

# ab-Original



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*ab-Original: Journal of Indigenous Studies and First Nations and First Peoples' Cultures* is devoted to issues of indigeneity in the new millennium. It is a multi-disciplinary journal embracing themes such as art, history, literature, politics, linguistics, health sciences, and law. It is a portal for new knowledge and contemporary debate whose audience is not only that of academics and students but professionals involved in shaping policies with regard to concern relating to Indigenous peoples.

### **Submission Information**

Publishing two issues per year, the content will consist of both themed and unthemed editions, based on considerations of topicality, the amount, and quality of submissions. The journal encourages authors to submit unsolicited articles and comprehensive review essays. Authors interested in contributing short research reports, or ideas for thematic editions, should contact the editors before submitting a manuscript or proposal. Each issue will consist of 40,000–50,000 words. All academic articles should be approximately 6,000–10,000 words long. An abstract of approximately 150 words must accompany each manuscript. All articles and comprehensive review essays will be peer-reviewed. Opinion pieces or short research reports, which are not peer reviewed, should be approximately 1,500 to 3,000 words in length with abstracts no more than 50 words long.

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## FROM THE EDITOR

*ab-Original: Journal of Indigenous Studies and First Nations and First Peoples' Cultures* is now in its second year and is gaining wide interest from researchers around the world. In the spirit of forward thinking, original and critical scholarship we again bring you an issue that ranges across issues of importance to Indigenous peoples from Africa to Australia then across the Pacific to North America. I take this opportunity to thank Lorena Sekwan Fontaine for her role as editor in our inaugural year and to introduce Professor Barry Judd as the new member of our editorial team, but certainly not new to the journal as he was part of the founding group and helped set the agenda for its future. Both Lorena and Barry are scholars who include in their practice research with their own communities. Both focus on translating research into applied and tangible outcomes that are useful to the communities with whom they work. It is particularly gratifying to see that, in the same spirit, our contributors are including members of the communities with whom they are conducting research as authors and researchers in their own right. The editors encourage this approach as it is giving voice to people who are often voiceless in scholarly journals.

Barry is a scholar of wide repute for his research into Indigenous sport and in particular the impact of that industry on Indigenous men. He is a descendent of the *Pitjantjatjara* people of inland arid Australia and works from the Alice Springs campus of Charles Darwin University, near his peoples' lands, in the very heart of the Australian continent. Barry is exploring the benefits that being "in-place" can bring to Indigenous focused research because he says it increases the capacity for scholars to accurately restate the voice of Indigenous people and communities to the broader world. He also believes it helps to ensure the research that emerges does so in the context of relationships that are ethical not only by university standards but, more importantly, by those set by Indigenous people themselves. The articles in this issue are concerned with localized Indigenous research practice and methodologies developed by Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous colleagues in research that are based on deep understanding of communities.

Barry has this message for our contributors and readers: “the importance of *ab-Original* in providing voice to Indigenous peoples cannot be understated. In Australia, the hard work of Indigenous peoples to reconstitute and reset settler-indigenous relations through the ‘Uluru Statement of the Heart,’<sup>1</sup> a public demand in May 2017 by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for equality of representation in the Australian Constitution, has been rejected by the settler-colonial state. Efforts to enshrine an Indigenous Voice in the constitution have been characterized as undemocratic leaving Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders without recognition or representation in Australian politics and with no way to influence the policies and programs that impact their lives in ways both mundane and violent every single day. Such situations are hardly unique to Australia. Where the governments of settler-colonial states are resistant and/or hostile to the political struggles of Indigenous peoples, ‘the republic of ideas’ that rests in the academy becomes all the more important, providing Indigenous scholars, activists, and artists a place to give voice to their knowledges, perspectives, agendas, needs, and aspirations. In the absence of a place in formal state politics scholarly platforms such as *ab-Original* provide an important counter to the anti-Indigenous nationalist discourse propagated by settler-colonial states. The same point can also be made of our non-Indigenous supporters whose messages of support are often denied outlet in other scholarly journals as well as in “mainstream” media more broadly.”

The Editors encourage all scholars, whether they identify as Indigenous or not, who are undertaking research on matters of critical interest to Indigenous communities worldwide to submit scholarly articles, opinion pieces, and reviews of books, exhibitions, and performances for publication in *ab-Original*.

In the lead article, “Nya Anghuwa Che’ (Our Food Gives Us Life): Exploring Indigenous Perspectives on Traditional Food Gathering and Foraging in an Irigwe Community from Nigeria,” Majing Oloko and Shailesh Shukla explore the Irigwe’s perspective on their food system through participatory research tools. The authors argue that as well as playing an important role in preserving culture, knowledge systems associated with Indigenous food can inform policy development relating to food security and to the protection of biodiversity.

In the second article, “Connections with the Land: A Scoping Review on Cultural Wellness Retreats as Health Interventions for Indigenous Peoples Living with HIV, Hepatitis C, or Both,” Dana Harper Krementz, Chris Macklin, Alexandra King, Taylor Fleming, Amani Kafeety, Sandy Lambert, Sandy Leo Laframboise, and Valerie Nicholson discuss HIV/HCV and the

role of colonization as a binding force, Indigenous ways of knowing, and land-based retreats. They present their findings from a scoping literature review on the topic of land-based, healing retreats for Indigenous people who are living with HIV, hepatitis C, or both.

In “You Can’t Just Rely on What You Know Now’: Community Teachers’ Perspectives on Language Education in a Revitalization Context,” Kitty-Jean Laginha and Ahmar Mahboob present and discuss the findings of interviews with community language teachers (primarily of Gumbaynggirr, an Aboriginal language of coastal northern New South Wales, Australia) regarding their approaches to and perceptions of their language education practice, including their motivations, pedagogical orientations, choices, and aims.

The practice of ethnographic writing is explored by Camilla Brattland, Britt Kramvig, and Helen Verran in “Doing Indigenous Methodologies: Toward a Practice of the ‘Careful Partial Participant.’” The authors describe teaching through experimental writing workshops designed to introduce students to a way of writing that expresses Indigenous methodologies in recognizing multiple epistemic authorities. In approaching writing through a differently configured author, the authors propose a form of participatory ethnographic writing that encourages writers to see themselves as partially participating in the collective workings of Indigenous knowledge communities.

In the final article, “The Narrative and Poetical Role of a Polynesian Literary Myth: Canoes of the Origins in Contemporary Texts from French Polynesia, New Zealand, and Samoa,” Chloé Angué discusses how the rewriting of the Polynesian migration allows contemporary authors to “write back” to historians and others who ignored the Polynesian heritage, or failed to recognize its value, thereby giving the myth of the original migration a political dimension. In these novels, the quest of the hero is filled with the memory of the great migration, which adds to the postcolonial protest discourse.

This volume also includes the opinion piece “Welcome to Country Speeches: A Personal Perspective from a Larrakia Man.” Welcome to Country speeches are used in Australia to open events, conferences, and ceremonies. Roman Curtis discusses the opportunities to educate and inform that are available to Indigenous people who are invited to make a Welcome to Country speech

*Jakelin Troy*

## **NOTE**

1. For more information, please visit: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3755370-ULURU-STATEMENT-FROM-the-HEART.html>

# **“Nya Anghuwa Che” (Our Food Gives Us Life): Exploring Indigenous Perspectives on Traditional Food Gathering and Foraging in an Irigwe Community from Nigeria**

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*Majing Oloko and Shailesh Shukla*

**ABSTRACT** | This article is based on a community-based case study of the Indigenous food system of the Irigwe people of north-central Nigeria, a farming community known for its tradition of gathering wild food. We explore the Irigwe’s perspective on their food system through participatory research tools, including oral history interviews with thirty indigenous food-knowledge experts and elders. We document the cultural meanings of food within their Indigenous food system and their relationship to Indigenous food-production practices such as food foraging. Because the Irigwe people perceive their indigenous food systems and knowledge as holistic, many wild foods—such as *Gbangri* (*Grewia mollis*), which is used in a traditional soup—are eaten with claims of medicinal potency. Foraging trips are significant for gathering food, intergenerational teaching, and socialization. Despite environmental and social challenges, the community has maintained its unique Indigenous food system through transmission of values, such as reciprocity and traditional dispute resolution.

**KEYWORDS** | Indigenous food, Indigenous food system, Irigwe, foraging, gathering

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## **Gathering and Foraging Traditions among Indigenous Cultures in Africa: Background**

They used to move in groups—groups made up of grandmothers, mothers, grandchildren and every relation in-between, often with a child wrapped snugly on the back of one of them with hands stained with a dark-red liquid from *rofro mente* (*Carissa spinarum*). They would be carrying basins on their heads, basins filled with this food that they had gathered from the wild.

These are Irigwe women from Kwall who engage in gathering and foraging Indigenous food for various purposes.

For many Indigenous cultures across Africa, food gathering forms part of an ancient tradition that many generations have carried on to present times. From the Bushmen of southern Africa who still rely almost entirely on hunting and gathering for subsistence to the traditional hunters in western Africa who use Indigenous knowledge to harvest bush meat, small rodents, and plant-based foods, gathering and foraging still remains a viable source of food and livelihood (Ntiamoa-Baidu 1997). Although adult males may engage more in hunting activities that are considered more hazardous (overnight hunting and the hunting of bigger or more dangerous animals), women and children also play a significant role in the gathering of food, the hunting of smaller animals, and the sale of harvested food (Azuwike 2012). The gathering and use of Indigenous food supplements the economic livelihoods of families and contributes to food security needs of the people of Africa. From the luscious rain forest communities in the south to the open grassland in the middle belt to the semi-arid communities in the far north, Indigenous peoples in Nigeria have relied on their Indigenous food for nutrition, medicine, and livelihood (Federal Ministry of Environment [FME] 2006). Despite the contributions that Indigenous food systems make in meeting peoples' food, medicinal, livelihood, and nutritional-security



Figure 1 | Rofro mente (*Carissa spinarum*). Photo: JMK, Wikimedia Commons.

needs (Vinceti, Termote, Ickowitz, Powell, Kehlenbeck, and Hunter, 2013; Ntiamoa-Baidu 1997; Azuwike 2012), not much has been done by policy makers and the academia to celebrate these benefits (Dweba and Mearns 2011). This is particularly the case for the Indigenous food systems of minority Indigenous groups, such as the Irigwe in north-central Nigeria. A research project from the southern part of the country showed that children and youth contribute to the food security and income of their homes through harvesting small animals such as snail and insects (Azuwike 2012). In another study, which aimed to determine the dietary content of Indigenous food eaten mostly by the Fulani people of the northeast, data showed that edible wild species such as *Ficus thonningii* were found to be a good source of protein (Lockett, Calvert, and Grivetti 2000). In western Nigeria, Indigenous foods such as mushrooms and fruits help provide food in households. Women, who engage most in the harvesting, also generate income from the sale of such foods and from the sale of other wild food by-products, such as grass and brooms, which helps augment household incomes. More than 60 percent of respondents involved in the project reported that they generated more than 50 percent of their entire income from the sale of wild species of various kinds (Adedayo, Oyun, and Kadeba 2010).

A study to determine the role of Indigenous food in supplementing household food security in two southern states (Cross River and Enugu) found that species such as the African bush mango, afang, and oil bean appeared in the meals of the respondents about 43 percent of the time, and that people in those communities also generated income from the sale of such Indigenous food (Chukwuone and Okeke, 2009). Similarly, in the southern region of Nigeria (e.g., the Okpoto Nkwot and Ikot Okure communities in Akwa Ibom state), Indigenous fruits such as *ewanga* or white rubber vine (*landolphia oweriensis*), *ekom* or gaboon nut (*caula edulis*), *ekporo* or African walnut (*conophorum tetracarpidium*), and *ubon mbakara* (*attacarpus heterophylla*) were found to contain high amounts of carbohydrate, crude protein, and crude fat, as well as minerals such as iron, manganese, zinc, copper, potassium, and phosphorus. These indigenous fruits compare favorably with exotic fruits such as banana, avocado, guava, and mango in terms of their nutritional content. These fruits also serve as detoxifying substances and laxatives for stimulating bowel movement (Effiong and Udo 2010).

Although most studies on Indigenous food focus on the scientific aspect of the food (nutritional contents) or on its economic value (including their contribution to household food security from an economic perspective), the cultural meanings behind harvesting these foods and the benefits of these foods from an Indigenous perspective has been neglected by scholarly research. Our empirical study of the Irigwe Indigenous food system

addresses this gap by highlighting the relationship that the Irigwe people have with their food system and by emphasizing the nutritional, medicinal, and cultural benefits of these foods. Our aim is to create a greater understanding of the meanings behind the traditional practices of gathering and foraging Indigenous foods. Highlighting the Irigwe Indigenous food system and its significance can potentially help inform and enrich food security policies in Africa and other regions where Indigenous communities have high rates of food insecurity (IFAD 2012). Participants in this study shared how Indigenous food have helped them meet their food needs during difficult times when the rains fail and they have to wait longer for a new harvest, or when a family member is ill. At such times, they know they can rely on their Indigenous foods.

The study community is situated in a region that has witnessed years of ethnic and religious conflict, which has often led to the destruction of communities, lives, and livelihoods (Odoh and Francis 2012). Furthermore, human insecurity and environmental factors have posed challenges to the community's efforts to fully utilize the potentials of their food system. By taking into consideration the significance of practices such as foraging and Indigenous dispute-resolution alternatives, policy efforts can be channeled toward incorporating Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices in food security programs, and especially toward promoting the sustainability and resiliency of Indigenous livelihood sources.

### **Irigwe Indigenous Knowledge and Belief System: The Interconnectedness between Food, Land, and Well-Being**

The Irigwe Indigenous knowledge is founded on their intergenerational interaction with their land and food, and on a belief in a supernatural being that has put in place all the various actors (man and environmental elements) on the earth and enables a cordial interaction with all the parties for the good of all. The celebration of this connectedness is usually commemorated during the *zrachi*, a ceremony conducted between the months of April and May, to recognize the existence of a deity and to thank this being for the provision of food and pray for a bountiful harvest in the future. During this ceremony, food is harvested and offered to the deity as a sign of thanksgiving. The *zrachi* can sometimes get intense in terms of the spirituality, and although participants of this study chose not to share specific details regarding some ritualistic practices, stories about certain individuals becoming possessed and controlled by supernatural powers were shared. Depending on the extent of possession, Indigenous foods (medicinal plants) are used

to help them recover their strength and consciousness. Part of the Irigwe Indigenous knowledge is the concept of “*Iya Anyiri Kenji*” (“Our food our medicine”).<sup>1</sup> This teaching reinforces the significance of their food in supporting their well-being as a people; it is taught at childhood by older family members and carried through generations. In the words of an Irigwe elder, “The truth is, everyone in our community is a medicine man or woman. I say this because our food is our medicine; so if you consume food, then you are consuming medicine” (Participant 16, field interview, August 2015).

The Irigwe Indigenous belief system used to be the dominant practice in the community before Nigeria became colonized at the turn of the twentieth century. With the 1905 forceful British intervention in Nigeria, many Indigenous communities were forced to abandon their spiritual beliefs and embrace Christianity, and the Irigwe witnessed the labeling of their Indigenous spirituality as backward and evil. Today, the Indigenous belief system has become one of other religions practiced in the community. The introduction of foreign belief systems among the Irigwe not only reduced the number of people practicing their Indigenous beliefs but also impacted on the perception of the Indigenous spirituality and the practice of medicine by medicine folks—Irigwe Indigenous medicine relies on Indigenous plants and the belief that such provisions are made possible by the deity, who also completes the healing process.

## Researching Food Stories: Community, Approach, and Method

“Traditional food system” is used to identify all food that is available from local natural resources and that is culturally accepted within a particular culture. It also includes the sociocultural meanings, acquisitions, processing techniques, uses, compositions, and nutritional consequences for the people using the food (Kuhnlein et al. 2006, 19).

We use the term “wild food” to describe Indigenous food available for harvest from the environment (bushes, forest) and not necessarily through cultivation. It is important to note that some Indigenous foods that grow wild have been domesticated and grown on farms. “Wild food harvesters” is used to describe community members who, as a result of their consistent foraging and gathering practices, have over the years gained experience navigating the bushes and lead foraging trips. They also teach younger members of the community about the tradition. “Medicine pickers” are those who embark on foraging trips in search of Indigenous food for medicine preparation. Sometimes, various Indigenous foods need to be used together to make the desirable medicine: the medicine folks have the knowledge to pick, prepare, and administer traditional medicine made out of Indigenous food.



Figure 2 | Map of Plateau State, Nigeria, showing Bassa. Image: Google map.

Kwall is one of two Irigwe communities in the Bassa Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau state in north-central Nigeria. According to the last national census, it has a population of 15,620 (National Population Commission [NPC], 2006). Bassa lies north and west of the Jos Plateau and covers a land mass of 1,743 square kilometers. Figure 2 shows the study area. Despite being situated in the tropics, the community is located in a region with a near temperate climate, with temperatures averaging between 18°C and 20°C and a mean annual rainfall that varies from 131.75 centimeters in the south to 146 centimeters on the Plateau. March and April are when the warmest weathers are recorded, and the months of December to February bring in the coldest weather. This low temperature has led to the reduction of some tropical diseases like malaria and has made the region free from the tsetse fly, which causes the disease trypanosomiasis in humans or nagana in animals such as cows. The vegetation, which was formerly wooded, is now mostly open grassland used mainly for farming. It is characterized by patches of cacti and dispersed trees. It is important to point this out because the grassland in combination with a tsetse fly-free zone, presents an ideal grazing field for Fulani pastoralists (Blench and Dendo, 2003). The community used to graze their cattle in the area; however, this activity has decreased over the years owing to conflicts between Indigenous farmers and the pastoralists. We discuss this further below. The Gbeke and Fobe are two major rivers that pass through the community. Community members gather fish from the rivers; however, owing to the construction of a dam by the state on the Gbeke for power generation purposes, this activity has also decreased over the years. Figure 3 shows a scene from present-day Kwall.

Our community-based case study of the Indigenous food system of the Irigwe people from Kwall in north-central Nigeria was carried out through

intensive field research from July to October 2015. In particular, we explored the various Indigenous foods within the community's food system and their benefits from an Irigwe perspective. We also explored the meaning of some traditional practices (foraging and gathering) and the challenges faced by the community in utilizing their food system. As part of our case study, we conducted in-depth interviews with thirty participants (eighteen males and twelve females) who were known to be knowledgeable in the Irigwe food system, as determined and scouted by the local Indigenous elders and community leaders.

Consultations with the research community started about twelve months prior to the commencement of the study. This helped shape the approach, objectives, and method of the study to be in line with the community's needs and protocols. Part of such protocols included consulting with the community head, who delegated a liaison person that followed the researcher throughout the process. The representative, an elder in the community, made sure that the researcher clearly explained to participants the purpose and outcome of the research. They also knew their rights and responsibilities as members of the community. Since the purpose of the research was to highlight the importance of the Irigwe Indigenous food system, the community's leadership suggested it would be best to gather such stories from elders and community members who are considered knowledgeable in the community's food system and teachings by virtue of their activities, such as wild food harvesting and farming and their intergenerational family traditions like medicine making.

Because of the conditions of the consent obtained from participants prior to the research, names cannot be published. Instead of names, unique identity codes have been assigned to each participant. Table 1 gives an overview of the participants' ages and occupations (roles/responsibilities) within the community.

**Table 1 | Overview of the participants' age and occupation (roles/responsibilities) within the community**

Occupation		Farmer	Trader	Medicine Picker	Wild Food Harvester
Age Group	18–35	15	9	0	10
	36–54	8	2	1	11
	55–80	5	8	9	4
<b>Total No. of Participants</b>		28	19	10	25
Gender	Female	12	10	2	10
	Male	16	9	8	15

The first author is from a community south of the study area and speaks one of the languages commonly spoken in the region, namely, Hausa. The many months of relationship building prior to the start of the research and the consultation with community leaders helped build trust between the researcher and the community.

## **Traditional Irigwe Food Sources, Leadership, and Gender-Based Divisions of Labor**

Historically, the Irigwe people used to live in euphorbia-enclosed extended family compounds that are clustered closely together to form a belt of almost continuous settlement running north and south for about four miles just north of the Jos Plateau (Sangree 1969, 1046).

Before the establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria, the Irigwe people had no central leadership: each hamlet had a head who took charge of affairs, and such roles were exclusively reserved for the men in the community. However, with colonization came the centralized system of leadership whereby a central head coordinated the affairs of the tribe and facilitated colonial agendas. Those agendas included the introduction of Christianity and the suppression of the Irigwe spiritual beliefs as discussed in the previous section. The Irigwe people traditionally gained their subsistence through farming and the harvesting of wild food. They farmed Indigenous grains such as fonio (*Digitaria exilis*) and millet (*Eleusine coracana*). Vegetables such as *Chorchorus capsularis* and *Moringa lleifera* were sourced from the wild (PADP 2005). Traditionally, women were not allowed to plough the fields: a man whose wife was seen ploughing the farm was considered a weak and lazy man. Men did the ploughing while women engaged more in weeding, sowing, harvesting, and transporting food from the farm, and in the processing and sale of food. Wild food harvesting has traditionally been practiced by both men and women.

Over the years, Irigwe food systems and associated traditional gender roles have evolved. In present times, smaller communities within the two major districts have local chiefs who oversee affairs and report to a central traditional ruler, *Bra Ngwe*, who is the paramount chief of the Irigwe people. Women in the community carry out their traditional responsibility of home-making. However, they also contribute to duties outside the home. Women are now actively engaged in farming for themselves and as labor for other community members. They weed, plant, harvest, and sell farm produce. They also engage in the gathering and foraging of food and medicine. Women are also responsible for processing foods like grains into usable forms.



Figure 3 | Scene from Kwall. Photo: Majing Oloko.

## Wild Delicacies with Nutritional Benefits: How Gathering and Foraging Food Help Meet Irigwe Food Security Needs

There are various reasons why people would utilize Indigenous food. For some it is a source of food, and so they derive nutritional benefits from it, whereas for others it is a source of medicine. For many cultures across Nigeria, there is no clear demarcation between food and medicine. In most cases, people derive both benefits just by eating certain foods as part of their meal, whereas special preparations may be required for certain types of food to become medicine.

In the case of the Irigwe people in Kwall, 60 percent of participants in the study reported using their food for both nutritional and medicinal benefits. Indigenous foods are utilized mostly for making medicine; for example, the African locust bean (*Parkia biglobosa*) is used as food, and oil extracted from its seed is used to cure ear infections (Oloko 2016).

Scientific studies of wild food utilized by some cultures in Nigeria show that there are nutritional benefits that can be derived from them. Examples of such foods are given under the first section, which discusses gathering and foraging traditions in Nigeria. The Irigwe Indigenous food system is made up of several Indigenous foods that offer the people nutritional benefits. These foods range from leafy green vegetables to fruits and tree/shrub food that are either eaten alone or in combination with other foods to give the desirable meal. *Riti* (*Vernonia amygdalina*), as shown in figure 4, is an example of an

Indigenous wild vegetable used to make soup. It is often eaten with a grain meal but can also be eaten on its own as a local salad. Based on Irigwe Indigenous knowledge, riti is believed to contain nutrients that enhance breast-milk production and help cleanse the body of unwanted substances (Oloko 2016). Rofro mente (*Carissa spinarum*; see figure 1) is another Indigenous wild fruit that is consumed as a snack in the community. It also has significant appeal among non-Irigwe people within Plateau state, and thus it is often sold by women in markets beyond their community to generate income. In a country where rural poverty is significantly high (IFAD 2018, generating income from the sale of Indigenous food can be beneficial. A two-kilogram pail of rofro mente can be sold for between \$2.30 and \$2.60 (rate from September 2016 and provided by study participants). This is significant income in a country where over 60 percent of the population is living below the poverty line (Opejobi 2016).<sup>2</sup> Whereas the nutritional benefits from Indigenous food may have been recently explored in literatures, the cultural meanings that groups attach to their food are as important as the other benefits. For example, finger millet or *ibre* (*Eleusine coracana*), an Irigwe Indigenous food, is very significant in the community: it is the first food given to babies after they are weaned because it is believed to have all the essential ingredients needed for healthy growth, and it is also used as “farm food.” Farmers eat it first thing in the morning before resuming their farm duties because it is said to be filling and sustaining (Oloko 2016). It has cultural significance as well because it is used as part of the bride price during traditional marriages in the community. Although finger millet is now mostly domesticated, other foods that are still harvested primarily from the wild, such as *gbangri* (*Grewia mollis*), have cultural significance as well. Because of the ease of preparation, it is believed in the community that when you have a visitor in your home and you have *gbangri*, then you have no excuse for not feeding them. Since women in the community are primarily responsible for domestic work, including meal preparation, it is expected that every woman that has come to the age of being able to cook should at least master the preparation of *gbangri*. It is interesting to note that, despite its bland taste, older members of the community find the food more appealing than the younger members, largely because of claims of its ability to maintain blood pressure. Because of such differences in interest, older members of the community see the need to teach the youth about their food and their benefits. Foraging trips are sites for intergenerational learning and its transmission. One participant highlighted the significance of the teaching that happens during foraging trips: “I was very sure that I was harvesting the riti properly, but my aunty showed me how much wrong I was doing to the plants because of the way I was picking the leaves” (Participant 14, field interview, August 2015).



Figure 4 | Riti (*Vernonia amygdalina*). Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

### "Hanging Out in the Bushes": Wild Food Harvesting as a Cultural, Social, and Knowledge-Sharing Activity

Various Irigwe Indigenous foods have unique cultural significance. Gbangri (*G. mollis*) soup is a dish that has been used for many generations as a quick and easy way to entertain visitors or make a quick, inexpensive meal in a home because of its easy and uncomplicated mode of preparation (dry pounded gbangri is whisked into cold water to make the soup). The primary method of accessing gbangri is through wild harvesting, and the trips to do this are significant for many reasons. The older women within the community use the trips to teach the younger women how to correctly identify edible plants in order to avoid picking species that may be harmful to human consumption. They also teach them how to harvest ethically, so that the plant continues to grow long after harvest. By embarking on such trips, younger members of the community get a sense of being part of a generational tradition that has cultural significance. One participant emphasized the importance of generational learning: "You have to start by following the older women. You don't want to be the one that always comes back with the bad gbangri. It is not good for soup and the men will have something to say about your abilities to take care of the home" (Participant 19, field interview, August 2015).

