape, racism, and lack of communication due to lingering colonialism after Peru's independence from Spain, and Peru's 20 year civil war, which ended in 2000. Anderson argues that Llosa's film creates a feminist counter-narrative to Peru's national discourses that have historically oppressed Quechuan communities politically, economically, racially, and culturally. Anderson foregoes discussion of film media as a narrative vehicle. Instead, she

critiques the role of a Quechuan/Spanish bilingual song, performed by the protagonist Fausta, in the representation of Quechuan women's rights to create knowledge, especially sacred knowledge, food knowledge, and knowledge of women's bodies as a source of creation, strength, and courage.

Christopher Greiner's article, "'The North Chose Us': Selected Poems by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää as Expressions of Sami Cultural Ecology and Indigenous Rights Concerns," splits his discussion into two separate concerns: how Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's poetry should be read for its emphasis on Sami relations with the surrounding lands, and how his poetry structures content to constitute a myriad of narrative forms, including dance, performance, song and creative story. Greiner stresses that such poetic configurations are unique to the Sami because they evoke a core Sami worldview: their relations with sacred lands is built on the perception that the "land chose us," which is a reversal of the typical narration of land affiliation in storytelling tropes. Like Day's and Anderson's articles, Greiner makes reference to the conflict apparent between colonial (European) and indigenous philosophies. In this case, Greiner sheds light on colonial views that lands are conquered and owned, rather than the indigenous Sami view that the lands select the Sami to co-exist and care for them, causing the Sami to surrender to the surrounding ecology.

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As you read the essays in this issue of *Indigenous Knowledge: Other Ways of Knowing*, consider how language and storytelling work simultaneously, yet separately, to assert language rights and represent multiple thematic rights concerns expressed in UN DRIP, such as: traditional food production, sacred healing remedies, land preservation, and the development of a distinct indigenous identity.

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