Gathering and foraging food is a means through which Indigenous knowledge is transmitted, and because most Irigwe Indigenous foods are used as

medicine, the harvesting of certain foods is practiced with great care and guided by members of the community with locally recognized traditional food knowledge. For example, the harvesting of *zhe* (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*)—which is eaten as part of a meal because it is believed to help restore blood loss (especially among women)—can be tricky because without much care, weeds that look very similar to the plant can get mixed in during harvest. It is not uncommon to find that a particular family or lineage has exclusive knowledge on how to prepare certain types of medicine from Indigenous food, and in most cases, it is the older members of such families that possess such knowledge. Foraging activities create an opportunity for knowledge transfer from older folk to younger members. Young people who want to learn the tradition of picking medicinal plants can embark on trips with knowledgeable members, who spend days imparting such teachings.

Beyond the educational and cultural significance of gathering and foraging trips, socialization is one significant benefit derived from these activities. The culture of courtship and marriage within the community is followed according to community traditions. An unmarried girl is expected to live with her parents until she is married. Although polyandry used to be practiced among the Irigwe, such practices were suppressed with colonization. Prospective couples take advantage of foraging trips to develop relationships in the comfort of the natural environment and in the company of their fellow community members. Wives take advantage of foraging trips to discuss domestic issues with other women, away from the community.



Figure 5 | Gbangri (*Grewia mollis*). Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

Children get the opportunity to play and explore with each other under the guidance of their parents or relatives.

## Significance of the Seasonal Harvesting of Indigenous Food

One of the unique characteristics of the Irigwe Indigenous food system is the year-round availability of foodstuffs. There is a time in the year when certain types of food are readily available, and so easier to access. People often modify their consumption habits to fit foods that are in season; this helps them reduce food purchases and also helps save their stored grain for longer.

Some seasonal foods, such as fruits, have a shorter shelf life; however, they serve as an affordable and accessible source of food for Kwall and many rural communities in the region. Indigenous food such as rofro mente (*C. spinarum*) is eaten by children in the community to buy their mothers some time to attend to other duties before cooking the family meal. Some foods, like fonio (*Digitaria exilis*), are readily available during the dry season (generally October through March; however, this varies between regions and from year to year). Similarly, certain Irigwe Indigenous food, like *ugo* or white yam (*Dioscorea rotundata*), are harvested during the rainy season (generally April through September, but this varies between regions and from year to year). This makes the food more affordable and accessible. The months leading up to the harvest of staples in the community can be challenging because supplies start running out; Indigenous foods play a significant role in meeting people's food needs. Table 2 shows a calendar illustrating the seasonality of some Irigwe foods.

Table 2 | Seasonal calendar

Food: Type/Name		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Irigwe	Scientific												
<b>Grains</b>													
Nwei	<i>Sorghum bicolor</i>									x	x	x	
Zhu	<i>Pennisetum glaucum</i>									x	x	x	
Iche	<i>Digitaria exilis</i>									x	x		
Ibre	<i>Eleusine coracana</i>									x	x	x	

(Continues)

Table 2 | Seasonal calendar (Continued)

Food: Type/Name		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
<b>Vegetables</b>													
Riti	<i>Vernonia amygdalina</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Karkashi	<i>Corchorus spp</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Akwe rama	<i>Chorchorus capsularis</i>				x	x	x	x	x	x			
Zogale	<i>Moringa oleifera</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Gbangri	<i>Grewia mollis</i>				x	x	x	x	x	x			
Rikkwe	<i>Amarathus cruentus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ayoyo	<i>Corchorus olitorius</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Gauta	<i>Solanum aethiopicum</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Tree Food and Products</b>													
Akwe urin	<i>Parkia biglobosa</i>			x	x	x	x	x	x				
Akwe shawara	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Akwe tsamiya	<i>Tamarindus indica</i>	x	x									x	x
Rofro mente	<i>Ribes nigrum</i>				x	x	x	x	x	x			
Akwe oho	<i>Khaya senegalensis</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Tuber</b>													
Ugo	<i>Yams/Dioscorea rotundata</i>							x	x	x			

Note: The seasonal calendar is based on when the type of food is most accessible in terms of availability and affordability, and this is usually during harvest of the specific food. However, vegetables can be harvested from the wild during the rainy season and can be grown all year round in dry-season farming.

## Changes and Challenges to Irigwe Indigenous Food Systems

Besides farming, wild food harvesting plays a significant role in Irigwe subsistence. Changing political and environmental dynamics have made wild food harvesting challenging for the people of Kwall community. Based on participants' responses, human insecurity and the loss of Indigenous species constitute significant challenges to accessing wild food in the community.

### *Human Insecurity*

"I don't feel secured in the bush anymore. Why should I be looking over my shoulder each time I am in the wild? I think our leaders should provide enough grazing field for everyone to prevent such crisis. I don't blame them for trying to feed their cattle, but must they feed on our crops?" (Participant 18, field interview, August 2015)

One of the imperceptible effects of conflict in the state is the impact on wild food harvesting. About 73 percent of participants from this study reported human insecurity as a major impediment to their ability to access wild food.

One of the issues reportedly at the center of conflicts is the alleged encroachment of farmlands by pastoralists who pass through the community with their cattle. These pastoralists' animals stray into farmlands and damage crops.

This has strained the relations between Indigenous communities and pastoralists, who often come from outside of the community. The relationship between the two groups was once described as cordial, with Indigenous farmers using livestock waste as manure to nourish their farms and in turn allowing the livestock to feed on their leftover crops after harvest. Although the state has been relatively peaceful in recent years, the insurgency in some northeastern states has made the northern part of the country vulnerable to security challenges and reprisal attacks.

People in Kwall community have come up with strategies to sustain this tradition of wild food harvesting in the midst of challenges. They go in groups (women groups are encouraged to have male company) and must endeavor not to go too deep into the wild. Children can forage only in the shallow bushes and must be watched by adults. Community leaders have also made efforts to use traditional dispute-resolution options and negotiations with pastoralists. This seems to have had an encouraging outcome in that no major incidence involving pastoralists and Indigenous farmers has been witnessed in the community in recent times. Participants shared instances of minor incidences in which pastoralists not familiar with the route through their community have taken a wrong path that skirts too close to houses or leads up to gardens near settlements. Such incidences were resolved without any lives lost. Some of the recent major conflicts in the region include an episode in 2010 when about 400 people were killed and 18,000 displaced during a conflict lasting only four days in Plateau state in north-central Nigeria (International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect [ICRP] 2015). In the same region, in 2012, about 360 people were killed in an ethnic-based and religious crisis. Most of these people were subsistence farmers in rural communities (ICRP 2015).

### **Deforestation: Threats to Indigenous Food and Local Plants**

“Some of the wild fruits we ate as children seem more difficult to get these days. I use to eat a fruit called tiyo, I can’t even see it anymore. I know at times you have to go deeper into the forest to get some foods because they no longer grow close to home.” (Participant 12, field interview, August 2015)

In Kwall, just like many rural communities in Nigeria, firewood is the primary source of cooking energy for the majority of households. Trees are cut down for firewood because, in most cases, that is the only fuel option available. Unfortunately, trees and shrubs that provide food for community members are often cut down in the process. Bushes are also cleared to provide additional space for farming. Figure 6 shows a farm in Kwall community with one of the only surviving trees on the verge of disappearing. Participants from this study discussed how species that were once found close to settlements have now disappeared, with the result that they have to go deeper into the wild to harvest some foods, including rofro mente and *akwe kadanya* or the shea butter tree (*Vitellaria paradoxa*). One participant explains this challenge: “I guess it is the population increase that has led to this. Trees have been cut down to make room for homes and farmlands. We still cook with firewood, where do you think the wood comes from?” (Participant 12, field interview, August 2015).

Community members in Kwall have made efforts to replant some trees, but the rate of harvesting seems to outweigh the efforts toward afforestation. One of the participants said that “most of these trees are old. I make efforts to replant whenever I can, but I cannot go from one forest to another planting trees” (Participant 10, field interview, August 2015).

The rate of deforestation in the country is quite alarming. It is estimated to occur at about 3.5 percent per year, which translates to an average loss of 350,000 to 400,000 hectares per year. Issues relating to a population explosion and poverty means that a lot of the rural populace who depend on the environment for energy and food lack an affordable alternative source of energy. The projected national demand for wood in the year 2020 is said to reach 180 million square meters. This is much greater than the available supply, which is less than 100 million square meters. Most of this wood comes from trees on farms, as well as woodlands, bush lands, and plantations, all of which combine to make up Nigeria’s forest lands (FME 2006). Although the government’s policy is to conserve 20 to 25 percent of land under forest, the country’s forest is put at 10 percent of its total land mass (923,767 square kilometers), and with the current rate of deforestation, the future of these species is bleak. The government has made efforts in the past to curb deforestation by setting up guidelines on forest management, and in



**Figure 6** | Farmland in the community of Kwall. It is bare of trees because trees are often cut down to make more room for farming and for fuel purposes.  
Photo: Majing Oloko.

2006 it introduced the National Forest Policy (NFP). However, such moves have not yielded significant results. Deforestation is said to persist because of poor enforcement and lack of investment in the sector (Faleyimu and Agbeja 2012).

### **"Eating Today and Tomorrow": Sustaining Irigwe Food Systems**

There was a wide consensus among respondents that if the government would assist in providing grazing fields for pastoralists, then the problem of inter-communal conflicts could be resolved. It is important to mention that some other Indigenous groups in the state, like the Berom Indigenous peoples, have been involved in land-claim issues with settler groups that had settled on their ancestral lands decades ago, especially during the colonial era when tin mining in the state was vibrant. There are also questions about the role of the political elites in exacerbating an already fragile situation for their political gains. Because of the diversity within the population of the north-central region, people are often divided along ethnic and religious lines; politicians have been accused of taking advantage of such divide-to-win support for their platforms.

Participants also suggested replanting efforts for trees that have been cut down for firewood or otherwise. Part of the Irigwe teaching is for members to imbibe reciprocity, but quite often people are overwhelmed with other

challenges and ignore the culture of planting new trees. Since firewood is the primary source of energy for cooking in the community, it is important to make efforts toward replacing trees and shrubs that are sometimes food sources. Table 3 summarizes suggestions given by participants.

Community members also agree that the youth in the community are an important part of their community and should be educated in their Indigenous practices and involved in decision making in the community. Although it was not expressed as an immediate challenge, there are concerns among older members about the possibility of rural-to-urban migration among youth in the future. For now, young people seem to have ties to their community, so they return even after leaving, but with increased development challenges facing rural communities like Kwall, elders fear that the bigger cities may be an alternative livelihood option for their youth. For many community members who rely on Indigenous food, the restoration of human security in the region is of utmost importance. Gathering and foraging for food provides the people of Kwall with social, economic, and dietary benefits. Community leaders have opted for traditional dispute-resolution options and have made efforts to accommodate and remain in peace with nomads passing through their community while still respecting government-imposed boundaries that are guided by the constitution of the state and country. While citizens are making efforts on their end, the government is called out to live up to its responsibilities by protecting lives and properties. As the effects of climate change are continuing to be felt across Africa, vulnerable communities like those in drought-prone northern Nigeria continue to rely on wild food in difficult times (Harris and Mohammed 2003).

Table 3 | Suggestions by participants on how to improve food gathering and foraging

Food Insecurity	Threats to Plant Species
Peace dialogue among ethnic groups and traditional dispute resolution	Domestication of Indigenous species to protect them from going extinct
Creating more grazing fields for pastoralists keeping livestock	Access to alternative energy to protect trees against firewood users
Greater government commitment to its citizens in terms of its protection of lives and properties	Effective policy implementation and enforcement to cut back on deforestation
More effective formula for sharing natural resources	More government investment into research focused on Indigenous food
Respect for traditional/ancestral boundaries	Encourage Indigenous teachings on environmental conservation

The Irigwe Indigenous food system has contributed significantly to the subsistence of the Irigwe people of Kwall community. These people use these foods to meet their nutritional and medicinal needs, and while they do that under sometimes difficult conditions, the people of Kwall have come up with suggestions to enable them to continue in this tradition for many generations to come. Our research reestablishes the relevance of a food system that has supported a people for generations through sometimes difficult environmental dynamics; and yet it is often dismissed as being not as relevant in modern days. Indigenous communities around the globe, many of which are in developing countries, are dealing with issues of food security and rural poverty at a time when the effects of climate change are being felt across the world. Indigenous food systems have never been more relevant because of their resiliency. Africa is said to be the most vulnerable continent to climate change, despite being the least contributor to factors that alter world climate (Hope 2009). Communities need their Indigenous food systems to support them.

Our study has the potential to provide policy makers with insights for community-specific interventions and program priorities that take into consideration existing community potentials, like their Indigenous food systems, as a foundation for building vibrant and sustainable communities. Through collaboration with the community, resources can be channeled into strengthening and complementing traditional practices to bring lasting solutions to challenges of species loss and human insecurity.

Our study also has the potential to provide insight into creating a food sovereignty framework from an Irigwe perspective. Whereas our research used the food security concept as a framework, the authors wish to acknowledge the strides made by the “food sovereignty” movement and its importance in the resurgence of self-determination and self-governance in the lives of Indigenous people globally (Whyte 2016; Cote 2016). The concept of food sovereignty from an Irigwe or Nigerian perspective has hardly been explored, developed, or highlighted in studies; “food security” is commonly used instead. This study took advantage of the evolving focus of the food security concept, which has moved to incorporate issues such as nutrition, access (economic, physical, and social or cultural), and issues of preferences in food choices. Since there is room to contextualize, our study used the concept according to the Irigwe reality. In a study about Indigenizing food sovereignty, Cote challenged Indigenous people to be wary of embracing the mainstream definition of certain terms such as “sovereignty,” which is often used in Indigenous resurgences (2016). Cote underscored the need for Indigenous people to “indigenize the term sovereignty to mean peoples’ struggle for autonomy, self-sufficiency and self-determination, as oppose

to an assertion of domination, control and authority over ancestral homeland” (9). Our study highlighted the Irigwe Indigenous food system, their connection to their food, and their aspirations for a food-secure, healthy, and vibrant community that is grounded in their knowledge and culture. These outcomes are in line with the tenets of some recent food sovereignty discussions, such as the one put forward by the Peoples Food Policy Project (PFPP) (2011) in Canada. PFPP put forward seven pillars of food sovereignty in Canada, which covered the fundamental principles of the food sovereignty movement as respect for producers and the people, local food system, knowledge, and sustainability; but they also went further to call for the recognition of food as sacred (PFPP 2011). While the colonial and present realities (poverty, human insecurity, environmental degradation, a dysfunctional political system) of Nigeria may be different from other countries in the Americas or Africa that have incorporated or made significant progress toward incorporating food sovereignty into their laws, there are similarities in the goals of Indigenous communities beyond these boundaries. There is potential for an Irigwe, or even a Nigerian, food sovereignty movement in the future. Our study has exposed the possibilities; in the Irigwe story lie the right conditions for a food sovereignty dialogue that could lead to a framework and policy development.

As the world continues to evolve, there is a greater need for cross-cultural learning and cooperation between various worldviews. While we look to science and technology for answers to some of the world’s demanding issues, the role of Indigenous food and associated knowledge systems in protecting biodiversity, food security, and cultural preservation should be celebrated.

**MAJING OLOKO** is building her research around highlighting traditional food systems in Indigenous and rural communities in Africa and Canada, as well as exploring how communities can strengthen their biocultural diversity to enhance food security and sustainable community development.

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## NOTES

1. Traditionally, the Irigwe people relied more on plant-based food than animal-based food. Hunting was done by men, mostly for recreational purposes and not necessarily for the meat. In one of the earliest studies conducted on the Irigwe people, Sangree (1974) reported that the amount of meat consumed from game hunting would have amounted to less than a pound per person per year, which makes meat of lesser significance to their food tradition.

Plants from their Indigenous food system support both nutritional and medicinal needs; therefore, there is no separation between food and medicine.

2. On September 5, 2016, the United Nations made public a report on Nigeria's Common Country Analysis (CCA). The report, which is the latest of its kind, was read in Awka (a city in the southeast of Nigeria) during a meeting to prepare a UN Development Assistance Framework IV (UNDAF IV) for the southeast region of Nigeria. Among other indices, the report revealed that about 64 percent of Nigeria's over 170 million people are living below the poverty line.

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# **Connections with the Land: A Scoping Review on Cultural Wellness Retreats as Health Interventions for Indigenous Peoples Living with HIV, Hepatitis C, or Both**

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**ABSTRACT** | Despite the availability of prevention and treatment services, the ongoing process of colonization has significantly contributed to disproportionate rates of HIV, hepatitis C (HCV), and HIV/HCV coinfection among Indigenous peoples. This inequity highlights a deficit in health care's ability to provide effective and culturally relevant services. Indigenous peoples have used land-based cultural practices to promote wellness since time immemorial, yet they have rarely been evaluated as health interventions. Given the severity of these health inequities, it is imperative that gaps in research and services be addressed quickly and in "good way," whereby the research undertaken is a sacred endeavor that is connected to ceremony and ancestral wisdom and contributes to healing. Land-based cultural-wellness retreats represent a fruitful path toward holistic wellness and decolonization. The purpose of this review is to understand the theoretical utility of and wise practices for conducting land-based cultural-wellness retreats for Indigenous peoples with HIV, HCV, or both.

**KEYWORDS** | Indigenous wellness, decolonization, land-based cultural-wellness retreats, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C

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## **Introduction**

If the legends fall silent, who will teach our children of our ways?  
(Chief Dan George)

Since time immemorial, Indigenous peoples have been using connections with the land, culture, and ceremony to prevent illness, treat disease, and

maintain wholistic wellness. Yet, despite the strength and resilience of Indigenous peoples in Canada, they currently face complex physical, social, and political environments that are wrought with health inequities, in particular regarding HIV, HCV, and HIV/HCV coinfection (Alfred 2009; CCDIC 2010; PHAC 2014; Trubnikov et al. 2014; CATIE 2015). However, these health inequities are not simply the result of individual behavior but are rather the end manifestation of harmful social and structural factors resulting from the historical and contemporary processes of colonization (Barlow 2009).

Although certain Western biomedical practices (such as antiretroviral treatment [ART] in the context of HIV/AIDS) may be vital for maintaining one's physical health, disparities reveal that contemporary health services are neither sufficient nor adequately equipped to address the wholistic wellness needs of Indigenous peoples (Duran and Walters 2004). As a response to this, many Indigenous communities have been facilitating connections with land and culture, specifically through land-based cultural-wellness retreats (LBCWRs), as a method for restoring health, promoting wholistic wellness, and facilitating decolonization (Lane et al. 2002; Archibald and Dewar 2010; Robbins and Dewar 2011; Iseke 2013; YFNHSDD 2013; Goodkind et al. 2015). Although LBCWRs have been shown to be a preferred and effective wellness practice for Indigenous peoples, many historical, political, social, and economic factors have combined to inhibit these programs (Lane et al. 2002; Wilson 2003; Kanentakeron 2006; Alfred 2009; Green 2010; YFNHSDD 2013; Iseke 2013; Goodkind et al. 2015).

In particular, the devaluation of Indigenous ways of knowing within Western health fields has contributed to significant gaps in recognizing the utility of facilitating LBCWRs as active wellness interventions for Indigenous peoples. These gaps have restricted Indigenous-determined wellness practices and subsequently contributed to significant health inequities. Therefore, to combat this devaluation and address contemporary gaps in Western research, this project utilizes both Indigenous and Western research methodologies to

1. highlight research gaps within the current Western body of knowledge;
2. examine what the available literature reveals around the utility of, and wise practices for, LBCWRs as wellness interventions for Indigenous peoples; and
3. explore how LBCWRs can be adapted to the contexts of Indigenous people living with HIV, HCV, or both.

## **Background**

### *HIV, HCV, and HIV/HCV Coinfection*

Despite the existence of prevention, treatment, and disease-management services, evidence has illustrated that Indigenous peoples have a significantly increased HIV, HCV, and HIV/HCV coinfection disease burden. Whereas Indigenous peoples made up 4.3 percent of the general Canadian population in 2011, they represented around 9 percent of all people living with HIV/AIDS, and roughly 11 percent of new HIV/AIDS cases diagnosed in Canada (PHAC 2014). In addition, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) estimated that 332,500 Canadians, roughly 0.96 percent of the population, were positive for HCV antibodies in 2011 (Trubnikov et al. 2014). Indigenous peoples are also recognized as having a disproportionately higher prevalence of women being seropositive for HCV (CATIE 2015). Results from the I-Track study highlighted excess HCV burden among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, with an overall self-reported lifetime seropositivity as high as 41.6 percent—with men and women reporting 46.1 percent and 36.9 percent, respectively (PHAC 2014). Moreover, within the Canadian HIV/ HCV coinfection cohort, 13 percent of participants self-identified as Indigenous, with the highest prevalence being found in British Columbia (BC), at 33 percent (Klein et al. 2012).

These HIV, HCV, and HIV/HCV disparities are not unique to Canada. HIV, HCV, and HIV/HCV disparities have been found Indigenous communities across the globe, and especially within the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, which have similar histories of colonization as Canada (Negin et al. 2015). This disproportion in both incidence and prevalence highlights a dangerous gap in the health-care system's ability to provide effective services for Indigenous peoples. Multiple studies suggest a number of failure points within care/cure cascades resulting in decreased screening, health-care access and utilization, and research inclusion and participation (Klein et al. 2012; Alavi et al. 2013). Combined, these findings underscore the urgent need for future HIV and HCV research, prevention, and treatment strategies that are culturally appropriate and tailored to the unique context of Indigenous peoples.

### *Colonization and Health*

Disconnection is the precursor to disintegration, and the deculturing of our people is most evident in the violence and self-destruction that are the central realities of a colonized existence and the most visible face of the discord colonialism has wrought in indigenous

lives over the years. Cycles of oppression are being repeated through generations in indigenous communities. Colonial economic relations are reflected in the political and legal structures of contemporary indigenous societies, and they result in Indigenous peoples having to adapt culturally to this reality and to individuals reacting in destructive and unhealthy (but completely comprehensible) ways. (Alfred 2009, 52)

Determinants of these HIV and HCV-related health inequities are multi-faceted, yet they share a similar origin: colonization. Although colonization began over five hundred years ago, it is far from a historical process and has continued to cause extensive, reverberating, and transgenerational effects. Colonization has been enacted through diverse practices such as resource exploitation and expropriation of Indigenous lands, forced attendance at residential schools designed to assimilate, systemic racism, extinguishment of rights, and forced welfare dependency. More specifically, whereas tactics of colonization have been different in regard to time and place, this colonial relationship—first between Indigenous peoples and the European colonizers and then between them and the newly formed nation of Canada—has most often been explicitly based on separating Indigenous peoples from their land and cultural practices to facilitate resource extraction and to attempt cultural assimilation (Alfred 2009).

Disconnection with the land not only separated Indigenous peoples from important sources of food, water, and medicine but also instilled feelings of disempowerment and lack of control (Place and Hanlon 2011). In addition to forcibly separating Indigenous peoples from their land, which directly inhibits traditional land-based cultural practices, laws were also created by European settlers to prevent and criminalize Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices. Criminalization imposed disconnection with the culture, which contributed to an environment where access to self-sufficient, healthy, and autonomous livelihood was limited (Alfred 2009).

These factors have affected Indigenous peoples at the individual, family, community, and societal levels, resulting in many Indigenous peoples and their families experiencing shame, deeply rooted mistrust, and anger (Christian and Spittal 2008). Combined, these factors have resulted in isolation, marginalization, and poor coping mechanisms for many Indigenous peoples, which contributes to the high-risk behaviors and substance misuse that place many Indigenous peoples at risk for blood-borne and sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV or HCV (Christian and Spittal 2008; Barlow 2009). Overall, forced disconnection with land and culture represents one of the greatest effects of colonization and most significant

sources of health and social inequities among Indigenous communities (Alfred 2009; Robbins and Dewar 2011).

### ***Synthesis of Indigenous and Western Ways of Knowing***

The disproportionate and inequitable burden of HIV and HCV experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada illustrates the ineffectiveness of contemporary health services in providing for the wholistic wellness needs of Indigenous communities. Although medications such as antiretroviral therapy (ART) for HIV and direct-acting antiviral treatments (DAAs) for HCV represent the life-saving capabilities of biomedicine, current HIV/HCV disparities indicate that, in the specific contexts of Indigenous peoples, relying solely on biomedical solutions is not sufficient to protect, restore, or maintain wholistic wellness (Lane et al. 2002; Duran and Walters 2004; Alfred 2009; Green 2010; Iseke 2013; Goodkind et al. 2015; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015).

In recognizing forced disconnection to land and culture as a source of health inequities among Indigenous peoples, it is not surprising that many Indigenous communities, scholars, and health advocates have proposed reestablishing and refacilitating Indigenous peoples' connections with land and culture in order to enable decolonization and promote wholistic wellness (Lane et al. 2002; Duran and Walters 2004; Christian and Spittal 2008; Alfred 2009, Archibald and Dewar 2010; Robbins and Dewar 2011; Place and Hanlon 2011; YFNHSDD 2013; Iseke 2013; Goodkind et al. 2015; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015). However, for Indigenous peoples affected by HIV, HCV, or HIV/HCV co-infection, both biomedical therapeutics and connections with the land and culture may be required for wholistic wellness. It is explicitly because of this complex relationship between Indigeneity, biomedicine, and wellness that, for many Indigenous people, a synthesis of both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing is imperative within the Indigenous HIV and HCV wellness field.

### ***Contemporary Context and Challenges of Land-Based Cultural-Wellness Retreats***

The health and well-being of Indigenous children, their communities, and ultimately their nations arises from this connection with the land and from a strength of culture that grows from this connectivity. (Greenwood and deLeeuw 2007, 49)

LBCWRs, which are as diverse as the many Indigenous nations, are typically multiday excursions that take place on the land<sup>1</sup> and involve a variety of traditional practices based in Indigenous knowledges, spirituality, and ceremony (Lane et al. 2002; Archibald and Dewar 2010; YFNHSDD 2013; Goodkind et al. 2015; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015). Activities and ceremonies depend on the local cultural traditions, time of year, physical location, and needs of the retreat participants (Lane et al. 2002; Archibald and Dewar 2010; Green 2010; Robbins and Dewar 2011; YFNHSDD 2013; Goodkind et al. 2015; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015). Despite these variations, a core element of these practices is that they aim to connect people with their culture, facilitate healing, and promote wholistic wellness (Lane et al. 2002; Archibald and Dewar 2010; YFNHSDD 2013; Goodkind et al. 2015; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015).

A recognition of the importance of using land and culture in strategies to promote, restore, and maintain wholistic wellness has been well known and acted upon within Indigenous communities since time immemorial. To this day, communities have demonstrated both a need and desire for land- and culture-based wellness programs (Lane et al. 2002; Archibald and Dewar 2010; YFNHSDD 2013; Goodkind et al. 2015; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015), and LBCWRs have been found in Indigenous communities across Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia (YFNHSDD 2013). Though diverse, these programs have typically been used to empower youth, assist people in transitioning out of correctional facilities, promote mental health and wellness, overcome addiction and substance misuse, and facilitate general overall wellness (Lane et al. 2002; YFNHSDD 2013; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015). Regardless of their application, available research has shown that LBCWRs have been effective at protecting and promoting the health and wellness of Indigenous peoples (Lane et al. 2002; Archibald and Dewar 2010; YFNHSDD 2013; Goodkind et al. 2015).

## **Methodology**

The overall intention of this research process was to explore available literature concerning LBCWRs Indigenous peoples living with HIV, HCV, or both. Given that this is the beginning of a new research journey, we sought to develop a research focus that was both broad (so that we could get a wholistic perspective and honor the existing work that has already been conducted) yet specific (so that we could gather information that would directly contribute to conducting LBCWRs for Indigenous peoples living with HIV, HCV, or both). To do so, this literature review focused on four key areas:

1. Theoretical perspectives on connections between land, culture, and health.
2. Relevance of LBCWRs for Indigenous people living with HIV and HCV.
3. LBCWRs program evaluation and existing evidence of health/wellness outcomes.
4. LBCWRs program development, implementation, management, and logistics.

### ***Scoping Literature Review***

Scoping literature reviews are exploratory processes that systematically map the literature on a topic and identify key concepts, themes, theories, and sources of evidence and are specifically designed to seek out gaps in the evidence base where little research has been conducted. Scoping reviews are welcoming of all relevant literature, regardless of study design, and allow researchers to examine the extent, type, range, and breadth of research that has been conducted on a specific research topic (Arksey and O’Malley 2005).

Using Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) methodological framework, a scoping literature review was conducted on the existing literature focused on LBCWRs and Indigenous peoples. The review specifically focused on Indigenous peoples within Canada (i.e., First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples) Australia, New Zealand, and the United States—all of which have similar histories of colonization. Included in this scoping review are peer-reviewed articles and grey literature (such as organizational documents, newspaper articles, or presentation materials) related to LBCWRs for Indigenous peoples. Six databases were systematically searched.<sup>2</sup> A targeted internet search was also employed. With consultation from key informants, the following search terms were mapped out and utilized:

1. (Aborig\* OR Indigen\* OR Native OR “First Nation” OR “First Nations” OR Inuit OR Métis)
2. (“Land-based healing” OR “land-based wellness” OR “land-based interventions” OR “wellness retreats” OR “cultural retreats” OR “land-based cultural retreat”)

After combing each database, thirty-one abstracts and documents were retrieved and imported into Mendeley, an electronic referencing software. Any duplicate copies of articles were removed. Using specific exclusion/ inclusion criteria, all documents were collectively reviewed to

determine which articles were relevant to the key research areas stated above. Detailed information was then extracted from the articles and entered into a summary table in Microsoft Excel for comparative analysis.

After group collaboration and discussion of the land-based cultural-wellness landscape, abstracts were included if they had any of the following:

- explicit reference to, consideration of, or incorporation of Indigenous peoples, perspectives, cultures, and communities
- both land-based and Indigenous culture as a prevention or healing method
- reference to both health of Indigenous communities and program development, description, implementation, management, or evaluation of land-based cultural wellness retreat or theoretical discussion of connection between Indigenous land-based culture and wellness

Abstracts were explicitly excluded from the literature review if they did not meet the above criteria and were either of the following:

- focused solely on youth as target population
- books, ebooks, extended community documents, dissertations, theses, and full-length program evaluations

Materials focusing solely on youth were excluded so our findings would be applicable to adult populations. Additionally, while we recognize the utility of including books, extended community documents, dissertations, theses, and full-length program evaluations, we were unable to incorporate these materials because of time constraints and coding feasibility.

After examining the articles, fourteen met the inclusion criteria for this literature review. The research team then reviewed the final approved articles and met to critique and discuss key findings. The articles were then imported into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11© for coding and thematic analysis. Coding and thematic analysis was done in an iterative and community-based manner. There was one primary coder, who was supported by two other members of the research team, and the community steering committee, which was comprised of a small group of Indigenous Elders and individuals with lived HIV, HCV, or HIV/HCV co-infection experience. This committee periodically met with the research team to offer guidance on the research project. Once articles were confirmed, the primary coder reviewed all articles and conducted free line-by-line coding in order to translate primary concepts from articles into themes. As thematic

codes were generated they were added to a coding bank, and new codes would be developed as needed. These primary free codes were then shared with other members of the research team to discuss and develop descriptive themes. The primary coder then re-reviewed articles based on descriptive subthemes and began to synthesize “child codes” into “parent codes” in order to synthesize themes and generate overarching analytical themes (Thomas and Harden 2008). Next, the main research findings were mapped out with specific attention paid to employing an Indigenous perspective to relate these findings to LBCWRs and potential gaps in the literature. Finally, analytical codes, key findings, and gaps in the literature were shared with the community steering committee to confirm that findings were consistent with their lived experience.

### *Two-Eyed Seeing, Ethical Space, and Liminal Space*

In addition to the scoping literature review methodology, there are three Indigenous methodologies that informed this research process: two-eyed seeing, ethical space, and liminal space.

The concept of “two-eyed seeing” was put forward by Mi’kmaq Elder Albert Marshall and is intended to describe a method to view the world using both Indigenous and Western perspectives. Specifically, this concept proposes that individuals, researchers, and health practitioners need to view the world with the strengths of both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing to gain a more wholistic perspective on health-related issues and relationships (Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffrey 2004). Professor and Elder Willie Ermine took the discussion of two-eyed seeing one step further by introducing the concept of “ethical space.” Ermine suggests that most often within the contemporary academic and organizational realm, Western ways of knowing are held above Indigenous ways of knowing and as absolute truth, whereas Indigenous knowledges are portrayed as “anecdotal” or less rigorous (Thomassen 2006). This false assumption has structurally facilitated the devaluation of Indigenous knowledges, such as in the case of using connections with land and culture as health interventions. Ermine proposes that, to reconcile this devaluation, these two ways of knowing must be utilized simultaneously and in a nonhierarchical way. It is only through this lens that ethical space—where Western and Indigenous knowledges come together—can exist and illuminate more wholistic understandings of the world.

This literature review is also grounded in the concept of “liminal space,” which represents the space between Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledge (Thomassen 2006). Liminal space is fairly ambiguous and

uncertain, and it can cause feelings that fluctuate between anxiety and hope since both Indigenous and Western knowledge users are suspended in what Victor M. Turner has called “betwixt and between” (1969). Turner states that liminal space acts as an interstitial passageway between fixed states that present opportunities for scientific synthesis and hybridity (in the absence of hierarchy), and that this sense of ambiguity and uncertainty must be shared between both Indigenous and Western knowledge users. Liminal space is of particular importance in the conversation around land-based cultural-wellness retreats for Indigenous peoples living with HIV or HCV by virtue that it “(1) contests claims of cultural supremacy; (2) assists in overcoming challenges to the ‘legitimacy’ of Indigenous ways of knowing; (3) recognizes the philosophical and intellectual underpinnings of the different knowledge systems; (4) aids in understanding the unstated yet inevitable hegemonic outcomes inherent in Western systems; (5) establishes and delineates boundaries between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing; and (6) advances the realization of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (Tano 2016). These theoretical approaches are embodied within our research project both physically and academically. We specifically sought to ensure that both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing are represented and honored. Although current Indigenous HIV/HCV health disparities illustrate that contemporary care models are insufficient for Indigenous communities and thus in severe need of repair, we also fully recognize the life-saving capacity of antiretroviral therapy (ART) in the case of HIV and direct-acting antivirals (DAA) in the case of HCV. To honor this unique Indigenous HIV/HCV context, we as researchers and public health advocates propose that both Indigenous and Western wellness efforts (such as using ART and traditional ceremony simultaneously) are capable of protecting and improving wholistic wellness for Indigenous peoples with HIV or HCV. Therefore, both should be accessible for Indigenous people who wish to use Indigenous and Western wellness practices.

Additionally, we actively challenge any figurative or rhetorical devaluation of Indigenous ways of knowing. For example, when we first started our research, we kept framing our project as “wellness research that has not been done before.” However, upon reflection, we realized that Indigenous peoples had been researching and evaluating land-based wellness practices since time immemorial and that it wasn’t the case that “no research had been done” but rather that no Western research had been done. We acknowledged our mistakes and changed our rhetoric from “filling research gaps” to “filling Western research gaps.”

Furthermore, our research team is composed of a synthesis of individuals with Indigenous and Western lived experience, academic training, and professional practice who have come together to pool our strengths in efforts to promote decolonization and wholistic Indigenous wellness. Together, we strive to hold each other accountable in our actions, rhetoric, and relationships. We center and respect the wisdom of our Elders, all of our meetings are opened with prayer and sharing food, and we ensure that we speak in an honest and strengths-based way in all of our interactions and work. Most importantly, we willingly embrace that we are entering into a new and somewhat ambiguous realm in relation to research, wellness, and personal relationships. We acknowledge that when we began this project, we had no idea what this research would ultimately look like but recognized the necessity of diving into that unknown, liminal space and committed to entering this ambiguous space together.

## **Key Findings**

Key findings fall into two main categories: (1) the theoretical utility of LBCWRs as wellness interventions and (2) key considerations for planning, implementing, and evaluating LBCWRs.

### ***Theoretical Utility of LBCWRs***

The theoretical utility of LBCWRs as reflected by the literature is composed of three components: alignment with Indigenous health paradigms, contemporary need for Indigenous wellness practices, and connections with land and culture being an essential component to wholistic wellness.

#### **Indigenous health paradigms**

Everything on the earth has a purpose, every disease a herb to cure it, and every person a mission. This is the Indian theory of existence.  
(Morning Dove)

It is important to begin by grounding this discussion within an understanding of Indigenous health paradigms as represented by the literature. All articles agreed that Indigenous wellness is a rich and diverse concept that is both specific to time, space, and place and yet informed by common themes that emerge within and across the expanse of global Indigenous diversity. Though broad, these themes were adequately summed up by the following

quotation from Lane and colleagues' (2002) *Mapping the Healing Journey*, written for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF):

There appears to be agreement that some foundation principles are held in common by Aboriginal peoples across Canada (such as the principle that healing comes from within and the principle that the healing of individuals and the healing of communities must go hand-in hand). There is also general consensus that healing work certainly involves overcoming the legacy of past oppression and abuse and also that what that means in practice usually involves the transformation of inner lives, as well as family and community relationships and the social and environmental conditions within which people live. In other words, healing means moving beyond hurt, pain, disease and dysfunction to establishing new patterns of living that produce sustainable well-being. (Lane et al. 2002, 6)

This summation illustrates that Indigenous health paradigms serve more as a guiding philosophy rather than a strict definition. This lack of a strict definition is important and intentional since Indigenous health paradigms are not static but rather change and evolve over time. This quotation also reflects that Indigenous health paradigms do not just strive to address individual states of wellness—they are also explicitly tied to promoting recovery from the lasting effects of colonization and oppression (Lane et al. 2002).

Articles also revealed that, while fluid, Indigenous health paradigms revolve around recognizing the variety of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational aspects of health and wellness and addressing these components with complex and multidimensional practices (Green 2010; Robbins and Dewar 2011). Moreover, while the necessity of individual health and healing is recognized and valued, it is the overall health of the community that Indigenous health paradigms seek to promote, facilitate, restore, and maintain (Lane et al. 2002; Wilson 2003; Alfred 2009; Robbins and Dewar 2011). This is a concept reflected best by Taiaiake Alfred when he states that “the recovery of health in mind, body and spirit, from an indigenous perspective, is only possible in the context of a strong, stable and healthy community” (2009, 55).

Although wellness initiatives must be contextual, the literature was clear that wellness programs must be imbued with understandings and respect of the importance of land, culture, ceremony, language, storytelling, and the wisdom of the Elders. Moreover, successful wholistic wellness initiatives should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- participation in traditional healing and cultural activities
- culturally based wilderness camps and programs
- treatment and healing programs

- counselling and group work
- community development initiatives (Lane et al. 2002; Green 2010; Robbins and Dewar 2011; Iseke 2013; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015)

Overall, this combined understanding of Indigenous health paradigms reveals that, to be effective, LBCWRS should be contextual to the community and peoples it is being provided for; wholistic in its approach in that it promotes decolonization and recognizes and addresses the multiple dimensions of health and wellness; imbued with Indigenous wisdom; developed by community and guided by Elders; and directed toward building, restoring, and supporting a wholistically well Indigenous community.

#### **Contemporary calls to action for Indigenous wellness practices**

*Community requests.* Whereas Indigenous health paradigms are nuanced, community calls for more culturally relevant health-care services have been clear. Community requests are diverse and specific, but overall they have been well reflected within Lane and colleagues' (2002) monograph, which states, "Cultural healing practices are playing an increasingly strong role in the community healing movement. Traditional practices have been invigorated at the community level and have seen a tremendous increase in participation. Cultural components, delivered by Elders and cultural specialists, are now commonly found within most government institutions serving Aboriginal people, such as schools, colleges, the justice system, the health care system, etc. Culturally-based curriculum and models are widely used within treatment and healing programs. The community healing movement and the cultural renaissance have grown hand in-hand over the past three decades" (15). This illustrates that communities not only request more culture-based wellness programs but, when given the freedom to choose and the support to enact wellness programs, overwhelmingly use culture-based healing. Moreover, these types of programs are better attended and thus more effective than non-culture-based programs (Robbins and Dewar 2011).

Additionally, a wealth of Indigenous knowledges recognizes the value of connections with land and culture as ways to promote health and wellness. This is a notion that was clearly evident in discussions from Brascoupé and Weatherdon's 2013 "Healing Voices: The Ministers Forum on Addictions and Community Wellness," which showed that "people made it clear they want on-the-land programming . . . and lots of it. Reconnecting with their spiritual and cultural identities—so closely tied to nature—was for many communities a necessary component to all six pillars of healing: Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, Outreach, Aftercare and Enforcement" (20).

This request for land and culture-based programing is so prominent across Indigenous communities in Canada that one AHF study of projects with promising healing practices revealed that 80 percent of effective programs included some type of cultural activity or traditional healing intervention (Archibald and Dewar 2010). This desire for Indigenous-determined, culturally relevant, and land-based wellness services was made clear across all of the literature reviewed for this project and cannot be ignored moving forward.

*Legal precedence.* Demands for more Indigenous-determined wellness services are not limited only to community requests. A wide range of legal and structural appeals for supporting Indigenous-determined wellness practices for Indigenous communities have been established on both national and international levels (Wilson 2003; Kanentakeron 2006; Robbins and Dewar 2011). The TRC's *Calls to Action* (2015), the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations 2007), and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (United Nations 1996) all affirm the rights of Indigenous peoples to have access to their lands, culture, and health practices. Despite these far-reaching affirmations, the resources to back this action are lacking (Lane et al. 2002; Alfred 2009; Robbins and Dewar 2011; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015).

This lack of financial support is problematic because it is counter to available evidence that supports that land and culture-based programs are effective at facilitating decolonization and promoting wholistic wellness among Indigenous communities. It also directly undercuts the legal precedent for actively supporting Indigenous-determined wellness programs (Lane et al. 2002; Wilson 2003; Duran and Walters 2004; Kanentakeron 2006; Christian and Spittal 2008; Alfred 2009; Archibald and Dewar 2010; Green 2010; Robbins and Dewar 2011; Place and Hanlon 2011; YFNHSDD 2013; Iseke 2013; Goodkind et al. 2015; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015). This conflict cannot be ignored, and if Canada and its various branches of provincial and municipal government intend on honoring these national and international declarations, then the utility of land- and culture-based wellness programs must be recognized and meaningfully integrated into the Indigenous wellness initiatives.

#### **Connections with land and culture—key to wholistic wellness**

*Land, culture, and decolonization.* The literature reflects not only that facilitating connections with land and culture benefit wellness but also that, given colonization's causal role in contemporary health inequities, cultural revitalization and decolonization strategies are essential components in restoring and maintaining wholistic wellness of Indigenous communities

(Alfred 2009; Goodkind et al. 2015). The literature unanimously affirmed that programs and interventions that facilitate connections with land and culture offer a clear path toward decolonization and wellness. This is well reflected in Goodkind and colleagues' (2015) study, which affirms that "opportunities to 'give testimony to' the processes of colonization that disconnected American Indian/Alaska Native peoples from their histories, lands, and cultures . . . and to reclaim and revitalize cultural knowledge about the land, traditions, and histories are important components of healing these losses and promoting well-being" (488). Therefore, a core component of LBCWRs programs' theoretical utility is explicitly tied to its ability to facilitate and nurture the connections to land and culture that have been negatively impacted by historical and ongoing attempts at colonization.

*Land and culture in the maintenance of healing and wellness.* Wellness programs connected with land and culture offer more than just a pathway to decolonization; they are also protective and restorative for the wholistic health and wellness of Indigenous communities. Duran and Walters, in their article on "HIV/AIDS Prevention in Indian Country," best reflects these protective aspects, writing that "enculturation is a protective mechanism that can either mitigate the negative effects of a risk factor (e.g., stressors) or enhance the effects of another variable (e.g., identity attitudes) to decrease the probability of a negative outcome (e.g., HIV or sexual risk behaviors)" (2004, 197).

Land- and culture-based wellness programs can also provide space for healing from trauma, disease, and other factors of ill-health or imbalance (Lane et al. 2002; Wilson 2003; Duran and Walters 2004; Kanen-takeron 2006; Christian and Spittal 2008; Alfred 2009; Archibald and Dewar 2010; Green 2010; Robbins and Dewar 2011; Place and Hanlon 2011; YFNHSDD 2013; Iseke 2013; Goodkind et al. 2015; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015). These healing components were illuminated during an interview conducted by Kathleen Wilson in which an Anishinabek man from Northern Ontario expressed the healing aspect of connections with land and culture, saying "I came up with a phrase the other day that describes how I feel, 'Harvesting medicine is medicine.' I really think about the therapeutic aspect involved in knowing that you are out there being spiritually connected with Mother Earth and what she provides for you. You are picking plants and putting down tobacco, thanking her for what she has given but at the same time you are rejuvenating yourself. You are healing yourself within. You are making yourself feel good" (Wilson 2003, 12).

Connections with land and culture have shown themselves to be invaluable in promoting and maintaining wholistic wellness at the

community level. Again, Taiaiake Alfred offers a poignant reflection on the ability for connections with land and culture to maintain wholistic wellness among Indigenous communities when he expresses that “there is an ‘astonishing’ contrast between the experience and difference in the kind of life a person lives when land-based cultural practices form the core of their existence, one in which negative experiences are very rare, as opposed to the experience of poor health, accidents and injuries, violence, and alcoholism in the very same individuals, [in which] that connection to the land is broken” (2009, 53).

In sum, the themes that emerged from the literature regarding the theoretical utility of LBCWRs confirm that LBCWRs are in line with Indigenous health and healing paradigms, that there is both a strong community demand and legal precedent for LBCWRS, and that LBCWRs as a methodology to facilitate connections to land and culture are not just beneficial to the wholistic wellness of Indigenous peoples and communities but are fundamentally essential for it.

### ***Key Considerations for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating LBCWRs***

Three components make up the key considerations for planning, implementing, and evaluating LBCWRs: wise practices, evaluations of LBCWRs, and challenges.

#### **Wise practices**

Although the theoretical utility of LBCWRs was abundant throughout the literature, published wise practices for facilitating these types of programs were less common. LBCWRs range greatly in their context and application, thus making it difficult to highlight overarching wise practices. However, an extensive report on land-based treatment programs developed by the Council of Yukon First Nations (YFNHSDD 2013) outlined common wise-practice themes that apply to the wide range of LBCWRs. Those themes are summarized in the following list:

- Retreat planning
  - Assess the client’s suitability and readiness for the program.
  - Determine appropriate length of programs for participants’ unique context.
- Retreat implementation and management
  - Provide access to medical personnel, diverse wellness practitioners (traditional healers, massage therapists, etc.), and Elders.

- Provide hands-on, experiential, and diverse activities suitable for all levels of participant education and physical abilities (examples include as hunting, fishing, canoeing, circle work, drumming, berry picking, medicine gathering, snowshoe making, knife making, course work, and much more).
- Provide good quality facilities, facilitators, and food, despite the cost.
- Maintain openness and respect for all individuals' spiritual beliefs.
- Provide programs with a deep spiritual foundation focused on healing.
- Retreat follow up
  - Provide diverse approaches to aftercare, such as home visits, employment programs, employment at the land-based treatment program after completing the program, "keeping in touch" through Facebook, and community homes.
  - Work with participants support systems to help them in supporting participants following a retreat.

#### **Evaluation of land-based cultural wellness retreats**

Moreover, although formalized evaluations of LBCWRs have been minimal, available literature reveals the consistent, positive transformative capabilities of LBCWRs. According to the reviewed literature, measured effects of LBCWRs include but are not limited to the following:

- improved physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness
- reduced mental health, trauma, and anxiety symptoms
- improved self-care, self-esteem, and self-reliance
- lifestyle and physical health changes such as increased activity, weight loss, and reduced blood pressure
- improved coping skills in place of substance misuse
- improved family and community functioning
- decreased destructive acts (e.g., self-harm, suicide, unsafe sex)
- increased knowledge of and skills with cultural/traditional activities
- increased pride and identification with cultural heritage
- increased knowledge of First Nation history
- increased sense of purpose
- strengthening of relationships within community (Lane et al. 2002; Archibald and Dewar 2010; YFNHSDD 2013; Brascoupé and Weatherdon 2015)

This list is only a snapshot of the considerable knowledge demonstrating that Indigenous healing practices—and specifically LBCWRs—can have profound effects on Indigenous health, healing, and wellness at both the individual and community levels. These factors were common across the literature and clearly indicate the positive impact of LBCWRs.

### **Challenges**

Despite these positive outcomes, the literature highlights that LBCWRs face an overwhelming number of challenges, especially regarding research and funding. For one, LBCWRs must contend against bias from Western biomedical, organizational, and academic institutions that often construct LBCWRs as illegitimate wellness interventions. According to *The Haude-nosaunee Code of Behaviour for Traditional Medicine Healers*, traditional Indigenous healing practices have often been constructed as “superstition, witchcraft, and/or ineffective medicine” (Kanentakeron 2006, 15). Moreover, available literature reveals that contemporary Western research often disregards the approaches and framework of Indigenous healers, fails to listen to or attempt to understand Indigenous ways of knowing and healing, and overwhelmingly maintains prejudices against Indigenous healing practices.

This negative bias, in turn, has also contributed to another challenge: insufficient funding. As demonstrated throughout the literature, lack of funding is a major factor that inhibits the development, implementation, and management of LBCWRs. The literature further reflects that whereas the need for funding is great, acquiring funding can be a difficult and risky process. External and often non-Indigenous funding sources typically come with strict restrictions and regulations that can inhibit Indigenous autonomy and control over LBCWRs. This lack of Indigenous determination can then potentially decrease the overall cultural safety and effectiveness of LBCWRs and thus mitigate the retreats’ wellness effects. This tumultuous nature surrounding funding was best reflected in the YFNHSDD’s report on land-based treatment, where one person proposed that “it [LBCWRs] is not going to work if it is funded. Too many people will be telling you what to do” (2013, 20).

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Overall, the available literature reflects many aspects of how the process of colonization has impacted Indigenous communities’ wellness; the consensus around the theoretical utility of promoting connections with

land and culture as viable health interventions for Indigenous communities; the positive transformative capacities of LBCWRs; and the challenges associated in the provision of LBCWRs for Indigenous peoples and communities.

However, notable gaps were also identified. In relation to planning and coordinating retreats, while many different LBCWRs have occurred within Indigenous communities for various wellness issues, very few retreats have been conducted specifically for Indigenous peoples with HIV, HCV, or both. As a result, there is a significant lack of knowledge related to the specific physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social wellness needs of Indigenous peoples living with these condition, and thus there is a lack of knowledge about how best to tailor LBCWRs for this community.

Next, outside of funding restrictions, very little information exists regarding other types of challenges and barriers faced by both retreat coordinators and participants regarding LBCWRs. This is significant since challenges cannot be addressed until they are better understood. Moreover, given that LBCWRs for Indigenous peoples living with HIV, HCV, or both will likely have different challenges than other retreats, it is important to distinguish which challenges are common across LBCWRs and which are specific to LBCWRs for people living with HIV, HCV, or both.

In terms of researching retreats, little to no literature exists around methods to evaluate the various types of LBCWRs using Indigenous evaluation frameworks or Indigenous-specific wellness indicators. Understanding how to evaluate Indigenous programs from an Indigenous perspective is imperative to facilitating Indigenous community control and autonomy over Indigenous-determined health services and thus fundamental to LBCWRs' success. In addition, the literature is also lacking discussions related to Indigenous research methodologies that are also connected to land and culture. In recognizing the utility of land- and culture-based wellness programs, we too must employ research methods that are also connected to land and culture.

Finally, there is a significant gap within Western knowledge frames around wise practices for LBCWRs. According to Lane and colleagues' study, "This absence of viable models and clear principles presents a critical challenge to Aboriginal communities and organizations struggling with healing issues, as well as to funders wishing to support Aboriginal healing work" (2002, 6). Clearly, these gaps highlighted by the literature have directly impacted the ability of LBCWRs to exist and flourish. Moving forward, if health inequities faced by Indigenous communities are to be addressed in "*good way*,"

concerted effort and increased resources must be directed to amend these gaps.<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion and Recommendations for Moving Forward

In efforts to move toward health equity and justice, LBCWRs offer a promising path toward decolonization and wholistic wellness for Indigenous communities. Contemporary literature affirms that colonization explicitly sought to disconnect Indigenous peoples from their land and culture and that this disconnection is a causal factor for many current health inequities faced by Indigenous communities, specifically in regard to HIV, HCV, and HIV/HCV coinfection.

Indigenous peoples and communities, both historic and current, recognize that LBCWRs work—they are effective interventions for restoring and maintaining wholistic health and wellness. Not only do Indigenous communities continue to call for access to culturally relevant, Indigenous-determined health services and research, but these calls are also echoed by national and International declarations, such as the TRC and UNDRIP. Yet despite our understanding of LBCWRs and the demonstrated need and legal precedence for them, these programs still face many challenges related to negative bias and lack of funding.

Given the extent of health inequities faced by Indigenous communities and the proven inability of Western biomedical practices to promote wholistic wellness for Indigenous communities, it is imperative that these gaps in research and services be addressed as soon as possible. As we acknowledge the truth and move forward toward reconciliation, it is essential to ask the following questions:

- What are the best practices for connecting and reconnecting Indigenous peoples to LBCWRs?
- What are Indigenous-determined methods for land-based research?
- How do we bring land-based evidence back to community to nurture the sharing of our wisdom? How can it center on storytelling, a culturally resonant way of sharing?
- How do we honor the diverse lived experiences of those with HIV and HCV in a LBCWR setting, moving from separate roots to a common way forward?
- How can we bridge Indigenous and Western research and evaluation models in “*good way*” that honors both ways of knowing?

If we are to further aid Indigenous peoples affected by HIV and HCV in their journeys of healing, wellness, and self-empowerment, LBCWRs must be recognized as viable health interventions and integrated into support services across the continuum of HIV and HCV care. Most importantly, this integration must be done in a manner that is accessible, strengths based, and culturally appropriate, and that addresses the unique physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social needs of Indigenous peoples with lived experience of HIV, HCV, and HIV/HCV coinfection.

**AHF** Aboriginal Healing Foundation (Canada)

**ART** antiretroviral treatment

**BC** British Columbia (Canada)

**DAA**s direct acting anti-viral treatments

**HCV** hepatitis C

**HIV** Human Immunodeficiency Virus

**HIV/HCV** HIV and hepatitis C coinfection

**LBCWRs** land-based cultural-wellness retreats

**PHAC** Public Health Agency of Canada

**TRC** Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

**UNDRIP** United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

**YFNHSDD** Yukon First Nations Health and Social Development Department

**DANA HARPER KREMENTZ** received her bachelor of science degree in biological sciences and interdisciplinary Indigenous health studies at Northern Arizona University in 2014 and is a recent graduate of the Master of Public Health program at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia. Dana's professional and academic interests range from Indigenous wellness to disability justice to sexual and reproductive health, but altogether they maintain a strong commitment to understanding and addressing social inequities in health. In recent years, Dana works as a research assistant for the Canadian Institute of Health Research's Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health, as an outreach and support worker for sex workers in Vancouver's Downtown East Side at WISH Vancouver, and as a wellness and recreation program coordinator for Indigenous youth across the Lower Mainland of BC at Red Fox Healthy Living Society.

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**SANDY LEO LAFRAMBOISE** is an Algonquin/Cree-Métis person. She is a recognized two-spirit spiritual leader who has actively practiced in the Vancouver area for twenty-five years. Her ceremonial rites were received from Frank Supernault, a Cree Elder from Alberta, through the Pot Latch ceremonies. Sandra has lead ceremonies throughout North America and Continental Europe, most recently leading a pipe ceremony within the circle at Stonehenge and giving lectures at Queens University of Belfast and in Devon. Since 1972 she has advocated for the LGBT community, and in particular she has worked to promote social health and justice for transgender groups. Sandra is also a researcher, a collaborator, and conference presenter on numerous projects as an Elder, a Knowledge Keeper, and a transgender person.

**VALERIE NICHOLSON** is Mi'kmaq and Haida. A mother of four boys and grandmother of four grandsons and one granddaughter, she has lived with HIV for fourteen years and currently works as a peer navigator with the Positive Living Society of British Columbia. She enjoys working in community-based research and is the 2018 recipient of the Canadian Association for HIV Research Red Ribbon Award. Valerie is the chair of the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network and Red Road HIV/AIDS Network.

## NOTES

1. While "connection with the land" and the notion of being "on the land" may seem abstract, conversations with our Elders and knowledge keepers reveal that these imply

grounding one's own self (in mind, body, spirit) within the land. The physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual being and foundation of Indigenous people is grounded in a firm belief in the Great Spirit and the understanding that all living beings on Mother Earth have a spirit that together compose the essence of the life force of the Great Spirit. This means that our ecosystem and our environment is the fundamental basis of our spirit. Being "one in connectedness" with the land can be interpreted in both a literal and symbolic sense. The "land" can refer to different natural environments that provide Indigenous groups with medicines and other valuable elements that are key for survival, healing, wellness, and more. Indigenous cultures are directly tied to and informed by the lands they are on; the land guides Indigenous cultural activities, norms, values, spirituality, survival, healing, and wellness approaches. Each Indigenous group is intimately connected with the land that nurtures them, and the land forms the basis for their understanding, or ways of knowing, the world and life overall. Connecting with the land does not necessarily entail a physical act or physical presence in a remote environment; rather, "connecting with the land" can be a broader, more abstract relationship that is honored through diverse ceremony and rituals. These practices strengthen our relationship with the land and the Great Spirit and thus are essential for balance and holistic wellness.

2. Those databases were Proquest, Web of Knowledge, Pubmed, Medline, Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), and PsychINFO, which is an abstracting and indexing database devoted to peer-reviewed behavioral- and social-science research literature.

3. It is important to note that this is not a full-fledged systematic literature review. Given the "rapid, scoping" nature of this review, as well as time restraints and budgetary limitations, not every article published in relation to LBCWRs as wellness interventions for Indigenous peoples could be included in this review. Additionally, given the time taken for the publication process, other articles regarding development and evaluation of LBCWRs for Indigenous peoples living with HIV, HCV, or HIV/HCV coinfection may have been published. Although these works are important, all of the articles reviewed for this paper were found in a methodical and community-based manner; therefore, newly published material have not been retroactively incorporated into the review since inclusion of new material would compromise the community methodology utilized here.

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# **"You Can't Just Rely on What You Know Now": Community Teachers' Perspectives on Language Education in a Revitalization Context**

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*Kitty-Jean Laginiha and Ahmar Mahboob*

**ABSTRACT** | In this article, we present and discuss the findings of ten semistructured interviews with community language teachers (primarily of Gumbaynggirr, a language of coastal northern New South Wales, Australia) regarding their approaches to and perceptions of their language education practice, including their motivations, pedagogical orientations, choices, and aims. Inspired by the increasingly socially oriented trajectory of applied linguistics research, specifically research situating language teaching in social contexts, we illustrate how community language teachers act with socially oriented agency within a difficult environment. Their self-described approaches and views are shaped and enacted in light of the particular aims and challenges pertaining to language revitalization. The role and function of language teaching, as perceived by community teachers, is engaged with personal as well as wider social, historical issues that lie at the root of language loss in Australia.

**KEYWORDS** | language, revitalization, language teacher, identity, Gumbaynggirr language

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Indigenous language revitalization efforts in Australia seek to confront, halt, and counter the reality of severe language loss and shift. Recent government policy developments have enabled the provision of Aboriginal languages within the language education curriculum, a relatively new frontier of language revitalization.<sup>1</sup> There are, however, many barriers facing the teaching of reawakening languages in school contexts (Hobson 2006, 2014; Rhydwen et al. 2007; Purdie et al. 2008; Rhydwen 2010), and these challenges, combined with the unique goals of teaching for revitalization, suggest that communities have their own ways of approaching second language (L2) pedagogy. In this article, we attempt to shed some insight into the beliefs and practices of Aboriginal language teachers in one community.

Following an overarching qualitative research design, we investigate the nature of community teachers' perspectives regarding approaches to Aboriginal language teaching in the setting of Australia's language revitalization movement. In this article, we focus on the New South Wales (NSW) context—where Aboriginal languages are considered “dormant” (Palmer 2000)—and the Gumbaynggirr community to provide a descriptive exploratory account of community teachers' perspectives about Aboriginal language education and pedagogy in the NSW revitalization context. Drawing on first-person insights obtained through interviews, we explore their stories, beliefs, motivations, and experiences. In providing nuanced insight into community teachers' beliefs about language-in-context, we seek in this article to demonstrate how understandings of language and the relationship between language and education reflects and construes particular social, cultural, and political realities.

This study is positioned within the field of research concerning language education, which has over the last decade or so taken a “social turn” (Block 2003) and pays greater attention to how the broader social-cultural-political context mediates the relationship between language and processes of language teaching and learning (Benson and Cooker 2013). The identities, practices, and beliefs of community teachers of Aboriginal languages form a domain of potentially constructive inquiry for the intersecting fields of language education and revitalization. Some important work has been published in this area. Amery's (2016) study presents a fine-grained and comprehensive analysis of the efforts of the Kaurna community in reclaiming their language, whereas Mühlhäusler and colleagues' (2004) report *Ecological Issues in Language Revival* also offers relevant insight. These works consider first-person accounts of teachers' experiences and views, as well as look at the motivations and attitudes of learners and teachers that may impact the process of language revitalization. The present study contributes to this area of research by investigating the relationship between Aboriginal language revitalization and teachers' perspectives on their work specifically for the Gumbaynggirr language context, which has not yet been subject to formal scholarship in this respect. In developing this project, we draw from a number of related subfields, as discussed below.

## Language Endangerment, Loss, and Revitalization

The phenomenon of language loss and endangerment is a necessary starting point for any study concerned with languages undergoing revitalization. “Dormant languages”—which constitute the focus of this study—lie on the far end of the continuum of endangerment (Tsunoda 2004, 9). Linguists have

highlighted the central role of social determinants of the linguistic process of endangerment. According to Sasse (1992), external factors bring about changes in speech behavior, which in turn lead to structural changes and thus to “shift” (or transfer). Sasse argues that causes for language endangerment can be found exclusively in the “external setting” (11), which requires linguists to examine the “ecology of language” (Haugen 1972). In the Australian context, language loss or “death” can be attributed to immense population loss (as a result of a violent colonization) as well as to shift. Tsunoda distinguishes between two causes of “language death”: (i) language death owing to the death of the population, and (ii) language death owing to language shift (2004, 42–43). In Australia, both processes are evident; however, the mechanism of shift is particularly notable for revivalists, for it involves, as Sasse (1992) remarks, cultural, sociological, ethno-historical, economic, and political factors, which create pressures that cause a community to cease using their language.

Recent attempts to “reverse language shift” (Fishman 1991) have opened up the field of “revival linguistics,” which is a linguistic discipline aiming to explore the universal constraints and mechanisms involved in language reclamation, renewal, and revitalization (Walsh and Zuckermann 2011, 121). Efforts to revitalize languages involve attempts to maintain the vitality of languages that are endangered but still spoken, as well as attempts to “reawaken” and “restore” languages that are no longer actively spoken because of language shift or loss. Since the target languages of Aboriginal language education programs in NSW can be classified as dormant (Palmer 2000), this study focuses on this latter “sense” of revitalization.

## **Language Revitalization and Education in Australia**

In order for readers to understand the contextual particularities within which we have carried out our study, we provide a brief overview of revitalization activity in NSW. The severe scale of language loss and endangerment in Australia is widely attested (e.g., Palmer 2000). The estimated number of distinct languages spoken prior to invasion is approximately 250 (Walsh and Yallop 1993), whereas the number deemed “strong” or “safe” was estimated to be 13 in 2014 (Marmion, Obata, and Troy 2014, xii). According to UNESCO indicators, the majority of Indigenous languages have no living native speakers, and others are “severely” or “critically” endangered (McConvell, Marmion, and McNicol 2005). Rates of language loss in NSW, as the first area to be impacted by colonization, are particularly acute. Languages that have no living fluent speakers, as is generally the case in NSW, are commonly referred to as “dormant,” capturing their potential to be revitalized (Hobson et al. 2010, xxv).

Federal and state governments in Australia have recently incorporated language-revitalization aims into language policy and planning initiatives. One area in which this manifests is the inclusion of Aboriginal languages in primary and secondary schools. Teachers of Aboriginal languages in NSW, who usually have ancestral links to the target language but are not necessarily “full speakers” of it, have varying levels of education and usually do not hold formal teaching qualifications. Whereas there are clear benefits to such programs that involve the community and recognize the role of language owners, language revitalization in a school environment has been subject to criticism, particularly concerning the institutional nature of state education and associated legacies of cultural imperialism and assimilation (Malcolm and Truscott 2010, 9). Indeed, Indigenous communities often express a degree of reservation about language programs in education institutions (Poetsch and Lowe 2010, 157).

Aboriginal language programs in education currently face a multitude of barriers, including a shortage of adults who have some degree of fluency in their languages, a shortage of teaching resources, and a lack of appropriate and accessible teacher education and training (Hobson 2006, 2014; Rhydwen et al. 2007; Purdie et al. 2008; Rhydwen 2010). It is important to recognize that goals of revitalization efforts in NSW are deeply constrained by practical considerations and barriers; Lo Bianco and Rhydwen note that activity does not usually occur with the expectation of full restoration (2001, 396). However, it is also important to acknowledge signs of positive change. Marmion, Obata, and Troy (2014) found thirty languages showing signs of increased use, and “school programs” (in which community involvement is recognized as crucial) were identified as a significant component of language revitalization activity. Lowe and Howard (2010) argue that schools have the potential to, and often do, make a positive contribution to revitalization efforts, particularly if they follow a community-based approach that involves genuine collaboration between schools, language centers, linguists, and language owners. For instance, the Kaurna language revitalization effort, documented in detail by Amery (2016), represents a remarkable case of successful linguistic and cultural reclamation.

## **Language Revitalization and Ideologies of Language**

Arguments concerning the value of linguistic heritage commonly invoked in “endangerment discourse” (Duchêne and Heller 2007) invite inquiry into the link between language, identity, and culture. The question arises, “What role or function do languages hold in a revitalization context, as perceived by language owners, language workers, and linguists?” Tsunoda makes an

entry point into this discussion by asking the question of whether a culture is lost if a language is lost (2004, 161). A common argument posits that, given that a language represents a unique worldview and contains unique forms of knowledge, loss of language naturally involves loss of this knowledge (resonating with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis [Hoijer 1974]). A contrary view contends that cultural knowledge and practices exist within language and endure as present cultural practices (Eades 1982, 1988; Rigsby 1987; Yunkaporta 2009, 2010).

Indigenous people's perspectives on the link between language, culture, identity, and education provide crucial insight here. Indigenous Australian education scholar Yunkaporta (2009, 2010) explains that Aboriginal pedagogies, or "ways of learning," are embedded within language, and thus teaching and revitalizing language involves "reclaiming" Aboriginal pedagogies. He identifies eight such "ways of learning": story sharing, learning maps, nonverbal learning, symbols and images, land links, nonlinear learning, deconstruct/reconstruct, and community links. In the process of exploring teachers' perspectives and self-reported practices, the ways in which such cultural pedagogies are enacted in language education will become apparent in the views of Aboriginal language teachers.

Motivations for revitalization reveal ideologies of, or orientations to, language. The beneficial social effects of language reclamation and maintenance to individual and community well-being has been clearly demonstrated (e.g., Biddle and Swee 2012). It is widely attested that Aboriginal languages hold a strong identity function since language is associated with continuity and maintenance of group (i.e., community) identity (García, Rakhmiel, and Schiffman 2006). Indeed, traditional languages are in fact a strong part of Indigenous people's identity (Marmion, Obata, and Troy 2014). Our understanding of language can be further broadened by considering that revitalization does not concern language exclusively but forms part of a much broader movement toward reclaiming culture, identity, and empowerment, and thus revitalization encapsulates struggles for social, economic, and political justice (Thieberger 1990).

So-called discourses of endangerment have been subject to critique. Duchêne and Heller's (2007) volume examines the implications of superficial acceptance of the Whorfian view of the inherent connection between language, culture, and identity. Patrick (2007) problematizes equating endangered or dormant languages with traditional lifestyles and fixed territories, questioning whether it is accurate or appropriate to assume that a language is required for maintaining ethnic identity given that speakers shifted for a reason. Similarly, Jaffe (2007) argues that discourses about "saving" languages often posit an "essentializing" relationship between

language, culture, and identity. Such a relationship, she says, “can never just ‘restore’ a language; it will always inevitably create new linguistic, social and political realities” (74).

Such critiques highlight the need to apply a critical understanding of language in different social contexts since an analysis of orientations to languages undergoing revitalization involves interrogating and potentially challenging assumptions about language and its relationship to culture and identity. As Cameron has noted, language does not merely reflect or mark identities as particular kinds of social subjects but constitutes and construes identity (1995, 15–16). This prominent idea has been developed by scholars such as Blommaert and Rampton (2011), who point out that studying “whole languages” in isolated units of space and time is insufficient to account for the complexity of language within shifting social realities (such as those brought about by globalization). A basic yet crucial implication of such theorization is that language is a *social practice* located in particular social contexts.

## Language Teacher Identity

In recent years, the broad field of applied linguistics has taken on a more socially informed and interdisciplinary approach (Block 2003). Greater interest has been shown in the social, cultural, and political factors arising in instructional contexts, with extensive literature dedicated to examining experiences of language learning and use in particular social and situational contexts (e.g., Canagarajah 1999; Norton 2000; Pavlenko 2001). Since individuals are fundamentally social subjects, the notion of identity has also come under investigation from this perspective.

A focus on the individual as reflecting and construing social realities (such as orientations to language and education) in applied linguistics invites consideration of the research domain of identity. The concept of identity as an “analytic lens” is gaining prominence in educational research (Gee 2000). Such research has offered critical commentary on the way identity lies at the nexus of the wider social-cultural-political world and more microlevel experiences of education in particular settings. The bulk of this research has been oriented toward Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) contexts and has tended to focus on the learner. According to Borg’s (2003) study, teachers’ identity and beliefs is an understudied but gradually growing area. Borg’s (2006) research examines teachers’ identity and their mental constructs (thoughts, beliefs, knowledge systems, etc.) and investigates how their “cognitions” translate into classroom practice. In examining the thoughts and beliefs that lead to particular behaviors, he

finds that underlying behaviors are layers of complex factors that have a bearing on, and reflect, the sociopolitical context of language teaching itself.

Literature concerning the socially mediated nature of identity raises considerations of agency. Within the sociocultural theory (SCT) research paradigm, agency is understood as “the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001, 112, cited in Lantolf 2013, 19). Lantolf goes on to summarize aspects of agency, suggesting that agency is the human ability to act through mediation with awareness of one’s actions and to determine their significance (2013, 19). Agency has been a central concern in educational linguistics engaged with social critique; however, there has, again, been a prominent focus on the learner (e.g., Canagarajah 1999). Teachers, as agents in the process of learning and teaching, are just as deserving of consideration, particularly in the context forming the focus of this study. Conceptions of agency (which promote the formation of individual agency) have also been linked to social transformational goals (Lantolf 2013, 27). Such a view links agency with social goals and is significant for this study since community teachers’ understanding of their practice—including their motivations as well as their pedagogical orientations, choices, and aims—relate to the needs and aims of their community trying to revitalize their language.

Finally, much of the literature examined in this brief background might be said to fall within a “critical” research domain. According to Pennycook’s (2001) study, a “critical” approach to applied linguistics is one that engages with social critique and calls for positive change. Such research engages with configurations of power and inequality within language education. These approaches are applicable to the goals of the present study since social, historical, and political factors are highly salient in language loss and revitalization. Also, critical practice can emerge from engaging with communities’ concerns, which this study seeks to achieve.

Despite increased scholarly attention to language loss and revitalization, as well as greater attention to language teacher identities, community teachers involved in revitalization have yet to be considered from an applied linguistics perspective. The overall socially oriented trajectory of research in language education is highly pertinent to the unique pedagogical context within which community teachers’ work is located. Thus, this study is poised to offer an original contribution.

## Method

In this study, we take a qualitative, interview-based approach to exploring and inquiring into the perceptions of Aboriginal language teaching practices of community teachers. The exploratory nature of qualitative research

is particularly well-suited to fields in which existing research is limited or when little is known about a given phenomenon (Croker 2009, 9). Indeed, the emerging field of “revival linguistics” (Walsh and Zuckermann 2011) and its relationship to language in education is somewhat understudied. Qualitative methods, of which interviews represent the archetypal form, are an essential foundation for this study and future research. Further, although the identity, cognitions, purpose, motivation, proficiency, and education of language teachers have been examined, teachers of Aboriginal languages in revitalization contexts have yet to be considered beyond a small number of studies. Such a “gap” is well-served by a qualitative, exploratory research approach that obtains data using in-depth interviews.

### ***Focus Study Community***

The Gumbaynggirr language community constitutes the community-in-focus of this research study. As such, participants (interviewees) are predominantly community teachers of the Gumbaynggirr language. Gumbaynggirr country lies on the NSW North Coast between the Nambucca River in the south to the Clarence River in the north, extending west to the Great Dividing Range, near Glen Innes.

Gumbaynggirr language revitalization began in the 1980s when Gumbaynggirr Elders gathered to confront language loss by reawakening their language, which had been “buried” (Muurrbay, n.d.). The language center, Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-Operative (or “Muurrbay”), plays a significant role in facilitating revitalization efforts, undertaking work in language documentation, research, publishing, and language education support. Muurrbay operates under a model of Aboriginal leadership and ownership, a crucial component of community-led grassroots revitalization (Ash et al. 2010). Muurrbay provides occasional community workshops that assist Gumbaynggirr people not only to learn the language but also to develop skills to teach others. Subject to demand, Muurrbay intermittently offers the “Certificate IV in Teaching Language and Cultural Maintenance,” a Vocational Education and Training (VET) accredited course. The certificate equips Gumbaynggirr speakers to teach their language in TAFE<sup>2</sup> colleges and qualifies them to be community language teachers in NSW schools (Hobson 2014, 194). The Gumbaynggirr community’s efforts represent an exemplary model of language revitalization in Australia (Walsh 2001), owing partly to the determination and hard work of key individuals and their effective collaboration with the wider community. Muurrbay is also driven by a significant degree of autonomy and ownership in the planning process. Lo Bianco and Rhydwen identify

the language initiatives of the Gumbaynggirr community as provisionally successful instances of the kinds of “modest revival” feasible in the Australian context (2001, 404).

### ***Community-based Research***

This research topic calls for both a commitment to principles of ethical research and a critical awareness of a socially aware and culturally appropriate approach in interactions with individuals who contribute their knowledge. The historical lack of representation of the needs and aims of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in linguistic research conducted by academic institutions cannot be overlooked.

Prior to recent shifts, studies involving Indigenous peoples have been subject to Eurocentric prejudice and have seen communities of practice and their languages as “objects of study.” It has become more accepted that linguistic research is not devoid of ethical responsibility. Rice’s (2009) study argues that collaborative and cooperative research approaches, guided by principles of respect, relationships, reciprocity, and recognition, are imperative. This study aims to contribute to a field of research that is empowering, useful, and underpinned by the principle that language revitalization goes hand in hand with social justice. The *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (AIATSIS 2012) offer a solid foundation for following such an approach. The *Community Protocols for Indigenous Language Projects* provides similar guidance in this regard and asks linguists and language workers to remember that communities are the owners and custodians of their languages and cultures and should be consulted at all times (FATSIL 2004, 7).

### ***Interviews***

Interviews consisted of semistructured conversations with community language teachers. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. According to teacher identity researcher Borg (2006), interviews, a form of “verbal commentary,” are a highly useful data collection method in research that investigates phenomena (such as teachers’ “mental constructs”) that are unobservable and thus difficult to measure through other means. In this study, semistructured interviews offer the opportunity to conversationally engage with community teachers’ perspectives to attempt to understand the nature of their experience, thereby enabling us to present a fuller, richer picture of their pedagogical approaches and the factors that inform them. Additionally, given the complex and somewhat fraught social and political

context of Indigenous languages revitalization and its role in education, aspects of teachers' identity, beliefs, and knowledge base (including their purpose, motivation, proficiency, and education) are particularly pertinent.

Interviews followed a semistructured style (Richards 2009, 185) chosen for its capacity to facilitate greater participant input and thus "co-construction" of the interview itself. The interview plan consisted of twenty preprepared questions (see appendix 1) selected depending on the flow of the conversation and their relevance to the participant. These questions yielded information about participants' biographical backgrounds, their language-teaching practices, and, most of all, their beliefs, motivations, and aspirations. An informal, collaborative style was followed, and the conversation was guided by (yet often digressed from) set questions.

### ***Participants***

The selection strategy of participants was largely open and aimed to gather a variety of experiences and backgrounds. Eleven interviews were conducted, mostly with community teachers of the Gumbaynggirr language who teach in various schools within and surrounding the Coffs Harbour and Nambucca Valley area. Other interviewees included community teachers of Wiradjuri, Gathang, and Gamilaraay. Participants reported that they had a personal, identity-based connection with the language that they taught, except for one non-Aboriginal teacher.

Participants were always learners of the language (of a variety of proficiencies), as well as teachers. Although it has been noted that most community teachers do not hold formal language-teaching or general-teaching qualifications, many interviewees had a background in teaching languages or other subjects, and a significant portion were graduates of the MILE program.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 provides some background information for nine of the interviewees, all of whom indicated that they wished to be identified and so be acknowledged for their work and their contribution to this study.

### ***Analysis***

The core methodology adopted in this study is thematic analysis. Flexible and relatively straightforward, thematic analysis enables one to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data, producing an analytical interpretation of aspects of the research topic (Braun and Clarke 2006, 6). Collating and transcribing interviews was followed by combing through each individual participant's interview data systematically, identifying (tagging words and phrases) codes as anchors in the data around which key

**Table 1 | Background information about interviewees**

Name	Language	Biographical notes
1. Courtney	Gumbaynggirr	Courtney is a Gumbaynggirr language teacher early in her career. She has used language as a way to connect with the community in different ways (e.g., she is a musician in a band that performs songs in Gumbaynggirr).
2. Diane	Wiradjuri	Diane, based in Dubbo, is a MILE graduate, experienced Wiradjuri teacher, school cultural officer, and highly involved in community activity connected to the revitalization of culture and language.
3. Jo	Gumbaynggirr	Jo assists in the revitalization of Gumbaynggirr. She is an Aboriginal Education Officer (AEO) at a high school and supports the students undertaking Gumbaynggirr classes. She is also undertaking an education degree for Aboriginal students, as a mature-aged student.
4. Lee	Wiradjuri	Lee is a MILE graduate and previously a teacher of Wiradjuri. She is trying to start up community-accessible Wiradjuri classes in Redfern.
5. Michael	Gumbaynggirr	Michael is a MILE graduate with extensive teaching and learning experience in preschools, primary schools, and TAFE. He also helps run workshops for upskilling community teachers. Michael has a background in early childhood teaching.
6. Raelene	Gumbaynggirr	Raelene is currently studying for a language certificate at TAFE and teaches at three different schools on Gumbaynggirr country.
7. Rhonda	Gathang	Rhonda is a MILE student and a teacher of Certificate I in Aboriginal language at TAFE. She has been at teacher at TAFE for about twenty years.
8. Ricky	Gumbaynggirr	Ricky teaches at two schools in the area and is currently undertaking his language Certificate II at TAFE. Ricky began learning his language in primary school, where he excelled at and enjoyed learning and then decided to teach in his community.
9. Tracey	Gamilaraay	Tracey is a tutor for a Gamilaraay university-level course (which community members can attend) and a tutor in the education faculty at Sydney University. Tracey has a background in teaching at a primary level as well as teaching English as a second language.

points were gathered. For ease of data reporting, these descriptive codes were drawn together into collections of codes that fell under the following

categories: *purpose, motivation, identity, experience, and beliefs*. Particular themes are identified within these major categories, as will be discussed in the following section.

Thematic analyses identify patterns in data that are not necessarily immediately apparent but that are recognized by the researcher as “of interest” in light of the research questions at hand (Braun and Clarke 2006). Thus, it is important to point out that the way in which patterned responses from community teachers were “read” or “interpreted” was consciously driven by the research objectives of this study. Specifically, the questions directed to participants provoked particular types of answers, which were identified as thematic strands within the data. A number of key ideas form the underlying theoretical thrust of the thematic analysis. First and foremost, the analysis was motivated by a methodological interest inspired by Borg’s research interest and approach (2006). Borg’s investigations of language teachers’ identity and cognitions is motivated by the idea that beneath behavior are beliefs and other related constructs that influence particular practices. In this study, themes were identified by paying close attention to the beliefs, ideas, and personal perspectives that community teachers enacted and raised as relevant to their pedagogies. Although personal perspective was foregrounded, critical awareness of the surrounding social context of teachers’ lives and practices also played an important role in identifying themes. Finally, it is crucial to note that this study offers *one* interpretation of the results in light of the purpose of this study.

## Results

The categories of purpose, motivation, identity, experience, and beliefs represent, broadly, an organization of the various issues, concepts, and ideas related by participants.

### **Purpose**

This conceptual category identifies teachers’ self-reported ultimate “aims” or “goals” in teaching their language in a school environment. The majority of community teachers identified their purpose as that of teaching learners how to speak the language, that is, to achieve (at least some level of) oral proficiency in the target language. Spoken ability was generally viewed in terms of “real” communication, or meaningful verbal interaction in the target language. However, this goal was tempered with an awareness of the challenges and limitations of teaching to achieve communicative proficiency in a reawakening language. Further, this concern for “real communication”

was associated with genuinely “reawakening” one’s language. To be able to “hear those languages again,” as Tracey put it, was to be able to view language as “alive” or “living” within the community. Diane, who teaches her language Wiradjuri, said, “My goal is to get fluency and to hear the kids talking in language in the school yard, using the language outside in the public.” Similarly, in exploring her purpose, Courtney, who teaches her language Gumbaynggirr, said that “to be able to have those people within the community here you can converse with, rather than just say those singular words, that can keep language alive.”

Purpose also extended beyond language as a communicative system; conveying cultural meanings encoded within language (for instance, as expressing totemic relationships) emerged as a highly prominent goal. Another purpose was to give learners, and especially Aboriginal learners, an understanding of the cultural basis of language—for instance, by gaining an understanding of place and an appreciation of the history and culture of the local community. In Courtney’s words, “They’re gaining a deeper level of respect and gaining a deeper understanding of the community in which they live.”

### ***Motivation***

Motivation, closely related to purpose, has been said to capture “reasons for wanting to do something” (Williams 1994, 79). This emerged in community teachers’ attitudes and ideas that influenced their desire to teach or continue teaching. This tended to be expressed in terms of the instrumental benefits and advantages of teaching and learning Aboriginal languages (for both learner and teacher). First, teaching one’s language to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students was identified as a positive step in a community’s *ongoing journey* in reclaiming and reawakening their language and culture. It was explained that, since teaching a language involves sharing culture and language with the wider society, Aboriginal language education is an avenue for moving toward reconciliation. Furthermore, learning the language entails appreciating and respecting Aboriginal systems of knowledge (such as those described by Yunkaporta [2010]), and it was felt that conveying this aspect of language has positive practical implications for the community. Indeed, when children from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal backgrounds learned languages together in a collaborative, respectful environment, it was seen as transformative both for learners’ relationships and, in turn, for the wider community. Diane explained that, since teaching her language involves sharing culture and language with the wider society, Aboriginal language education is an avenue for moving toward reconciliation; “I think

it's one of the best forms of reconciliation that we could have in that we are learning together. And we're learning that respect together." This shows that community teachers felt motivated by a desire to confront and respond to tensions within their communities, which were often issues associated with the root causes of language shift and loss. Other motivating factors raised by teachers were building learners' confidence, pride, and self-esteem. Some community teachers said that they noticed the changes in learners' self-identity as an effect of language learning, and that this motivated their own interest in or desire to teach their language. One participant stated, "I've seen the excitement, that, you know, non-Indigenous kids get in actually learning Aboriginal languages. But the pride of Aboriginal kids, that this is something of value, that they're part of something that's deemed to be valued in the school environment." Finally, community teachers' practice was often driven by a desire to increase their own language knowledge, proficiency, and teaching skills.

### ***Identity***

In the context of this study, "identity" was realized as community teachers' sense of community (collective) and personal (individual) identity and their perceptions of how language education affects the learners' sense of identity. Many teachers explained that their drive to begin learning—which often led to teaching—their language sprung from a desire to connect with their own heritage, or in Raelene's words, "where my people come from." Thus, as teachers explained, affirming a sense of personal *and* collective identity was achieved through the process of learning and teaching their language. The personal knowledge, experiences, and beliefs that community teachers brought to their individual approaches were related to their own sense of identity. For instance, Raelene's knowledge of Gumbaynggirr culture and ideas of social relations fed into her own practice: "How Aboriginal families and that work together, they are really in each other's faces. They have the respect. And that's a big thing in Gumbaynggirr. So that's why I like them to be very together, as a group."

A critical awareness of how teaching language can positively impact senses of identity, confidence, and pride for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners was identified as a major theme of community teachers' self-reported approaches. Community teachers explained how teaching one's ancestral language helped Aboriginal children "find" their identity and, in turn, their self-confidence and pride. The concept of collective community identity was also prominent throughout the data and was expressed as key in holding a degree of autonomy and control of one's language and culture. Community

teachers' sense of community identity was a force in the maintenance of collective identity and the continuity of culture, a primary goal of language and culture revitalization.

### ***Experience***

This category captures the personal histories (events, memories, specific incidents, or reflections about the past) raised by teachers in exploring aspects of their pedagogy. Experiences of the historical injustices of language discrimination (not just individuals', but communities' collective memories) heavily influence present attitudes and beliefs. Experiences of institutional education, either in community teachers' childhoods at school or more recent experiences of language learning, arose frequently as affecting teachers' own practice and their motivation to teach *their* language *their own way*. For Raelene, this involved bringing her own knowledge into the classroom: "whatever I've had since I was a kid I kind of reinforce in the classroom and give them a little bit of what I know." This resonates with other teachers' explanations of the experiences and knowledge that inform their practice, for example, the knowledge of the language acquired from stories being passed on in one's family.

Many community teachers explicitly acknowledged the institutional, alienating culture of schools as a factor in such experiences. Aboriginal culture, language, and identity were denigrated and stigmatized in school; for example, community teachers shared stories of relatives being punished for speaking their languages. When community teachers "went back" to the site of these experiences and brought their languages into the classroom, this was expressed as confronting this past. However, these experiences mean that the focus of schools as a site of revitalization is sometimes challenging; the distrust of schools and other educational institutions based on experiences was often raised as a barrier for community involvement. Thus, community teachers frequently spoke of a desire for ownership and control over a linguistic heritage, that is, of a revitalization on the communities' "own terms."

Rhonda, who teaches her language Gathang, spoke about her experience learning language formally via a TAFE certificate as impacting her preference for a particular kind of learning environment in her own class. She described her language learning experience as challenging since it involved standing up and presenting in front of her people, when "shaming" sometimes occurred. Rhonda explained how she preferred to have her TAFE classes revolve around a sharing circle since she sees learning as about sharing language and cultural knowledge. That she adopted a personal style of

teaching was in direct contrast to the nature of her own experience. Some other examples of alternative ways of learning involved language learning in a talking circle, sharing language, “yarning up” about the land and culture, learning collaboratively, and being humble in the learning and teaching process.

### ***Beliefs***

This section captures the personal beliefs that community teachers identified as impacting their teaching practice; primarily, these beliefs were about what constitutes effective teaching and learning in the context of Aboriginal languages. First, realizing the cultural knowledge embedded in language in the classroom was prominent (we might interpret this as “cultural pedagogies” [Yunkaporta 2010]). The importance of “learning together” in a cooperative environment was a highly salient aspect of teachers’ perceptions of effective language teaching. One teacher tried to create a “family” classroom environment since, for her, family is an important part of Gumbaynggirr culture. Beliefs about what is needed for effective teaching and learning within the constraints of reawakening Aboriginal languages concerned the need to improve oneself, adapt, and grow because of the unique challenges of teaching in a revitalization context. Michael expressed his view about how community teachers can respond to the challenges of teaching a reawakening language, saying that “you can’t keep delivering the same thing over and over. So we, as Gumbaynggirr language teachers, gotta keep growing and that’s what I want to get through the tutors. You can’t just rely on what you know now. Because that’s gonna run out. You’ve gotta fill your bucket up more and more and more.”

Community teachers also held strong beliefs about the nature of effective language teaching programs; specifically, it was often expressed that the more community focused and accessible a school program is, the more successful it is likely to be. Jo expressed her view about “institutionalized” language learning programs in schools or TAFE, saying that “those things are sometimes difficult, especially for older community members to access. So, more of an informal learning environment for the older people, community members . . . then we’re sort of completing that circle, you know, the younger people who are learning the language and . . . there’s a gap there.”

Teachers believed that genuine autonomy is necessary for collective identity to be maintained and strengthened for the continuity in the end of language and culture. This illustrates that beliefs about teaching, learning, and revitalization were not always institutionally acquired forms of knowledge

but represented personal knowledge and insight gained through individual and collective experience.

## Discussion

The above themes identified in community teachers' self-reported approaches and perceptions of language education reveal particular orientations to language and education held by community teachers who approach language education as revitalizers of their language and as educators (with these roles dynamically interacting). In Aboriginal culture, and thus in revitalization, language is at once a vehicle for culture, part of the land, and an expression of identity (Tsunoda 2004, 136–46). The teachers' orientations to language exemplify the literature concerning the instrumental and integrative value of a linguistic heritage. This study has focused on how these views are enacted in a pedagogical context and from the point of view of community teachers.

Beliefs and ideas about the form, function, and role of language were present in teachers' approaches. These ideas related to knowledge being encoded within the form (e.g., the structure) and to the sense of language as a communication system as well as an abstract social sense. Community teachers did not view language simply as a body of knowledge to be learnt but as a social practice for learners and teachers to participate in. Understanding language learning as a social practice foregrounds learning as a *process* rather than as the achieving of skills as end products. In turn, community teachers viewed learners as agents in the journey of discovering their self-identity and in engaging with their local community. Learners were not simply passive receivers of transmitted knowledge about culture and language; rather, through community teachers' practice, learners were encouraged to come to understand themselves in relation to language and the world around them. This finding instantiates Halliday's notion of the three aspects of the process of language development: one not only learns language, but *through* language and *about* language itself, as a social practice (2004, 308). This necessarily multilayered conception of language learning and education is fundamental to our understanding of the social nature and function of language in a given community. The specific functions of language learning and teaching reawakening Aboriginal languages is further discussed below.

Community teachers seemed to view language education as having the capacity to respond to the social and material realities faced by communities, and specifically, the issues relating to their experience of language loss (and attendant issues arising from the root causes of language loss

such as language stigmatization, negative or uncertain self-identities, and racial tensions within the community). An emphasis on genuine community engagement was highly salient—teachers constantly invoked *community*. Gumbaynggirr teachers emphasized that meaningful engagement and collaboration with parents, schools, and the community was crucial in their success. This resonates with Yunkaporta's observation that making "community links" is one of eight "ways of learning" in Aboriginal languages, which involves the notion that knowledge and learning is "returned to the community in useful ways" (2010, 46–47). This view of learning was clearly exemplified in community teachers' views about the purposes of teaching their language, given the special attention given to how language education may benefit learners, especially those who have been affected by the ongoing loss of and discrimination concerning their ancestral languages. Relatedly, making "land links" (Yunkaporta 2009, 2010) also arose in community teachers' perspectives, with the understanding that knowledge of local land and place is central to Indigenous ways of knowing (2009, 6). Specifically, we can recall that helping learners gain an understanding of *place* was named as an explicit purpose by community teachers.

It was also demonstrated that community teachers' consciousness, identity, and relationships to language and the community were implicated in the educational experience. That teachers' experience, knowledge, and other mental constructs played such an important role challenges models of teacher education that see knowledge as "external" to the teacher (Clarke 2008, 6). Indeed, in explaining "story sharing" as a "way of learning," Yunkaporta stresses that personal stories (from the student and teacher) have a key role in the classroom and ought to be told upon beginning any topic. Commenting on the significance of this, Yunkaporta writes, "That way you are drawing on everybody's home culture and knowledge for the lesson" (2009, 4). This indicates that the nature of learning in the context of learning and teaching reawakening Aboriginal languages is personal and subjective, rather than resembling a detached cognitive activity.

## Implications and Conclusion

This study, being based on a previously unexplored topic located at the nexus of personal and sociopolitical dimensions of language education, has significant implications for understanding language-in-context. It is enlightening to consider the connection between language and culture by drawing from the insights and perspectives of community teachers as language owners applying their view of language from a pedagogical perspective.

It has been shown that the “subjectivities” teachers bring to their practice—their stories, beliefs, life histories, and knowledge about language—inform their approach to language pedagogy. Therefore, culture and identity are enacted by community teachers in this pedagogical context. The Gumbaynggirr people’s traditional social and cultural system is still present within, for instance, the continuing importance given to kinship relations (Lo Bianco and Rhydwen 2001, 406). Indeed, notions of family, respect, and learning together were present in Raelene’s exploration of what being Gumbaynggirr means to her. Yunkaporta offers confirmation of this view through exploring “cultural pedagogies” embedded in language. He states, “Aboriginal culture has not been lost—just disrupted. Our ways of knowing, being, doing, valuing and learning remain in an ancestral framework of knowledge that is still strong” (2010, 37).

The view of language as merely “reflecting” culture and identity at a fixed point is thus inaccurate. It has been shown through this study that language construes, enacts, and shapes the identity of community language teachers. Learners and teachers negotiating their experience of language education through notions of identity has been observed in other contexts. As Canagarajah noted, “Language is personally and communally appropriated to varying degrees in order to be meaningful and relevant for its users” (1999, 181). This study provides support for this view, since teaching a reawakening language carries particular meanings and roles for teachers that are actively engaged with history. Teachers’ orientation to language is a social practice engaged with history while also at the same time being engaged with the present; its roles and functions are appropriated by community teachers’ (language owners) aspirations, needs, and desires. This suggests that language, culture, and identity are not just reflections of a society or sets of information about characteristics of a society. Rather, they are dynamic systems through which a community constructs, represents, and enacts itself. Language education in revitalization, as these teachers perceive it, construes new meanings, functions, and roles for their own communities.

Patrick’s (2007) study argues that a narrow interpretation of “culture”—one associated with stereotypically “old” traditions, past epochs, and fixed geographical locations—must be avoided at the risk of positing an “essentializing” relationship between language and culture. Interestingly, the dominant philosophy for the first half of the twentieth century concerning how to respond to language endangerment and loss was to document a language before the last speaker passed away, which is sometimes seen as preserving language in a fixed state, akin to “pickling” it (Hinton 2001, 10). Indeed, according to Duchêne and Heller’s (2007) work, dominant “discourses of endangerment” tend to see language as objects to be “saved” rather than

social processes embedded in constantly changing concepts of identity and culture. Critically considering community teachers' views on this issue has provided strong support for the need to challenge such preconceptions about language (especially endangered or reawakening Aboriginal languages), which are apparently still influential in the field.

This study contains implications for understanding how we can support and strengthen the maintenance and revitalization of reawakening languages, and for understanding what effective revitalization may "look like." Language workers and revitalizers have already made important contributions in this area, and this study provides supporting evidence. It has been observed that "programs in support of local languages necessarily support local conditions" (Ash, Fermino, and Hale 2001, 20, cited in Walsh 2010, 23). This study has shown that community teachers' practice responds to the collective experiences of, for instance, the local Gumbaynggirr community (e.g., the experience of institutional education as alienating, or of language and culture stigmatization, etc.). This affirms the importance of connecting revitalization activities with the root causes of language loss, or "historically situating" present strategies in order for efforts to be effective and meaningful. Muurrbay and community teachers operate with the awareness of the limitations of schools (Walsh 2010, 24), and although the limits set by this particular avenue of revitalization sometimes constrained teachers' agency, teachers also enacted agency in responding to this occasionally challenging environment by developing their own approaches to pedagogy (e.g., by bringing their own stories and purposes and "making it their own"). This provides strong reasons to develop policy and planning approaches that affirm teachers' autonomy, ownership, and control and to empower language owners to teach for their own purposes and aspirations. At the same time, it also suggests that revitalization efforts be pursued beyond institutional domains or be improved to facilitate greater community involvement.

## Appendix 1

### *Interview question sample*

#### *SECTION A: Biographical information and background*

1. Check name and spelling.
2. What school do you teach at and what language do you teach?  
What stage of learning are the children at? Inquire about relevant details about the program.

3. Can you describe your personal connection to the language that you teach?
4. What is your own journey to coming to language teaching?
5. How would you rate your spoken language skills? (Following Marmion et al. 2014: 5–6.)
6. Do you have any experiences of language teacher training through a community center or university of TAFE? How do you think this has prepared you? Does it impact how you teach now? How?

#### *SECTION B: Language teaching practices*

7. What are some go-to activities that you use for your lessons? Can you please describe a typical lesson in stages?
8. How do you try to apply the learning outcomes of listening, reading, writing, and speaking in your classroom? Do any of these goals limit or enhance kids' skills or knowledge of language? From your experience, how do students engage with the literacy component compared to speaking and listening? What are the benefits and disadvantages of each?
9. Are there any overarching second language ideas or theories that guide your teaching?
10. (If applicable) In what ways has Muurrbay influenced your teaching (e.g., provided training in TPR/ASLA, resources). Have you found this to be effective?
11. How do you modify the lessons based on your views about the limitations or benefits of the curriculum?

#### *SECTION C: Beliefs, motivation, aspirations*

12. What is your purpose in teaching? What drives or motivates you? Do you feel that your teaching practice has helped you learn your language better?
13. What are your own aspirations/dreams in teaching language? What outcomes in learners, or in yourself, would you like to see based on the effects of your teaching?
14. Have you seen an awareness of the Gumbaynggirr language increase since revitalization began occurring in 1986? How? Have you observed other effects of Gumbaynggirr language revitalization?
15. How has your own language teaching practice impacted your own identity?

16. What are your beliefs about who should teach and learn language?
17. Why do you think it's important for children to learn Aboriginal languages? What benefits do you see for the children?
18. What do you think the role of learning an Aboriginal language at school is?
19. Have you witnessed a shift in children's knowledge and appreciation of Aboriginal culture and history through language learning?

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## NOTES

1. The number of schools conducting such programs is very small. In New South Wales (NSW) in 2010, thirteen Aboriginal languages were offered at thirty-six public schools (NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education and Community 2012, 17, cited in Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 2012, 88). These programs exist in response to community wishes and expertise in their local area.
2. Technical and Further Education (TAFE), the public provider of vocational education in NSW, recently developed Certificates I, II, and III in Aboriginal languages. These are accessible to postsecondary and nonuniversity adult learners and assist in developing oral and literacy skills in the local language (Cipollone 2010).
3. The MILE program, or Master of Indigenous Languages Education, has been offered at the University of Sydney since 2006 and is designed for Indigenous people who want to become teachers of their languages (Poetsch, Jarrett, and Williams 2017).

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# Doing Indigenous Methodologies: Toward a Practice of the “Careful Partial Participant”

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Camilla Brattland, Britt Kramvig, and Helen Verran

**ABSTRACT** | In this article, we describe teaching through experimental writing workshops designed to introduce students to a way of writing that expresses Indigenous methodologies in recognizing multiple epistemic authorities. We propose an alternative configuration of the “author in the text” who comes to life in analytic texts generated with and through Indigenous methodologies. In approaching writing through a differently configured author, we propose a form of participatory ethnographic writing that encourages writers to see themselves as partially participating in the collective workings of Indigenous knowledge communities. Based on experiences from the organization of two experimental writing workshops with Indigenous studies and visual cultural studies master students at UiT (the University of Tromsø—The Arctic University of Norway), we present a template with storytelling categories for transitioning fieldwork experience into text. How to “participate with care” thus fuels the possibility of such a transition as well as resistance within Indigenous scholarship and pedagogical approaches.

**KEYWORDS** | experimental ethnographic writing, pedagogy in Indigenous studies, figure of the analyst in the academic text, multiple epistemic authorities

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Mobilizing Indigenous methodologies in academic knowledge work is a way to recognize the epistemic authority of Indigenous Elders and the practices by which wisdom is enacted in Indigenous communities while not refusing the epistemic authority of academics. This paper tells of two pedagogically experimental writing workshops designed to introduce students, as well as scholars in Indigenous studies in general, to a way of writing that expresses Indigenous methodologies in recognizing multiple epistemic authorities. We believe that a valuable and necessary exercise for students and teachers in Indigenous studies alike is to use classroom and experimental workshops for discussing and opening up the “ready-made” way that Indigenous methodologies are presented, as well as using locally embedded workshops to perform the multiplicities of indigenous methodologies. Thus, this

paper focuses on the experimental workshop as a pedagogical method in Indigenous studies, but just as much on the importance of participation and learning in Indigenous scholarship in general.

How can we practice analytic writing about fieldwork in Indigenous studies and research practices? Who are the epistemic authorities we need to attend to during the learning process? And how should we go about recognizing multiple epistemic authorities? Even though some of us have conducted writing workshops and supervised Indigenous studies students, in particular Indigenous Sami students, for years, every encounter with different Indigenous communities at different times, and with diverse and complex groups of students, teaches us something new and valuable. This paper describes the process of organizing learning activities for master's degree students in visual anthropology and Indigenous studies through two experimental fieldwork and writing workshops that attempted to grapple with these issues.<sup>1</sup>

Conducted during a few weeks for a mixed group (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) of master's degree students, the "experiments" proposed an alternative configuration of the figure of the "author in the text" who comes to life in analytic texts generated with and through Indigenous methodologies. In approaching writing through a differently configured author, we propose a form of participatory ethnographic writing that encourages scholars to see themselves as partially participating in the collective workings of Indigenous knowledge communities rather than as adopting a position as a neutral commentator on those workings from idealized and removed observer positions. In addition, the arguments in this paper draw on previous experience with teaching programs and writing workshops that address Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous concerns regarding methodology done in responsible ways. For many, the ethics of "data gathering" and writing are utterly important, with many scholars working in communities that they see themselves as part of, and where decolonization is an ongoing process. How to "participate with care" is not only part of the methodological question but also part of what fuels the possibility, as well as the resistance, within our own writing. We argue that we need to address participatory ethnographic writing so that it takes seriously what Marilyn Strathern proposes as "ethnographic moments" (1999) that might otherwise be separated by social and historical scales, which relate to the extent of a network and how far, both in time as well as in relation to other, it is possible to expand these networks.

The figure of the writer that we are proposing as expressing Indigenous methodologies goes beyond the author in the text who comes to life in standpoint methodologies. We refuse that figure that others have proposed

as a configuration suitable for authoring texts that express an Indigenous methodology. Our grounds of refusal are that although that position is epistemologically relativizing, it is no less ontologically prescriptive than the universalizing removed-observer position. We encouraged students to write as figures embodied in particular times and places where Indigenous epistemic practices are being carried out. Of course the students' participation in those places was peripheral and often simplified; nevertheless, such writing is a way to manage the problem of how academic texts can enact appropriate deference to multiple epistemic authorities. We regard such management as a defining feature of Indigenous methodologies in the academy. We three, who also have very different past and present experiences with Indigenous epistemic practices and their methodologies as authors, researchers, students, and teachers, draw on these experiences here in reflecting on our practices in a modern academic setting.

We recount and discuss episodes of pedagogy that occurred both during an excursion to a Sami-Norwegian coastal village, which was organized as part of the introductory weeks for first year master's degree students, and in the classroom just after second year students' fieldwork or other data-gathering practices occurred and where we were engaged as organizers and teachers. This paper tells what we did together, considers some pedagogical pitfalls, and then considers the roles of epistemic practice in relation to the roles of authoritative texts, particularly from the emerging body of literature on indigenous methodologies, in students' and our own learning and writing processes. The pedagogical lessons learned from the way we related to epistemic authorities and practices are discussed.

## **Current Trends Influencing Indigenous Research and Pedagogy**

Two current academic trends influencing Indigenous research and study programs are considered here: the "Indigenizing academia" approach, and the turn toward student-active and practical forms of learning within the academy itself. Both of these trends hold the promise to make Indigenous methodologies more authoritative in the way Indigenous studies are taught, as well as in Indigenous research.

Many scholars and students doing research in or with Indigenous communities are inspired by Indigenous methodology, yet we still struggle with how to perform research design and ethnographic practice in formulating research projects, as well as in writing papers. It does not make things easier for students to access Indigenous methodologies when we as teachers, in multiple classrooms and in various studies programs, also struggle to be specific on how this ambition can be enacted in research design, in

document studies, in ethnographies, in interviews carried out in specific fields, and in writing papers, as well as in our own pedagogical practice.

Indigenous studies programs, be they open or closed to non-Indigenous students, are based on ideas of epistemic equivalence, democratization of education, and access to academia for marginalized groups in society, as well as on a critique of Western academic institutions, as for instance through the “indigenizing academia” approach. Named by Linda Tuhiwai Smith and others as an academic colonizing practice (Smith 1999), students and scholars are nowadays offered acquaintance with a multitude of knowledge practices that aim to be sensitive to Indigenous traditions and to express these as a part of their studies and research. The movement is a reaction against the conventional academic approach to Indigenous research, an approach that continues to exert an influence to the extent that it is given status through epistemic authorities on course curriculums. The role of the author as observing Indigenous communities from a removed, outsider position was an integral part of the conventional approach, where Indigenous peoples themselves seldom played an active participative role in research.

It is our view, along with many others (Smith 1999; Wilson 2008; Kramvig and Verran 2016), that academics should conduct research with Indigenous peoples, as careful partial participants, rather than situating ourselves as objective observers. Our main concern here is that Indigenous communities around the globe differ and appear different with every new encounter, varying with the individuals and collectives encountering each other. This diversity needs to be taken seriously when doing research together with Indigenous communities, as also argued by Smith (1999) and others. Our argument is moreover that Indigenous methodologies need to multiply and stay with this trouble of multiplicities in order to be more useful and gain status as an organizing research device and as epistemic authority (Haraway 2016). With the support of Haraway’s (1991) work, we insist on a careful partial participation that brings ethics—or as we argue, care—into dialog with research design and practices. Mol, Moser, and Pols’s (2010) study argues that care in practice does not restrict care to a certain domain or site. We must understand care as a doing, as a mode or style. Good care is always a collective achievement and involves “persistent tinkering in a world full of complex ambivalence and shifting tensions” (14). Careful partial participation means that there are no clear-cut inside-outside positions, and that participant and persistent tinkering take on the ambivalence and tensions that planning and doing research bring into the world.

At the same time, the need to adopt practices that fulfil academic expectations and standards are made explicit, and peers who are not familiar with or supportive of Indigenous methodologies will not necessarily review texts

using the approach favorably. In our experience, the majority of academic institutions are not necessarily sufficiently prepared to train students systematically in the nitty-gritty of practicing alternative or Indigenous methodologies; nor are teachers necessarily supported in their efforts to revise learning activities and curriculums. Thus, scholars and students alike are presented with the same challenge as before, namely, how to practice *localized* Indigenous methodologies that take the specificity of Indigenous communities' epistemic practices seriously. In addition, there is a need to respect the specific skills and interests that each student/scholar brings into the research activity.

Some universities have already recognized a need to put Indigenous cultures, histories, languages, and knowledge on a new footing within the academy. This process has many universities making efforts to bring Indigenous people, as well as their philosophies and cultures, into strategic plans, governance roles, research, and recruitment. The Sami scholar Harald Gaski (2013) has argued for stronger Sami participation in the international discourse on the role of Indigenous peoples within academia. He underscores the importance of past achievements in developing the Sami language as an academic language, a vital accomplishment in a world where more and more Indigenous languages are becoming extinct. In tune with Smith's (1999) call for an indigenous research paradigm, Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen also calls for a change in the academic paradigm and for a reshaping of the university such that "indigenous epistemes" are recognized within the academy (Kuokkanen 2007). Kuokkanen conceptualizes indigenous worldviews in terms of the "indigenous episteme," a term coined by Foucault in his survey of changes in the Western tradition of knowing between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries (Foucault 1970). As Kuokkanen defines it, "the concept of 'episteme' denote[s] ways of knowing, understanding and relating to the world. Referring to worldviews or ontologies, episteme is, therefore, a broader concept than epistemology" (2007, 75).

We agree with the argument, but in addition we claim a need to investigate how this can be done in the specificities of episodes of ongoing educational programs since the epistemic encompasses knowing as *practice* (Kramvig 2015). This is an argument to the effect that Indigenous ways of knowing are equally valid as tools, not only for understanding the local conditions of existence but also for providing valid knowledge of great interest to the wider scientific community. Educational academic programs on Indigenizing principles have their challenges, such as the uneasy balance of teaching Indigenous studies from within supposedly colonial, Western institutions, and the practical aspects of how to teach students to practice Indigenous research in a sensitive way. We address in particular the

tension between epistemic authorities, a tension that arises in proposing epistemic practices as pursued in incommensurable, hermetically sealed “epistemological bubbles,” or as Gieryn puts it, where epistemic authority is “the legitimate power to define, describe and explain bounded domains of reality” (1999, 1).

Our definition of epistemic authority in contrast rests on empirically describing the practices by which epistemic norms are generated. This includes those texts given authority through the curriculum design practices of their being selected and studied as Indigenous studies, and not necessarily as epistemologically privileged by virtue of being written by Indigenous authors. We are more taken with the definition of epistemic authority as performative—for instance, in the way it is understood by Janack as “conferred on persons or groups through social, political, and economic practices, as well as through sexist, racist, and classist assumptions about reliability, intelligence, and sincerity. . . . Having the appropriate educational credentials from a prestigious college or university, for example, puts one a long way toward gaining epistemic authority” (1997, 130).

This approach equates the way that epistemic authority is still conferred on anthropologists from Cambridge with the manner by which epistemic authority in Indigenous studies is conferred rather upon Indigenous authors and scholars by virtue of their marginalization. As Indigenizing approaches are in many ways a critique of the “received wisdom” of “Western” academic epistemic authorities that are an integral part of curriculums at universities worldwide, the performance of a separation between “Western” and “Indigenous” epistemic authority can be discerned. With Janack, we argue that our voices should be included in science both because it is *right* to include us (Janack 1990, 137) and because we wish to inspire virtues of care and partial participation in Indigenous knowledge-production practices.

In addition to Indigenous forms of resistance to and subversion of conventional epistemic standards in Western academia, there are also internal changes in the way teaching and learning is organized. According to current trends in pedagogical thinking, and because of a culturally and academically more diversified student body at universities, teaching methods need to be adapted to accommodate the needs of a highly diverse student group. Instead of consisting of “natural” academics with the same motivations and from the same social class and background (“academic Susans” [Biggs 1999]), student groups now encompass students from diverse social and cultural groups with varied motivations and academic backgrounds. International students, for instance, often have (unspoken) expectations they need to fulfill in traveling to a Western country. These responsibilities range from sending monthly economic support to their kin at home to high

expectations of changing the stories, imaginations, and prosperity of their people as such.

To effect learning among all students, and not only the “academically” inclined students, there is a change in emphasis from instruction to provoked learning, where outcomes are seen as growing out of student activities. Biggs’s (1999) study, for example, holds that students learn better through student-active, collective activities, rather than through being solely instructed by teachers in lecture halls. This means that the job of the teacher is to coordinate learning activities in such a way that students learn what they are supposed to learn through practice, and to test students according to set goals. *De facto*, this challenges established epistemological norms and amounts to a form of accepting differences in practice and of respecting “the other.”

This is perhaps good news for Indigenous studies, as the student body in Indigenous studies also increasingly consists of students with diverse social and academic backgrounds. Also, much of the critique against the Western academy from an Indigenous perspective has been exactly against instruction in Indigenous cultures and knowledge practices by teachers far removed from Indigenous peoples themselves, which the student-active learning approach is designed to counter through practice.

We wish to attend to two questions here. First, to what extent do these critical and emerging trends in academia have an impact on what students, teachers, and scholars do (their epistemic practices) and in what they write? And second, to what extent and in which ways does previous instruction in authoritative texts hold power over these practices? Through our experience, we both challenge Western epistemic authorities as configured in writing and highlight the need to assess and treat each experience as situated within our own research, independently from the way Indigenous research is represented by Indigenous epistemic authorities. Whether scholars and students adopt either Western or Indigenous authoritative texts into their own writing, the effect might however be the same: the adoption of a style of writing that removes the author as learner from the text and instead inserts a removed, judging observer. This has consequences for the way Indigenous peoples and communities and their complex contexts are analyzed. To write an academic text we need to write authoritatively, yet the author in the text needs to recognize the author as a learner. Making this challenge explicit, we propose to inhabit the figure of the careful, partial participant rather than the figure of the removed judging observer, through epistemic practice. Moreover, to practice education according to this goal, we also need to address how students learn about Indigenous methodologies through practice, which we will do in the next section.

## Doing Indigenous Pedagogy—Experimental Writing Workshop

In the following, we describe two episodes where we worked both with students enrolled in the first and second years of the Indigenous studies master's degree program and with first year students of the visual cultural studies (VCS) master's degree program at UiT. These programs at UiT are international masters programs set within a Norwegian mainstream university. Upon the establishment of the University of Tromsø in 1972, which was then the northernmost university in Norway, Sami language and ethnography as well as marine and arctic biology were named as disciplines where the university might develop special expertise (Broderstad and Hætta 2005, 311). UiT currently has a national responsibility for Sami and indigenous research and higher education in Norway, and the Centre for Sami Studies (established in 1990) holds coordinating responsibilities in this regard. As well as being a significant resource for Sami research, competence building, education, and recruitment across disciplinary borders, it also collaborates with Sami higher research institutions and Sami cultural centers in Sami districts (Broderstad and Hætta 2005).

In 2003, the university established the multidisciplinary master's program in Indigenous studies (MIS), which was designed to equip students with comparative perspectives on Indigenous issues and benefitted from the research-based knowledge at participating units of the university (Broderstad and Hætta 2005). A focus on the methodological challenges of "bringing together the different disciplines, but at the same time avoiding thinking only in terms of disciplines and categories" (321) was evident in the program from the beginning. This was addressed through, among other things, the establishment of courses in Indigenous methodology to bring disciplines together, which also provided a space for the experimental workshops described in this paper. Another valuable approach, which both the MIS and other UiT programs hold in common with many other community-focused programs, is to have students meet local and Indigenous communities outside of the classroom in the hope of contributing to what students know about local, Sami, and Indigenous culture, aside from what they read in textbooks. Sami communities differ from the indigenous communities that some students come from or have read about, with some being very ethnically diverse settlements. This diversity and the ways of living respectfully together are things we want to inspire students to reflect on. The excursion described in this paper is an example of this approach.

The master's program in visual cultural studies (VCS) aims to teach students how to produce knowledge about people's lives and cultures through an exploration of their everyday lives, based on the use of qualitative social

science research methods and ethnographic film. In the introduction to the program, students work in teams, not only to learn the technics of film-making in specific social situations but also to learn about cultural differences and the complexity of translation and mediation in any multicultural context. The camera is brought into social situations as a transformative device in bringing forward learning about the differences that exist within a local community. The learning outcome is to give students the possibility to reflect critically on the use of different filmic languages and narrative structures as “ways of knowing” in specific historical and societal contexts.

### ***Methods and Template for Storytelling***

Both visual ethnographic methods and Indigenous methodologies were introduced to both Indigenous studies students and visual cultural studies students during the first session of an excursion organized to the Sami/Norwegian community of Olmmáivággi/Manndalen in the fall of 2015. The purpose of this particular excursion was to introduce students to different aspects of life in an ethnically mixed, Indigenous community and to discuss visual and ethnographic approaches to data gathering. The second workshop was organized with second-year MIS students only, and it focused on the transition from their fieldwork or data-gathering experiences into text. As part of our workshops we produced a template (table 1) as a guide for practicing the transition from experience to text. The workshops we describe are not a regular part of the programs but arose from a particular constellation of teaching arrangements in 2015 associated with staff leave and availability.

Both of the episodes we tell here were focused through writing practices mobilizing what might be called an ethnographic sensibility that approaches social sciences research by focusing on managing the transition from experience to text. We recognize that many anthropologists are concerned about the appropriation of ethnography by scholars of other disciplines (Cadena 2015). But where ethnographic approaches are turned to quite different epistemic and methodological ends, such appropriation is exactly what we propose as a generative move for studies with a focus on and with members of Indigenous communities.

Multimodal ethnography understood as a methods assemblage (Law 2004) is increasingly becoming standard in many social science settings. Focusing on writing practices, we proposed a particular version of ethnographic writing to students as they began their studies in 2015. The version sought to sensitize them to issues associated with managing the transition from experience to text. Part of our reason for writing this text

is to foreground such approaches to preparing what we call participatory ethnographic texts. In developing our approach to ethnography, we turned for inspiration to Strathern's study, where she writes, "If at the beginning of the twentieth century one were inventing a method of enquiry by which to grasp the complexity of social life, one might wish to invent something like the social anthropologist's ethnographic practice . . . [which generates] a moment of immersement that is simultaneously total and partial" (1999, 1).

Table 1 | Categories for storytelling

Task	Practice	Dimension
Give an introduction of persons or things that became important during your fieldwork.	Draw a map; relate a happening; assemble images; make a performance.	Persons/things
What are the multiple time frames that became evident during fieldwork?	Identify time frames in the stories of others, time frames that you found yourself being pulled into, or time frames in documents you consulted.	Time frames
What are some of the "places" that became important?	Identify a room, a building, an institution, a town or village, or spaces for people important in your study.	Places
What are two events that happened in the episode of your fieldwork that you think will become important in your write-up?	Name an event that you felt others thought was important, an event that puzzled you, and an event that made you feel joyful or sad.	Events

The template we present here, and which was practiced during the two experimental workshops, can be read as a product of what Latour (1987) would call "ready-made science," which makes us seem like highly rational pedagogues working from analytic categories. What actually happened "in the making," in the process of working with students, is that in preparing for our workshops two of the authors discovered that we had (somewhat to our surprise even), through past experience, constituted these analytic categories in the everyday practice of our pedagogy. Working from what we intuited about the students' experiences, we came up with our prescribed task with its obligatory categories; then we recognized that we had them working toward feeling for what analytic categories are—and what particular categories might be—salient in *this* analysis.

In operationalizing our student-active task, we were much more at pains to emphasize that the students “begin in your experience” rather than “begin with these analytic categories.” The difference between participatory ethnography “in the making” and the “ready-made” categories of the “social analysis” of standard ethnographic methods was made explicit in the students’ work in generating drafts. The following two episodes should also be read as “in-the-making” examples of pedagogy aiming to teach practices that enact Indigenous methodologies.

#### **Workshop 1: Learning to be in the field and to tell a story about the experience**

In the fall of 2015, students from all over the world convened in Tromsø to participate in a multitude of international studies on offer at UiT, where the Indigenous studies master’s degree program and the visual cultural studies master’s degree program were two out of twenty-nine English-taught master’s degree programs on offer at several campuses in northern Norway. The student groups (consisting of up to twenty students at each program) were diverse, with students from all parts of the world and from various social, cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds.

In the beginning of September, we<sup>2</sup> traveled north to Manndalen, a small, coastal, Sami-Norwegian village a couple of hours’ bus drive away from Tromsø, where the Centre for Sami Studies organized an excursion lasting three to four days. Relations between the village and UiT are close because many of the people working at the local Sami cultural center (the Centre for Northern Peoples) were educated at UiT, and staff at UiT have both personal and professional ties with institutions and individuals resident in the area. Both Indigenous studies and visual cultural studies first-year master’s students were part of the excursion, which was organized in the very beginning of the semester.

The Indigenous studies and visual cultural studies students were divided into groups and dropped off at various locations around the village to do a mini-fieldwork in teams of three to five students. The template had been introduced to students prior to and during the excursion, along with a comprehensive program of introductions to the area and its culture. We, as the teachers, were either totally absent or observing only from a distance. Many of the students had not studied anthropology or Indigenous cultures, and most of them had arrived in Norway only a few weeks before. We were there to get to know each other and a local community, and for students to get a feeling of what it might be like to do fieldwork in an Indigenous community. In pedagogical terms, the idea was to introduce students to fieldwork as a learning activity by having them meet with real people and encounter real

events as a preparation for their own fieldwork in the following year. These small research groups brought a camera into the learning process for them “to see for themselves” how the presence of the researcher is part of the knowledge produced in any social situation. Before we went there, we had seen films about the community made by visual anthropologists. The films emphasized the multiethnic, fluid, and sensitive issues characterizing Indigenous areas and Indigenous identities where people are struggling with the effects of colonial and assimilation policies.

The student groups were allocated to a farm (cows and sheep), a local tourist business, a Sami cultural and language center, a heritage landscape, and a fish-fry production plant in a neighboring village. These arrangements had been previously negotiated as agreements between the Centre for Sami Studies and institutions and individuals in the village. Each student group was responsible for making a plan of what questions they were going to ask and what focus they were going to have in their end product to be presented two weeks later. The task was to prepare a short ethnographic film based on their experiences and “data” collected. The small video text was to be finalized two weeks later. The students were immersed in their “fields” for a whole afternoon before returning to our camp and classroom, which was hosted by the Centre for Northern Peoples in Manndalen. That same evening, the students gave an immediate report from their experiences, being asked to “tell a story” about it according to the template (table 1). Later, each group wrote an evaluation of the excursion experience, and after two weeks the results from the fieldwork exercise were screened for students and staff who had participated in the excursion. Both the immediate and visually prepared presentations were varied and rich, and they exemplified several challenges for Indigenous pedagogy and research practices in general.

The first challenge turned out to be an aspect we had not identified as problematic in our pedagogical planning. It concerned the collaborative aspect of MIS and VCS students working together in research teams. In their evaluation of the excursion, almost all of the students commented on this aspect, expressing a need for more explanation on the expectations from each group to avoid tensions between the different groups while in the field. This is a common challenge when working on interdisciplinary projects where researchers have disparate knowledge traditions, such as in the case of anthropologists and environmental scientists (Verran 2012). As researchers also often do, the students struggled to negotiate the cultural and academic differences between themselves, and especially the strong and specific disciplinary and cultural expectations associated with “being a social sciences researcher-in-the-field” and the role of the researcher as a “visual ethnographer,” which was unfamiliar to many. Many of these expectations

are probably derived both from previous instruction and from what is accepted as constituting epistemic authority on the subject, where the lone, “objective observer” engaging with distant tribes is the classical image of the *position* of the social scientist in the field, whereas the “visual ethnographer” evokes images from “camera person” to “participatory action researcher.” This is interesting because many of the students had similar educational backgrounds, but a few weeks into their first semester, they already identified themselves as being part of *different disciplines*. The challenges that we experienced in this case teaches us that the key factor in relations between researchers, and between researchers and Indigenous communities, is perhaps not primarily the discipline, but the *positions and knowledge-claims* assumed by researchers while in the field, which varies with the techniques and methods available to them.

A second aspect was students’ prior expectations of what “the field” would be like. In their evaluation comments, some students stated they had expectations of seeing people wearing traditional Sami dress and hearing people speaking only the Sami language. This is a very common expectation before going to a place presented as an Indigenous community.

In some cases, felicitously, these expectations were met—the villagers lived “up to” the students’ expectations (such as the people hosting students in the cultural heritage landscape of Skardalen). The expectations were of course shaped by previous experiences, academic instruction, or perhaps in the information and films that were provided prior to going to the excursion. Those who lived up to these expectations tended to be the villagers who had traditional occupations or who worked within the traditional Sami culture and heritage. The fish-fry production plant was the most challenging in its total failure to meet expectations. The lack of recognition of a commercial business as part of an indigenous community may signal a failure on our part to introduce perspectives on industrial development and its impacts on the coastal Sami society prior to the excursion. As the challenge of prior expectations and knowledge is an issue that is frequently dealt with in anthropological literature, we had taken care to address the issue of our own expectations during lessons. Experiencing these expectations firsthand and in practice, however, is something completely different.

The methodologist Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that “the relatively simple task of gaining informed consent can take anything from a moment to months and years. . . . Consent indicates trust and the assumption is that the trust will not only be reciprocated but constantly negotiated—a dynamic relationship rather than a static decision” (2012, 136). Negotiating entry to a community or home can require a lot of meetings within formal structures, or it can be a confusing informal process—in any case, the dynamics

of research relationships are hugely complicated. Even though scholars have gone through training in Indigenous approaches to research, this does not mean that we are able to apply these approaches without difficulty.

In the case of the first episode, although it was a learning experience meant for the students, we as teachers also learned something valuable. We had already established relationships prior to entering the field both through the fact that one of us was indigenous to, and had worked in the community, and through the university's long working relationship with the local Sami cultural center. To protect the villagers from being overrun by academics only there for a short while before going back to university, the step of negotiating access to a community was skipped, nor was it something that we wanted students to do. In evaluating the excursion, most students expressed that meeting locals and villagers was the most valuable part of the excursion because it gave them an opportunity to actually experience an indigenous community. However, in staging the fieldwork exercise for the students and halfway making them only experience what it meant to establish a relation with people, we had already taken away one of the most important steps in the kind of epistemic practice we would have liked our students to master.

### **Workshop 2: Transition from experience to text**

At the end of the 2015 academic year, a group of twelve students undertook a period of data gathering in their respective fields. They had previously completed, during their first year of studies, coursework in diverse disciplines (political science, anthropology, history, Indigenous literatures, languages, and art), plus an obligatory introduction to methodology, which had included an excursion to a Sami village. During the previous year, they had been introduced to both standard and Indigenous methodology literature when planning their own fieldwork. In the following fall semester, during the first two weeks after students came back to class, students were introduced to an unfamiliar task.

In classes scheduled on three consecutive days (a total of around six hours of contact), students were encouraged to present informal stories of their fieldwork. They were first introduced to the template (see table 1) as a means of structuring a story of their experience of fieldwork. Each of the categories named a possible dimension that might act as an organizing device for studying. We asked students to perform a story using each of these four distinct organizing tools.

As teachers, we first demonstrated the task. Each of us related an anecdote from our fieldwork experiences to show how the categories could be made to work analytically. Then each member of the class was asked to perform an analysis of their own fieldwork experiences. Despite some reluctance to take

up the role of storyteller, all eventually told stories that vividly expressed some of the “in-the-making” actualities of the confusing and anxious experience of working with Indigenous peoples. Stories included meeting and talking to persons or actors that for various, and perhaps unexpected, reasons became important: how colonial history or other time frames were brought up by people; and experiencing places, such as libraries or archives, and events that either as a result of careful planning or through serendipity came to play central roles during their stay or travels. The aim of the exercise was to become sensitized to possibilities of using analytic storytelling in presenting research findings as an expression of Indigenous methodology. By October 1st, students were required to submit a draft of their empirical chapter, based on the write-up from their fieldwork periods. Whether our workshop had an impact or not on students’ writings is difficult to measure; however, in the following section we focus on some challenges that are common to both students and accomplished scholars when writing texts based on ethnographic approaches or using other qualitative data-gathering techniques, both in and outside of Indigenous contexts.

### ***Recounting Fieldwork Experiences***

What does being asked to tell a story about important people, places, time frames, and events do to the figure of the author in the text, and what impact does it have on the writing process? First, in providing (and insisting on) the analytic categories presented in the previous section to guide and frame representations of the fieldwork or data-gathering period, we sought to actively *prevent* an automatic, “commonsense” recounting of experiences. Recount often purports to be a “true account” of what happened, which is focused on the researcher as the main actor. An example of automatic, commonsense accounts from the field is a thin description of central research participants, where people for instance are referred to only by first names, or they are anonymized, or they are labeled as “assistants” or “translators.” A central challenge is to overcome the “removed observer” position and to acknowledge the contributions and help received by people encountered during the fieldwork.

We also sought to prevent time frames from being told from the observers’ points of view. Often, representing time frames becomes a sequential “I did this, then I did that, and then this happened, so I did this.” Such lists of banal events purport to represent the timeline of a research period. They have a purpose that we recognize as important. In relating the events of the fieldwork, scholars are at pains to show that they did accomplish something, although in many cases both students and accomplished researchers

are dubious about whether they did actually “get enough data.” As beginning researchers we are also inclined to offer evaluative statements of our own data gathering that actually prevent us from entering our material to think through it. Such recounts are epistemically self-serving and counterproductive to taking seriously the ethnographic work that has been done and the material that has been gathered. In the worst-case scenario, the “common-sense” analytic categories are in many ways counterproductive in analyzing the categories used by the practitioners of the knowledge traditions we are studying. In such recounts, the field is implied as “ready-made” (Latour 1987), “over and done with,” or left behind, and all the ambiguity and difficulty is papered over as writers struggle to adopt what they interpret as the “objective observer” stance. These are well-worn tracks of beginning and accomplished writers alike, who strive to become the “removed judging observers”—the figure of authority in the Western academic tradition. The outcomes of such recounts are seen as “findings,” which then get packed into a “results” chapter that adopts the prescribed categories of positivist knowledge.

In the sense that the standard normative categories of social analysis that circulate in the dominant society are “dodged” in our exercise, it can be framed as one of multiple ways that Indigenous methods of analysis can be done in practice. By making the categories of storytelling named in table 1 obligatory, we short-circuit analysis as something all done and dusted. Yet we know from experience that by using normative analytic categories and a readymade model of writing, we risk making superficial analyses, often quite outside any insights that might be garnered from the ethnographic experience as well as the relevant academic literature.

We are also suspicious of the capacity such recounts have to explain away the tension between the totality and partiality of “immersement,” which, following Strathern’s (1999) study, we take to be the core of the ethnographic moment. As students subsequently proceeded with the task of thesis writing, we were reminded of these as well as other analytic challenges relating to doing Indigenous methodologies in general, which we will now turn to.

### ***Engaging with Theories and Epistemic Authorities***

One of the central challenges in contemporary Indigenous research and education is to overcome the power of epistemic authority and, again, our own expectations of how we are supposed to write. As beginning researchers and during our careers, we all struggle with our relations to theory and how to employ theories analytically in our work. For instance, many engage with theories as if they are something we need to subscribe to—for instance,

by introducing quotes from established theories and epistemic authorities without taking a stand on these theories. Whom to quote and which theories to problematize is always a tricky balance, but it is an epistemic practice that holds immense power in our texts. As Britt Kramvig explained in the workshop, we should stop thinking about theory as an entity that we must respect and put on top of our own ethnographic material. We should be respectful toward other academic texts but still bring in only those that can become tools and that work to support what we aim at. All others should rest in peace. We “do” theories as we “do” stories, and by being concerned with both we can participate in making futures different from pasts.

A common challenge is to avoid the core tensions and descriptions of the practical and material content of events and subjects encountered during fieldwork. Rather than describing the technical, dirty details of everyday lives in an Indigenous community, academics have a tendency to again focus on the activities of the researcher as the main actor, where a distance between the researcher and the researched is created through a focus on the methods used to achieve that relationship. Although this may be a necessary exercise to fulfil academic expectations, our argument is that a focus on the application of authoritative epistemic practices may come in the way of describing in commonsense terms to readers what actually happened in the field. For instance, instead of writing that interviews were conducted on the spur of the moment and by happenstance as informants became available for interviewing, perhaps owing to inexperience and too little time for relationship building, those insecurities tend to be glossed over. What we mean by “authoritative epistemic practices” here may be practices ascribed both by conventional authorities and also by Indigenous epistemic authorities, practices such as “participant observation,” “snowballing,” “semistructured interviews,” “research as ceremony,” or referring to the Sami eight seasons or the Cree medicine wheel as an “Indigenous framework of analysis.”

In other words, although it is necessary and critical to know qualitative and ethnographic methods and apply them in the correct way, this should not replace descriptions and stories about important places or events. What happens during a healing ritual, or what Indigenous artists do at cultural events, should not be hidden away in favor of discussing the methods employed to observe events. Although these are important parts of any text, and especially a thesis, it is also important to do justice to the relationships formed with people encountered in the field rather than prioritizing a perceived need for ticking off obligatory academic and Indigenous methodology boxes.

It is important to note that our description here represents the natural parts of any beginning scholar’s path of learning, and that these parts are

necessary steps that all scholars go through as they develop their writing and thinking. Some of the above-mentioned challenges also appeared in the beginning in the presentations and texts during our workshop. Nonetheless, in presenting during those first weeks—once fairly informally, and then more formally in written texts—many students went from describing what they did to describing what they saw and how they felt, and they talked about important stories, which contributed to a more careful shaping of their presentation. Their presentations became more embedded and figured the student as a “researcher in the making” and as a more manifold, caring figure responsible not only for the academic program and texts but also for their own way of performing research. Applying the analytical categories instead of cloaking their fieldwork into terms like “snowballing” or “random sampling” also had the effect of drawing out the responsibility they enacted on behalf of the people they had invited into the project (the previous informants) and the community they belonged to before entering the university. Whether this was the result of our exercise or simply a result of the students’ own talents and skills is, however, hard to judge.

The storytelling exercise pushes the writer to think about “what actually happened” in quite a new and fresh way. Also, it requires letting go of the conventional framing—research question, method, theory, analyses, and so on—and instead searching for the stories of analytic value in the material. The “in-the-making” stories told in such a preliminary exercise may or may not end up in the final products, but they tell different sorts of stories than a recount leads to, and they inspire a glimpse of how theory and empirics actually work together.

Giving scholars and students the possibility of allowing storytelling, drawing, or performances as a means of (re)enacting their experiences opens up possibilities for other ways of knowing. A creative space can emerge that has a chance to “line up” with different ways that Indigenous communities “do” knowledge. It is a respectful start on what needs, at a later moment in time, to become an academic text and valid as an academic epistemic practice.

## Concluding

What have we learned from the two episodes we consider in this paper, and what can be done to improve how beginning researchers in Indigenous studies learn about being careful participants rather than removed observers? It must first be noted that the lessons to be drawn from our experiences are general ones, and that the particular episodes described here serve as opportunities to discuss general challenges that may or may not be particular to beginner or experienced students. Our first lesson thus relates to our

own practice relating to the way we staged the fieldwork experience, which taught us the importance of practicing what we teach: if making relationships with Indigenous communities is important, then our focus on collecting data from predetermined groups of people through interviews, observation, and visual ethnography might not necessarily be the best way for learning how to do research *together* with Indigenous peoples rather than *on* them. Our lack of examples of what participative ethnographic research looks like might have resulted in reproductions of epistemically authoritative images and expectations of researcher–Indigenous relations in students’ films and texts, rather than creating a self-reflexive approach to the way Indigenous communities were researched. The lack of guidance on how to practice such relations, as illustrated by our own absence from students’ encounters in the first episode, also make it difficult for students to practice Indigenous research as careful participants rather than as researchers with ready-made, established relations with an Indigenous community. These are important points to consider when planning learning activities so that students may be allowed to practice being careful partial participants in the field. This means that the relationship-making step could be prioritized as one of the most important student-active activities.

Another learning experience is that the epistemic authorities in Indigenous studies and research are in a state of change, moving away from classical anthropological studies and toward texts produced by Indigenous authors. In the contemporary context, where Indigenous peoples are themselves educated in modern institutions often up to a high level, they have different expectations of researchers, and it is difficult to maintain boundaries between researchers and researched. In contemporary academia, students, scholars, and research subjects alike talk openly about their struggle to take on Indigenous or decolonial methodology. They struggle in particular with how these can be *performed*. The definitions of “decolonization” and who is “Indigenous,” despite their centrality to these projects, remain open and, to a certain extent, unknown and unknowable (Sium et al. 2012). As Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson (2000) have told us, Indigenous knowledges—and, we would argue, subsequent decolonization—are so deeply embedded and part of the everyday life of communities and individuals that they cannot be codified or defined. But they can be experienced.

Decolonization and the Indigenous knowledge practices that sustain it are, however, diverse and unique to particular contexts and geographies. This poses challenges for how we present ourselves as authors in texts that are both about and, at the same time, products of processes of decolonization—how to connect ethnographic moments that are more than ethnographic presents. How do we negotiate these particularities in

an increasingly globalized and connected world, especially when there are increasingly fewer options to remain isolated in attempts to maintain these particularities? As the student-active learning approach advocates, writing as careful partial participants should be done through practice and through collective learning activities. In particular, the practice of storytelling in a way that avoids recounting Indigenous “fields” in already established methodological categories and instead recognizes multiple epistemic authorities, both from texts and from the authors’ experiences together with Indigenous communities, is a major lesson taken away from our temporary engagement with Indigenous studies within the framework of this article.

The episodes and workshops we have described in this paper are examples that illustrate some steps on the way toward a sensitive Indigenous research approach. There are already many others, not least those that are already practiced within the framework of the study programs we have had the opportunity to learn from. A major limitation of our paper is the lack of measurable results from the introduction of our practice, which raises interesting and challenging questions about how to do more research in the field of Indigenous pedagogy and what methods to follow. We hope that our examples will serve not as an authoritative method but as a guide and inspiration for further discussions and research on what works and what does not work in future Indigenous pedagogy.

In tentatively concluding, we articulate our impression that in Indigenous studies there is a turn toward making complex methodologies and theories (cf. Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, axiologies, and so on) that seem to strive to match a perceived authoritative theoretical and methodological complexity in Western science. Whether this stems from insecurity about the strength of Indigenous studies or not, it has resulted in perhaps a misplaced focus on trying to describe in very complex and academic ways what in an embodied sense is very simple—how we make our experiences and they make us, and how engagements with particular here-and-now experiences and the people that matter to us are relevant in articulating a methodology.

We end this exercise in Indigenous pedagogical and epistemic practice with an episode from the classroom, as a lesson to students, scholars, and teachers in Indigenous pedagogy. Responding to discussions on the role of the objective observer, we ended one of our lessons in the following way:

So what we would suggest is that you all attend to letting your own ethnographic stories breathe, as so nicely formulated by Arthur Frank (2010). This commitment means that stories, those that are the unique outcome of your own fieldwork, should have the first word. Also then, we should remember that stories and material objects work together,

each inform the other—still, stories show how deeply people become caught up in one version, even though it could be told differently. A central question is as follows: How does one represent others and their diverse practices in what Verran (2012) calls good faith? Good faith is about seeing the possibility of writing generalizing ethnographic stories that intervene, not despite but because of the partiality of research and analysis. Partial perspective is a way of working around the dualism embedded in conventional thinking many of you want to challenge. In contrast, good faith analysis is about having faith in it being possible to write stories that are generative for some of the practices we study and for some of our own colleagues in social science.

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## NOTES

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1. The article draws on experiences from working with students and teachers in the master in Indigenous studies (MIS) and visual cultural studies (VCS) programs as these international-studies programs were organized during the academic year of 2015 at UiT—The Arctic University of Norway. The main author acted as coordinator for the

MIS program at that time and was responsible for the excursion and workshops, to which the other two authors contributed with the methodological framework and organization as described in the paper. The description in this article does not represent the current practices and methods of the MIS and VCS programs, the organization of which have since changed substantially.

2. Of the three authors, Camilla Brattland and Helen Verran planned and attended the excursion.

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# The Narrative and Poetical Role of a Polynesian Literary Myth: Canoes of the Origins in Contemporary Texts from French Polynesia, New Zealand, and Samoa

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Chloé Angué

**ABSTRACT |** How does the rewriting of the Polynesian migration by contemporary authors participate in the evolution of a historical and political myth into a fruitful literary one? When they create characters or stories which exalt the history of their migrant ancestors, Polynesian writers reclaim their past. They also keep alive and help spread the memories of the maritime journey. Most of all, they "write back" to those who ignored their heritage or failed to recognize its value, thereby giving the myth of the original migration a political dimension. In their novels, the quest of the hero is filled with the memory of the great migration, which adds to the postcolonial protest discourse. The myth is nevertheless seldom used for concrete political demands: most of the time, it echoes an ideal or dream of a new world, a world where Polynesian cultures and literatures would be recognized for their universality and creativity.

**KEYWORDS |** myth, imaginary, postcolonial literatures, Polynesian poetics, canoe migration

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The myth of the maritime migration is central in all Polynesian islands since it is part of the imaginary of the origins and tries to offer an answer to the question of the arrival on an isolated territory. For centuries, the only answer was the canoe, whose place of departure was unknown: did it come from Asia, Australia, South America? As a symbol of a precolonial past but also of the Polynesian identity, the *vaa*<sup>1</sup> or *waka*<sup>2</sup> is important in Polynesian day-to-day life: it plays a major part in ordinary activities like fishing, in sporting events,<sup>3</sup> and in ritual and artistic celebrations like declamation and dance competitions. Its omnipresence is not a surprise since it partakes of self-representation, which notably justifies its central position on the French Polynesian flag. Its importance grew again with the precision offered by scientists like Ben Finney<sup>4</sup> and his teams. Archaeologists actually established

that the Pacific islands were mainly populated by the Lapita people. Originating from Southeast Asia, the Lapita got up to Papua New Guinea and pursued their journey from there five thousand years ago. They landed in Tahiti around the first centuries of our era and reached New Zealand between 800 and 1300 CE. After they haunted the Pacific Ocean and the Polynesians' memories and imaginations, the canoes and their prodigious maritime migrations have modeled oral myths and legends: henceforth they also partake of Oceanian history. Many centuries later, readers are not surprised to discover that these ships play a major part in Islanders' written creativity. And indeed, their symbolic role in Polynesian literatures can be revealed thanks to five authors emblematic of this complex use of the migration myth.

Relying on the three famous concepts established by Pierre Brunel—emergence, flexibility, and irradiation (1992, 72)—this article intends to present an example of precolonial myths in order to give a general idea of how a historical and political myth can become a fruitful literary one.

Although most of these authors are famous in the whole Pacific area and in some academic studies, it might be necessary to begin with a small introduction. One of the first novels written by a Māori, *The Matriarch* was first published in 1986 and was followed eleven years later by its sequel, *The Dream Swimmer*. Its author, Witi Ihimaera, offers a complex literature that is politically committed and that gives myth a major role. In 1991, Chantal Spitz published *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, the first novel written in French by a Tahitian author. The book has been translated into English as *Island of Shattered Dreams*. Born in Samoa, Albert Wendt published in 2003 *The Mango's Kiss*, a novel that offers its reader a journey into the contemporary Polynesian imaginary. A Māori poet recognized in Oceania, Robert Sullivan describes his work as multicultural. In 1999, he published a collection entitled *Star Waka*, which is based on traditional oral structures as well as modern themes. Finally, Jean-Pierre Bonnefoy is not of Polynesian descent but spent a major part of his life in Tahiti.<sup>5</sup> He wrote *Polynésia, l'Odyssée d'un rêve* (Polynesia, the odyssey of a dream) in 2005, a science-fiction novel built as "a hymn to Polynesia, its myths, its legends" (Bonnefoy 2010).

The maritime migration myth is important to these five authors. What part does it play in their work? Is this fabulous story used only to "write back" to the colonizers? Or does it partake of the emergence of a poetics that is less directed at former Western traveler-writers and more dedicated to the celebration of contemporary Polynesian identities and postmodern creativities? To the writers, the va'a/waka imaginary is essential since it enables them to reappropriate their history and to state their political call

for emancipation, as well as to highlight the limits of postcolonial “writing back” (Aschcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002), while revealing the creative strength of contemporary Polynesian mythologies.

## Myth and History: Praise of the Canoe and Reappropriation of a Legendary Past

In these texts, the reader is struck by the high praise of the canoe, which turns into the symbol of a migration so fabulous that the authors need to retrace it. This is a true postcolonial<sup>6</sup> response: the point is to reclaim their history, spread it, and pay homage to the heroes of the past. The authors are thus addressing two audiences: Polynesian and foreign readers, all of whom need to discover or learn about the migration and its myth. What are the writers’ strategies used to mingle historical claims with their texts without going to the extremes of a didactic design that would prejudice their work?

Chantal Spitz’s *L’Île des rêves écrasés* presents a family that helps a Japanese archaeologist, Dr. Yoshi Sinoto, in his studies of a *marae*.<sup>7</sup> The heroine, Tetiare, takes part in this historical quest. Thanks to the Hawai’ian scholar, she discovers the Lapita migration and learns about her people’s past. Her main concern is to pass on her knowledge, which is not taught to the Polynesian children in French schools. Spitz reveals a first strategy when she integrates archaeology into the narrative structure. This episode is at the basis both of Tetiare’s brother’s vocation to become an anthropologist as well as the heroine’s decisions to leave her island in order to discover the whole Pacific continent and to be a writer. Her brother says, “If you think we should know about our history, write a book for us to read. Everything we read has been written by foreigners. . . . It’s time to write our history as we see it ourselves” (Spitz 2007, 123–24).

For both of them, taking a part in archaeological searches is a first step toward a commitment to create an image for their territory that would not have been determined by Western texts—a Polynesian image.

A second strategy consists in retracing the different steps of the route of the canoes while resuscitating the actors of the achievement and describing the conditions of the journey. Its aim is to fill in the blanks of the mythical story and avoid the weaknesses of a theoretical historical approach. First, writers often mention the departure of the canoes. In the migration myth the island left by the ancestors is very often called Hawaiki: operating as a generic term, this word replaces the true identification of the many islands that were left by Polynesian migrants, islands whose names have often been forgotten.<sup>8</sup> Writing one’s history therefore means taking into account the

words and concepts that most Western historians did not use because of their scientific inaccuracy or because their meaning was not revealed by Islanders. Then, Polynesian authors mention skills that have been forgotten for too long. For example, stars were fundamental to guiding the navigators once the sun had set. In Jean-Pierre Bonnefoy's novel, the captain of the great canoe learns how to decipher the sky and how stars are as reliable as a map: "One day, one night, when the moon caught his eyes, he saw a luminous path in the sky. An alignment of stars showed the way!"<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Robert Sullivan calls stars a "guidance system attached" (1999, 3), inscribing them in the present with this technological reference. Many other abilities were needed for a crew to survive such an epic journey, and only some of them are mentioned or celebrated by contemporary writers. Building a sturdy canoe was of course paramount, and the *tahu'a va'a*—the project manager in *te reo Tahiti*—was in charge of selecting the best trees, of praying in order for the gods to bless the trunks that would make the hulls, of supervising the work of the women and children who plaited coconut fibers into the ropes used to assemble the different parts of the canoe structure, and of making sure the travelers, who entrusted their future to his creation, would not forget any goods they might need for their crossing (Guiot 2008, 72). He thus played as crucial a part as the captain who had learned how to study the colors of the clouds and waves, the different bird species and flights, the movements and currents of the sea, and so forth (Hiquily 2008, 19). And of course, each archipelago had its own expertise depending on the sailing environment, the sailors' needs, and the type of journey they had planned. Except for Jean-Pierre Bonnefoy—who, like the Hawai'ian painter Herb Kawainui Kāne, precisely describes the *pahi* or double-hulled canoes used for major journeys and how they were built—most of the authors evoke a somehow symbolic *va'a* that can be recognized or even interpreted only as a *pahi*. Once again, the goal is to celebrate Polynesian history, but the didactic purpose is not to stand in the way of the narrative and poetic veins.

Because of the immense faculties that were required to achieve success in visiting or populating a new island, authors often extol the unique feat this migration was. This last strategy thus combines the rewriting of history with aesthetics of praise. Just as *Ancient Tahiti* is a book read throughout the Polynesian Triangle, *Vikings of the Sunrise* is a major influence on many contemporary artists and writers, especially among Māori. Its author, Peter Buck, was one of the first Māori scholars, a famous medical doctor and a praised intellectual in the country. As such, he is notably respected and quoted by Witi Ihimaera,<sup>10</sup> who inherited Buck's admiration and passion for the original migration. When Buck wrote the following stirring lines in 1938, he showed how proud he has been of his traveler ancestors,

thus expressing a deep feeling among Polynesian peoples: "If the sea ever gives up its dead, what a parade of Polynesian mariners will rise from the depths when the call of the shell trumpet summons them to the last muster roll! Their numbers will bear witness to the courage of those who dared but failed to reach land which was not there" (1938, 96).

Chantal Spitz also reminds her readers of all the ancient Polynesians who were lost at sea when she chooses the following mythical and poetical expression:

They paid costly tribute,  
The ancestors of my people,  
Giving their sons to the greedy gods,  
So that their dreams might live on in us. (2007, 137)

As opposed to some scientific theories of the 1950s and 1960s that questioned oral traditions so much so that they raised the issue of a Polynesian settlement achieved by chance, Chantal Spitz claims that her ancestors were "capable of the biggest human achievement of all times"<sup>11</sup> (Spitz 2006, 138). However, such episodes or remarks presented by committed authors should not lead us to believe that all Western travelers and scientists who wrote about Polynesian origins failed to take into account local oral traditions. European tradesman Jacques-Antoine Moerenhout—who served as a U.S. consul in Tahiti from 1834 to 1836 and in 1837 published *Voyage aux îles du Grand Océan* (Journey among the islands of the great ocean), a journal recognized for its ethnographical passages—wrote for example after he visited the Tuamotu islands, "The second general observation that can be made about the inhabitants of the Dangerous Archipelago is that they are said to have been, ever since ancient times, the bravest navigators of the region thanks to the large canoes that often are more than a hundred feet and are built based on a plan that make them look a lot like our ships."<sup>12</sup>

A century later in New Zealand, Peter Buck wrote *Vikings of the Sunrise* partly based on his travels in the Pacific and on his studies of S. Percy Smith's *Hawaiki: The Original Homeland of the Maori*. Smith's book was published in 1910 and still has great importance in the Māori imaginary. Even though the publication of the latter has been scientifically questioned (Simmons 1976) since the 1960s because of the (too) coherent narrative it created around the mythical Kupe and the "great fleet of seven canoes," Smith's work remains fundamental because it gave a written voice to many tribes who had shared with him their tales and memories.

When they create characters or stories that exalt the history of their ancestors, Polynesian writers reclaim their past. They also keep the memories

of the maritime journey alive and spread it. Most of all, they “write back” to those who ignored their heritage or failed to recognize its value, and they give the myth of the original migration a political dimension.

## Political Issues of the Myth: The Canoe, a Symbol of the Reconquest of a Promised Land

Thus, one question arises: how do Polynesian authors manage to turn the canoe into a symbol of the political quest?

First, the maritime myth is often used to insist on Polynesian descent instead of nationality: the greatness of the Polynesian family offers a symbolic alternative to the minority status of the Māori in New Zealand and to some forms of domination the Mā'ohi feel in Tahiti.<sup>13</sup> The mention of Hawaiki as a metaphorical place of origins shared by many tribes and families federates Islanders through the literary texts: it reaches beyond their national differences. The Polynesian family—which necessarily excludes the Other, the Occidental—is presented by Chantal Spitz in *L'Île des rêves écrasés* when her heroine Tetiare travels across the Pacific to meet her Polynesian cousins. The postcolonial disapproval is clear in Spitz's words that highlight how Hawaiki is exploited in this purpose: “She has discovered them, peoples of the first people, attempting through little disorganized movements to shake off the Foreigner and immerse themselves again in their origins, to be themselves, the lost children of this huge family in search of another” (2007, 121–22).

Spitz reminds her readers that when political claims are at stake, the myth of the Promised Land is very close to the myth of the maritime adventure. Furthermore, many novels base their narrative structure on the quest the characters embark on. The spirit of exploration haunts Arona in Albert Wendt's *The Mango's Kiss*, and this young boy finally leaves his family to navigate the whole Pacific. As for Jean-Pierre Bonnefoy's novel, it is built on a complex structure in which every timeline reflects the other. *Polynésia, l'Odyssée d'un rêve* presents three journeys: the ancient Polynesians' migration, the modern cruise of the narrator, and a future space travel. All these heroes relive the migration myth, sometimes unconsciously: the journey is part of an identity quest and of the building of a destiny.

The celebration of a common origin also appears in two shared traditions, preserved in the whole Polynesian Triangle. Reciting genealogies partakes of the canoe imaginary and identity. In Māori<sup>14</sup> it is called *whakapapa*, a word formed as *'akapapa* in Mangareva and *hakapapa* in Tuamotu. If some linguists consider that *whaka-* could be an evolution of the substantive *waka*, most of them explain that the causative prefix *whaka-* (employed

with different spellings everywhere in Polynesia) highlights the other half of the word, *-papa*, which means “layers” or “stratums.” The word would thus be formed as the Tahitian *papara'a (tupuna)*, which the anthropologist Bruno Saura translates literally as “a piling up (of ancestors).”<sup>15</sup> However, if Māori etymology does not associate genealogies to the canoes, most of the tribes’ imaginaries do. Reminding us that mentioning the original canoe enables you to assert the ancientness of your lineage but also connects you to other Polynesian peoples, Huhana Smith writes that “all tribal genealogies are more or less connected with the waka, or ships, that carried the first settlers—the founding ancestors—in Aotearoa” (2011, 17).<sup>16</sup> In his poem “Reconnaissance,” Robert Sullivan explains, “The waka represent ancestors/in name and form. Their names are invoked today/and bind Māori people” (1999, 10). Polynesian origins as a basis of individual identity are also extolled in the frequent mentions of the burial of the placenta—*whenua* in Māori, *pūfenua* in Tahitian, and *fanua* in Samoan—which links a newborn to its land. These terms also mean “native soil” or “homeland” in these languages. Burials of the placenta as well as funerals punctuate each of Chantal Spitz’s, Witi Ihimaera’s, and Albert Wendt’s novels since they all tell the story of at least three generations of families and mingle it with national history. These traditions are celebrated in the maritime myth, which is symbolically the same gesture: the travelers need to bond with their new land.

Lastly, Witi Ihimaera and Chantal Spitz use the migration myth as a metaphor for a political quest. The ancient travelers created a new society on a virgin land; young Polynesians have to follow their lead and carve themselves a place in the world. The search for emancipation is the core of Witi Ihimaera’s novels. His diptych offers many interwoven stories, most of which tell the Māori resistance to the *pākehā*<sup>17</sup> power since colonization. Each character takes up the torch from his forebear’s hand. Tamatea inherits his role and his *mana* from his grandmother, who associates his battle to that of his ancestors when she says to him, “And so I begin your journey, *e mokopuna* [grandchild], at the time of your awakening, by pushing you out into the universe. This the people did in Hawaiki when the *Takitimu*<sup>18</sup> voyaged to this land” (Ihimaera 1996, 294).

The journey symbolizes Tamatea’s path toward a career dedicated to Māori resistance. Later, his grandmother will order him to become a lawyer or a member of parliament, a modern hero of the political fight.

Quest is always one of literature’s inner workings. In contemporary Polynesian writings, it seems filled with the memory of the great migration that adds historical and symbolic dimensions to the postcolonial protest discourse. Nevertheless, the myth is seldom used for concrete political

demands: most of the time, it echoes an ideal, namely, the dream of a different world.

## A Literary Conquest: The Canoe in the Heart of Polynesian Poetics

Western authors who gave Polynesia a colonial or exotic image are numerous. Explorers like Wallis, Cook, and Bougainville were quickly followed by missionaries and the traveler-writers like Loti, Stevenson, Kipling, Gauguin, London, Simenon, and others whose works crystallized the image of these territories as paradise.<sup>19</sup> When contemporary Polynesian authors write back to them, they base their literatures on a bilateral relationship and keep an eye on the colonial past they wish to reject. And yet, how do they use the migration myth to extract themselves from the postcolonial response in order to reach further?

Both historically and politically, the use of the original migration also tends to support a cultural discourse that participates in the foundation of a different world, a world where minorities could end their fight. Movements for a Polynesian cultural renewal mostly started in the 1960s with the opposition to the nuclear tests in French Polynesia, the continual defense of land rights in New Zealand, and the creation of the University of the South Pacific (USP).<sup>20</sup> They are also linked to the discovery by the first generation of French Polynesian authors of Teuira Henry's 1928 book, *Ancient Tahiti*, a collection of nineteenth-century interviews of Tahitian priests and chiefs collected by her grandfather, the missionary James Orsmond. It constitutes one of the main mythical sources for contemporary writers, a counterbalance to the Bible and the framework of almost all allusions to traditional myths. Concerned with these claims and aware that they are creating a poetics of the canoe appropriate to their civilization of migrants as well as their continent of archipelagos, Polynesian authors insist on the bond that unites journey and narrative.

Nowadays, scientists have established that the settlement was conducted after an exploratory journey: some canoes first traveled as scouts. Robert Sullivan mentions them in "Reconnaissance." If the exploration was a success, the canoes would go back and praise the suitable island they found. Witi Ihimaera knows of this strategy and exalts the strength of the tale when he writes, "So the days go by, and the fever of romance ravages Hawaiki. Settlements flock to hear of the new land to the south" (1996, 253). The tale thus has a major function before the migration; but also after it, since it is of the utmost importance to forget<sup>21</sup> neither Hawaiki nor the peripeteia of the journey. In a poem entitled "Te Ao Marama<sup>22</sup> II," Robert Sullivan draws

a parallel between memory, canoes, and the modern schools of Māori language.

Recently  
Waka have performed a similar function.

They have travelled with us  
Through the evolution of legends

And the tongues our legends use.  
Waka spring from our unconscious,

The deep structure of Polynesia

To reappear in the modern world. (Sullivan 1999, 26)

The canoe becomes a conveyor of cultural and linguistic memories, a conveyor of an evolving poetics, a part it plays in the whole collection *Star Waka*.

Related to both memories and tales, the myth of the maritime migration falls within the scope of dynamic oral and written literatures. Every sea story is both poetic and novelistic. The phenomenon is well known: a reader or listener is carried away by the story and travels with the heroes. When they use the migration myth, Polynesian authors echo the call of the open sea. In Witi Ihimaera's novel, the matriarch says to her grandson, "Listen now to the saga of the voyage of the *Takitimu*" (1996, 236). The literary term "saga" highlights the insertion of a tale in the novel, just like the mythical quest is inserted in the postcolonial political discourse. As for Robert Sullivan, he chooses to open his collection with the expression of a symbolical filiation—"fleet, mother of tales" (1999, 2)—through which he affirms how profoundly novelistic the maritime myth is. Many scenes of *The Mango's Kiss* illustrate this quality of the myth, and Arona inherits his father's gift for telling stories. Influenced by Barker, a Westerner who settled in their village, he increases his repertoire with imported sea stories: "not once [does] he lose his way, or the attention of his audience. [His sister] Peleiupu [finds] herself flowing with his tale" (Wendt 2003, 135). Henceforth foreign stories, which are actually close to Samoan maritime legends, fire the readers' or listeners' passion and bring the villagers together again. Most of all, they call for constant re-appropriations and re-creations of new stories. Alone or combined with other tales, the ancients' migration myth metonymically represents Polynesian current literary creativities.

Indeed, the myth is also employed as a symbol of the contemporary journey toward strong and proud Polynesian literatures. The writers mostly distinguish themselves from the colonial texts, but they nevertheless wish to be read beyond the Pacific Ocean. And in this regard, the use of a regional myth does not isolate them: every civilization has its maritime imaginary, often mingled with imported stories mixed in a universal representation of the journey; so when they extol the virtues of the myth, Polynesian authors offer a poetic discourse the whole world understands and admires. Exceeding the postcolonial field of literatures that claim their uniqueness, the writers thus mention other great migrations that are at the basis of the world's collective unconscious. The parallels drawn by Witi Ihimaera between the Oceanian myth and the Old Testament are numerous, and he refers to the "exodus" (1996, 253) when he tells the journey of the *Takitimu*. He then describes Hawaiki as the place where "the great odyssey of the Maori had its genesis" (1997, 356), adding an antique reference to the biblical one. The same syncretism can be found in *Polynésia* since Bonnefoy presents the migration as "an ancestral epic in which we find a plain symbolism, that of the conquest of a promised land" (2005, 115).<sup>23</sup> Chantal Spitz also calls to mind the antique imaginary with the expression "siren song" (*chant des sirènes*), which is used to characterize the Polynesian spirit of adventure (2007, 27). But the image also has a fateful color because Spitz explains that this sailor's spirit led many Islanders to enlist in national armies during the World Wars. As for Albert Wendt, he highlights the taste of the Samoan villagers for the Persian *Adventures of Sinbad the Sailor*. Conscious as they are of the universality of every myth, Polynesian authors work to "implant" the *whenua*, the "placenta" of their own literature into the world's imaginary. Synthesizing the use Polynesian authors make of the original migration myth, Chantal Spitz writes,

They are gone now,  
The ancestors of my people,  
Travellers, builders, dreamers,  
Handing down to us their undying faith. (Spitz 2007, 137)

The ancients were travelers, builders, and dreamers in search of a better world; so are their descendants, in a metaphorical, political, and poetic sense. Because these qualities constitute the Polynesians' heritage, the authors need to extol it. Today, they dream of young people who know their culture and are proud of it; of Māori, Mā'ohi, and Samoans who regain a larger sovereignty on their own land; of Polynesian literatures recognized<sup>24</sup> not only for their postcolonial qualities but also for their universality and

beauty. Through the peripeteia of its many rewritings, the literary life of the migration myth is thus truly an odyssey of the dream. Michel Foucault wrote that “the ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilisations without boats, dreams dry up” (1986, 27). And indeed, studying Polynesia and its literatures is always working on the dream, may it be Western or Oceanian.

CHLOÉ ANGUÉ received her doctorate from Paris Nanterre University, where she wrote a dissertation in comparative literatures entitled “Biblical Myths and Polynesian Myths: Flexibility of the Imaginary of Conquest and Dream. Literary Images of Polynesia from the XVIIth to the XXIst Century.” In the dictionary edited by Sylvie Parizet, *La Bible dans les littératures du monde*, she wrote the short articles about Epeli Hau’ofa, Witi Ihimaera, and Chantal Spitz. She has also published articles in international journals, such as *Revue de Littérature Comparée*. She is passionate about Polynesian literatures, languages, myths, imaginaries, and territory representations. Recently, she has been focusing on myths in the works of Polynesian authors writing about environmental crises.

## NOTES

1. In the Mā'ohi and Samoan languages.
2. In Māori.
3. The va'a races are major events in Tahiti and Hawai'i. The athletes are seen as heroes and the media call them *'aito*, a precolonial Mā'ohi term for a brave warrior.
4. Ben Finney is an American historian and anthropologist known in the Pacific for his groundbreaking work on Polynesian migrations and canoes. He was one of the first academics to study the arts of surfing and sailing in the region. He played a major part in the Hokule'a project, an experiment that consisted in reviving Polynesian travels on a double-hulled canoe.
5. Even though Bonnefoy cannot exactly be called “postcolonial,” I believe he shares many literary structures and thematic interests with Polynesian writers, such as a multitemporal structure based on many narrators, his focus on a history that should not be forgotten and that needs to be reclaimed, the presentation of Polynesia as a model that should inspire Western societies, and a reflection on the Polynesian islands’ future.
6. According to Jean-Marc Moura’s distinction, only Albert Wendt can be called “postcolonial” since he is from Independent Samoa, whereas the other four writers live in territories that cannot exactly be called decolonized and are thus “postcolonial.” See Jean-Marc Moura, “Postcolonialisme et Comparatisme.” *Société française de littérature générale et comparée*. 2006. <http://www.vox-poetica.org/sflgc/biblio/moura.html>.
7. An ancient sacred place.
8. It would be fascinating to read the story of the word “Hawaiki”: how it was created, how it traveled with the migrants, how it somehow became synonymous with “island or land of the origins,” and how it now bears a strong poetic power of evocation.
9. My translation: “Un jour, une nuit, quand son regard fut attiré par la lune, il vit un singulier chemin lumineux dans le ciel. Un alignement d’étoiles lui montrait la route!” (Bonnefoy 2005, 325).
10. For example, the narrator of Bulibasha pays homage to his ancestors, “those intrepid Vikings of the South Pacific” (Ihimaera 2009, 160).
11. My translation of “capables du plus grand exploit humain de tous les temps.”

12. My translation of “la seconde observation générale à faire sur les habitants de l’Archipel dangereux, c’est qu’ils passent, de temps immémorial, pour les plus hardis navigateurs des environs, au moyen de leurs grandes pirogues, qui, souvent, ont plus de cent pieds, et sont construites sur un plan qui les fait beaucoup ressembler à nos vaisseaux” (Moerenhout 2006, 135).

13. It would be interesting to study how the presentation of the canoe as a political symbol and the migration as a political myth varies in Samoa: would another colonial history change the extent and ambition of the myth? It would seem so since narratives of the origins appear slightly different in this archipelago and are mingled with biblical episodes on a much larger scale.

14. In Mā’ohi, it is called *feti'i* in the oral language or *papara'a tupuna*, but the term *va'a* appears in *va'a matae'ina'a* or *va'a ta'ata*, written or declamation terms used to designate the population of a particular zone (often linked to particular families).

15. My translation of “Papara'a-tupuna, ‘empilement/base des ancêtres’” (Saura 2013, 27).

16. My translation of “toutes les généralogies tribales ont un rapport plus ou moins direct avec les waka, ou bateaux, qui transportèrent les premiers colons – les ancêtres fondateurs – en Aotearoa.”

17. Pākehā designates the non-Māori New Zealanders, just like Popa'a in Tahiti and Papālāgi in Samoa.

18. Their tribal canoe. New Zealand tradition (in particular since the publication of S. Percy Smith’s study) evokes seven—or nine—great canoes that brought Māori ancestors on this new land, whereas the Mā’ohi from French Polynesia have forgotten the names and number of their ships. Of course, there were probably many more.

19. “Paradieses” would be more accurate because, since the beginning of European writing about Polynesia, the literary image of this immense region has slightly differed: explorers and exotic writers presented New Zealand as a productive garden, fit for settlement, whereas in the same journals and novels, smaller tropical islands were painted as leisure lands. A study of the image of the Polynesian islands in early Pākehā literature would be very interesting since it would probably show an advanced distinction from European and American texts.

20. The USP was founded in Fiji in 1968. In 1977, Albert Wendt and his colleagues opened a center in Samoa and other centers in Melanesia.

21. Victor Segalen mentioned it in *Les Immémoriaux* (A lapse of memory); in ancient Polynesia, history was passed along orally, and forgetting was the most unforgivable sin.

22. An expression meaning “The World of Light.”

23. My translation of “une épopée ancestrale où l’on retrouve une symbolique simple, celle de la conquête d’une terre promise.”

24. Unfortunately, Polynesian literatures are still largely unknown in Western bookshops and universities, as well as in most of the local readership.

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# OPINION

## Welcome to Country Speeches: A Personal Perspective from a Larrakia Man

Curtis Roman

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**ABSTRACT** | Welcome to Country speeches have become part of many proceedings today. In this opinion piece, the author shares his view that, although these speeches have become tokenistic, they should be seen as an opportunity to educate and inform.

**KEYWORDS** | Welcome to Country, tokenism, opportunity

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Welcome to Country speeches are used in Australia to open events, conferences, and ceremonies, be they organizational, local, national, or international. The purpose of Welcome to Country speeches is to acknowledge the Indigenous people of the area in which events are taking place and to pay respect to them both by recognizing that events are taking place on their traditional lands and by having a person from the Indigenous community welcome everybody to the event. Such speeches are typically the first order of business at these gatherings, with the master of ceremonies inviting the individual who is delivering the Welcome to Country to the stage to welcome people to their traditional land and to the event. These speeches are typically between five and ten minutes in length.

This essay is the outcome of a public seminar the author recently delivered at Charles Darwin University in Darwin, Australia. The notion to do the seminar and the paper came to me after a colleague of mine, a law academic, invited me to deliver a small presentation to one of his law classes that was focusing on Aboriginal customary law.

My colleague had previously witnessed me deliver a Welcome to Country speech at a public event where I informed the audience that I typically do not do such speeches because, in my view, they meant nothing and had become tokenistic. However, I was happy to deliver one at the event because of the

clear commitment of the organizers to have Indigenous representation. With this in mind, my colleague asked me to talk about my views on Welcome to Country speeches to his class. He agreed with my view and thought that it would be a good perspective for his students to listen to and engage with. The class was a diverse group and it soon became clear to me that most students did not fully understand Welcome to Country speeches and did not understand why they occurred. With this in mind I thought it would be useful to deliver a public seminar and to publish this paper with my views on Welcome to Country speeches. The purpose of this paper is not to refer to references or Western theories but to give a personal insight from the perspective of a Larrakia man who has delivered many Welcome to Country speeches around Darwin.

It is my view that Welcome to Country speeches have become fashionable, the norm, part of conference proceedings with organizers often not understanding what they are. They have become about the organization feeling warm and fuzzy about themselves and showing that they are warm and fuzzy. After Welcome to Country speeches are delivered, the person delivering the speech is typically ushered out of the way so the real proceedings can begin—often without any Indigenous issues being raised after this.

My personal position on Welcome to Country speeches is not positive. My people's experiences, as people whose traditional lands were made into a city, is that we have experienced the full impacts of colonization, including the destruction of traditional culture and languages; we have been dispossessed of our lands and have suffered the intergenerational effects of child removal. Then, the government, through its self-made rules about Native Title, expects my people to prove to them that we have continued to practice our traditional customs, and we must prove this to them for us to even begin to be considered to have attachments to our traditional lands. They then ask my people, through people such as myself, to perform Welcome to County speeches for them. They have already taken the land and do not need me to welcome them here at all.

Let me now locate myself in the context of Welcome to Country speeches. I have delivered many Welcome to Country speeches around the Darwin area as my family are well recognized in the local community as Larrakia people. The Larrakia are the Indigenous people of the Darwin area.

I am one of a small number of Larrakia people in the Darwin area who are regularly asked to deliver Welcome to Country speeches. It is often a matter of people seeing you deliver these speeches, then inviting you to deliver one at an event they are organizing. Typically, not many Indigenous people get the opportunity to deliver Welcome to Country speeches. This

in no way means that those who deliver these speeches have more cultural authority; often it means only that they are more accessible to people wanting Welcome to Country speeches. They are typically employed in certain organizations, or have family members who are, and are therefore often part of staff networks rather than a cultural chain of authority.

How do people deliver Welcome to Country speeches? There is no one way to deliver a Welcome to Country speech. Given that those who deliver Welcome to Country speeches do not represent other people, they should see these speeches as an opportunity to approach them how they like, in their own style and having their own say. Too often, Welcome to Country speeches are not connected to the event or organization hosting the event. The audience has no interest in who the person delivering the Welcome to Country is related to and how they are related to these people, nor does it have any interest in how the person is part of that group of Aboriginal people. So, saying the names of uncles and aunties is irrelevant and a missed opportunity to say something meaningful and educational, to say something that creates awareness, that grabs the attention of the audience. Instead, take the opportunity to talk about some of the positives happening in the organization in the Indigenous space, such as Indigenous policies and programs and the achievements of Indigenous staff. In this way Welcome to Country speeches should be seen as an opportunity to take some leadership and say something that can make a positive difference, something that educates and initiates reflection. My view is that one of the practical ways to educate the audience and to ensure people continue to understand the aim of Welcome to Country speeches is by starting the speech with a map of Aboriginal Australia and pointing to the country they are welcoming the audience to. I suggest the one developed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Islander Studies as a good resource to do this. This will clearly show that there are many groups of Indigenous people around Australia and will accentuate that the person delivering the Welcome to Country speech is representing a specific area of land. This in itself can educate people who think, for example, that Aboriginal people are one people.

Welcome to Country speeches should also be relevant to the event, the audience, and the organization. They should not be a one-speech-fits-all approach, as doing so is a missed opportunity to educate and inform and to have people reflect on Indigenous issues. It is an opportunity to engage the audience in a positive way.

There are two main ways that traditional custodians are acknowledged at public events and gatherings—Welcome to Country speeches and Acknowledgments of Country. The difference is simple. A Welcome to Country speech is where someone who is recognized as being part of the

Aboriginal group Indigenous to the land on which an event is occurring stands at the front at the beginning of the event and welcomes everybody to the event. An Acknowledgment of Country is where any person can state, at the beginning of the event, that they acknowledge the Indigenous land custodians on whose land the event is taking place. In addition to speeches and Acknowledgments of Country, there are other ways to do Welcome to Country speeches, such as songs, dances, smoking ceremonies, and the use of water.

Welcome to Country speeches are not easy to deliver and there is no one way to do them. From the author's personal perspective, Welcome to Country speeches are one of the most difficult speeches to deliver. The author has delivered speeches to packed theatres and at conferences, has been master of ceremonies and facilitated at conferences, has chaired meetings and delivered many seminars and public lectures. However, he experiences the most discomfit and anxiety when delivering Welcome to Country speeches. This is one of the reasons that underpins this paper, to provide some structure for those who deliver Welcome to Country speeches now and in the future.

There are a range of reasons for this discomfit. To begin, the person doing the Welcome to Country speech does not represent other people at all, and they do not know if other people from the group of people who are either traditional custodians or claiming to be will be in the audience. This means they do not know for sure if they and their speech will be publicly challenged by others.

The person also has no knowledge of the politics of the organization and does not know what to say. They can also feel discomfit as a result of the tokenistic feel of the speech and can feel anxiety about how non-Indigenous people in the audience will receive their speech. The feeling is that the organization wants someone to deliver a Welcome to Country speech; however, people in the organization may be concerned that the person doing it may say something political, or uncomfortable and challenging, for the audience. It has been the author's experience that there are often people in the audience who will make facial gestures and exhibit body language that suggest that they have negative attitudes toward Welcome to Country speeches. It has been my experience that these people are visible when you are at the front delivering the speech but are not so visible to others in the audience. It is appropriate to point out here also that typically, the person delivering Welcome to Country speeches has to leave their workplace and travel to another location where they will talk for about three or four minutes. I point this out because there seems to be a belief among those

requesting Welcome to Country speeches that the person delivering the speech has no other obligations and can just turn up and leave again.

In conclusion, it is the position of this paper that Welcome to Country speeches have become so tokenistic and routine in their delivery that many members of society, including those requesting these speeches, lack an understanding of why these speeches occur. This can easily be transformed by seeing these speeches as an opportunity to educate the audience by causing them to reflect on Indigenous issues internally in the organization and, more broadly, by promoting the work that the organization is doing, and also by offering some insights on the importance of having a positive Indigenous space in the organization.

CURTIS ROMAN is a Larrakia man born and raised on Larrakia country. He is the head of the School of Indigenous Knowledges and Public Policy at Charles Darwin University in Darwin. He has taught Indigenous studies, education, human resource management, and anthropology at institutes of higher education and has published in the areas of Indigenous people and racism, Indigenous people and qualitative research, and Indigenous leadership in universities. He currently spends much of his time supervising doctoral students from a wide range of backgrounds who are conducting research on Indigenous topics.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art.*

By Ian McLean.

London: Reaktion Books, 2016. 301 pages, 149 illustrations. \$39.00 (hardcover).

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Reviewed by Greg Lehman, University of Tasmania

The task of adequately describing what we call “Aboriginal art” in Australia seems impossible. Whether through the disciplines of art history, anthropology, or any of the shifting fields of visual, critical, or postcolonial studies, the challenge is one of the greatest that might be conceived from within the traditions of the humanities and social sciences. Indeed, the idea of assembling such a multiplicity of cultural expressions from across vast and diverse historical and geographical dimensions into a coherent whole may seem even more absurd if approached through the epistemologies of Indigenous traditions. It may be argued to be more about imposition than exposition. Yet, this would appear to be the challenge that Ian McLean has set himself with *Rattling Spears*.

The book is, according to McLean, “the first full art-historical narrative of Indigenous Australia art” (7). However, the author recognizes the inherent problems of this claim from the outset. In describing it as “an art without an art history,” he quotes Terry Smith, who sees Aboriginal art as “an improbable yet potent mix of the most ancient and the most recent forms of art” (7). In fact, it is exactly this mix that is the subject of McLean’s fascination, and its formula for success.

McLean’s book is certainly not the first to attempt a meaningful survey of this sort. Hetti Perkins’s (2010) *Art + Soul* paved the way for Indigenous writers to begin to take control of the discourse of Australian Indigenous cultural traditions, values, and practices. Earlier *Aboriginal Art* titles by Wally Caruana (1993) and Howard Morphy (1998) profiled the masters of Indigenous artistic expression and explored the cultural foundations of art practice. McLean’s book continues both approaches, but his response has

not been to attempt to write Aboriginal art into Australian art history, or to create an Indigenous-specific art history. *Rattling Spears* extends a project McLean commenced in earlier volumes, including his *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art* (1998) and the edited anthologies *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art* (2011) and *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art* (2014).

The key to understanding his project, and to recognizing its validity, is to note the reference to this work as “narrative.” It is *a* history. McLean’s long-term concern has been to build and expand an alternative framework of postcolonial analysis in order to more adequately position Aboriginal art in a contemporary context than has been possible before. *Rattling Spears* seeks to account for “how Indigenous artists engaged with, and responded to, [their] meeting with modernity and in the process became modern artists, eventually making for themselves a place in the discourse of contemporary art” (11). Throughout the book, McLean is reflective on both his own role as inquirer, and the broader environment of modernity within which he (and his readers) will find themselves embedded. To enable this analysis, McLean intends his book to “map the discursive field of Indigenous art in the modern period, arguing that it has been a rich ground for transculturation” (157). The idea of art as “discursive practice” comes from Foucault and was popularized in cultural and media studies by Stuart Hall. These ideas are deployed adroitly by MacLean as one of the conceptual foundations that will ensure his book persists as an influential contribution in its field for decades to come. What is at stake here is the relevance and resonance of Aboriginal art in the “now,” rather than its archival currency as a marker of an Indigenous culture of “then,” which since colonial times has been assumed to also be one of inevitable decline or absorption on the terms of the occupier.

Foucault’s idea of discourse concerns the drifts and patterns of meaning that construct knowledge and establish notions of truth or authority. These, importantly, then infer modes of action. McLean is careful to point out that the affinities between Western and Indigenous thinking in modern times that make this approach useful are analogous rather than equivalent. In doing so, he offers an approach that is likely to have considerable appeal to Indigenous scholars, as well as to others who recognize value in analysis by Indigenous people of our own pathways. By this I refer to the author’s concern with recognition of “performativity”—offering an intrinsic acknowledgment and valuing of Indigenous agency that has been too often overlooked or even denied in the formation of Australian art-historical discourse for most of the past two centuries through its obsession with assimilation, integration, and decay.

McLean's idea of performativity acknowledges the self-determination with which Aboriginal cultural practitioners have sought to create a space for themselves in the European world since the arrival of Governor Phillip in 1788 and the subsequent creation of a British colony here. For McLean, the first "performative" gesture was the spearing of Phillip by the Gweagal clan of the Dharawal nation in what is now called Botany Bay. Rather than a simple act of defiance or violent resistance, McLean posits this event as performance art—"an aesthetic stratagem that initiated a new type of Indigenous political art." This might seem preposterous to some. However, unless we are to consider such an act as just an automatic and derivative reaction to invasion—a view that privileges European imperialism as an inevitable and deterministic process that Indigenous people must, by their savage nature, oppose—then it is necessary to ask what preexisting cultural and social conditions surrounded the action by the Gweagal party. This was not the first time that such an action had been carried out. Spearing was common, mostly undertaken within the confines of ceremony and ritual, and governed by law and largely symbolic. McLean recognizes that one of the most infamous attacks by Aborigines on the nascent British presence was far from barbarous. It was an act of rich intentionality, designed to draw the British into the Gweagal world.

Although McLean does not mention these, there are numerous other examples of such transactions in the European record of first encounter. William Dampier, for example, arriving on the continent one hundred years before Phillip, remarked that the natives stood around "like statues" and "grinn'd like so many monkeys" at his unsuccessful attempt to gain their labor in carrying barrels of water to his boats. Dampier greeted this affable gesture of ridicule by writing in his *New Voyage Around the World* that "the Inhabitants of this Country are the miserablest People in the World . . . setting aside their Humane Shape, they differ but little from Brutes" (1697). This condemnation was to influence the prejudices of almost every European navigator and scientist to visit Australia over the next two centuries. Among them was Marion Du Fresne, who, upon arrival in Van Diemen's Land in 1772, was invited by the Pydairrerme who met them on the shore to accept a flaming torch and set fire to a pile of wood assembled for the occasion. As soon as he did, he was attacked. Marion, like Phillip, had entered into a performative transaction and, ignorant of the implications, pronounced the consequences as evidence not of his own cross-cultural ineptitude but of the barbarity of the sovereign people whose country he was visiting.

It is the recognition of the importance of performance, ritual, or ceremony in Indigenous art—whether it be in the cultural (mis)communications that occurred in those earliest encounters on the shore or in the polemical

text of contemporary urban art—that the profound importance of McLean’s book resides. Anthropologists have understood the nature of this creative transaction in its ethnographic context for decades. However, we have had to wait for the publication of *Rattling Spears* for this understanding to be read into the context of contemporary Indigenous art. This is the essence of McLean’s most important concept—that Indigenous art is an effort at “seeing one’s self in the other” and a recognition by Indigenous artists of the necessity of establishing communication drawn from our own archive of culture and ceremony (no matter how fractured or compromised by the impacts of colonization) and prosecuting this into the Western sensory experience. It is an acknowledgment of the necessity that has been understood by Aboriginal people for millennia to place the other into our Indigenous cosmos.

McLean’s view of modernity follows that of Ernst Gombrich, beginning with the French Revolution and embracing the collapse of long-held assumptions about the social relations of power and extrapolating a period of accelerating dislocation and change. This period also saw the rise (or at least better recognition) of performativity in European art—not only in the role of making art but also in its reception by audiences as constitutive of a creative product. *Rattling Spears* now offers an opportunity to consider analogous shifts in Australian Aboriginal art, commencing with the advent of colonialism and accompanying the persistent disruption, injustice, and resultant activism that continue to characterize Indigenous Australia and its artistic expression. McLean’s arguments bring to mind Hegel, who in his *Lectures on Fine Art* was scathing about the art of his own time, feeling it lacked true spiritual necessity and so appeared “without any imagination of situations, motives or expression.” Like Hegel’s Absolute Idea, always acting in history, the expression of Indigenous art in *Rattling Spears* is changeable and various, depending on historical moment and development, making distinctive articulations possible at each stage of history. It is an art of intentionality, and full of motive.

McLean sees art as being continually used for instrumental purposes at key moments in history, a quality expected in the Western canon but poorly acknowledged in Indigenous expression. This analysis not only flattens out the old ethnographic imaginings of absolute difference between Indigeneity and the West but also succeeds in describing connections between the diverse forms in which Indigenous societies express themselves, thereby giving impetus to the rise of progressive development through time.

Even though the task of describing Aboriginal art as anything like a coherent whole in Western terms might be fraught, this book offers a vantage point from which the past and present can be seen as connected. McLean,

no doubt as a result of a lifetime in conversation with Aboriginal people about their cultural expressions, understands the supreme importance of this. He understands that, in the Indigenous world, aesthetics signifies the ever-presence of ancestors and law rather than being “reified into a Kantian ideology in which abstract feelings of beauty and the sublime signify the individual subject’s search for freedom” (19).

This book’s title refers to a “chilling sound that calls ancestors from their sleep. It is also a strategic manoeuvre to reclaim authority” (130). In Anangu this is called “Tirkilpa,” a sound that would be heard before a battle begins. It is a sound that resounded across the Australian continent during the nineteenth century as warriors rose up to defend their law and Country. As in the past, Indigenous art today continues this claim of authority, each a part of the discursive practice of culture and its inference to action in time. *Rattling Spears* explains a key process by which Indigenous people in Australia commence and create space for themselves in the Western world. This is done while still serving the precepts of traditional culture, honoring ancestors, meeting obligations to Country and kin, and defending a future for ourselves in an ever-accelerating and disruptive flow of history in which we play a defining part.

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#### ***Blood Will Tell: Native Americans and Assimilation Policy. By Katherine Ellinghaus.***

Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2017. 234 pages. \$40.00 (hardcover).

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Reviewed by Barry Judd, Charles Darwin University

As a detailed study of the development of ideas of blood and blood quantum as determinants of indigeneity in the United States of America, *Blood Will Tell* provides a valuable resource for those who seek a deeper understanding

of the politics of indigenous identity. The recent controversies that surround the claim of Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts to a Cherokee and Delaware identity in the United States and those of the award-winning and internationally celebrated novelist Joseph Boyden to Nipmuc and Ojibwe identity in Canada make *Blood Will Tell* an extremely timely and useful publication. *Blood Will Tell* provides much-needed context to contemporary debates about how indigeneity is or should be defined and what constitutes a valid claim to Indian-ness in the United States today. Such context is provided through a series of detailed historical case studies that are aptly used to demonstrate how definitions of Indian identity based in notions of blood were developed, applied, and articulated by settler-colonial governments of the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This focus locates *Blood Will Tell* as a history of legislative and public-policy discourses of race based in ideas of blood and their application in settler-colonial constructions of Indian identity. Importantly, *Blood Will Tell* might also be described as a historical study of discourse in that Ellinghaus reveals how notions of blood and blood quantum derived from popular-culture understandings of settler-colonial America slowly but surely came to influence and later underpin official definitions of the racial category “Indian.”

The case studies contained in *Blood Will Tell* span the decades between the 1880s and 1930s, with each themed to focus attention on particular issues and concerns that impacted settler-state efforts to determine Indian identity with reference to blood. In the first case study, “The Allotment of the Anishinaabeg,” Ellinghaus focuses on the issue of fraud that influenced the settler-colonial process of land allotment and state recognition by the granting of “status” at the White Earth Indian Reservation in Minnesota. She does so to argue that government officials deliberately used narratives of fraud to target and effectively undercut the Indian-ness of the many mixed-descent people at White Earth who identified themselves as being Anishinaabeg. Significantly, Ellinghaus also shows how the settler-colonial obsession with blood quantum and notions of racial purity were ruthlessly imposed on the Anishinaabeg, whose own conceptions of group membership was more dynamic and negotiable and based on family descent, kinship, association, and cultural practice. The process of allotment that was imposed on the Anishinaabeg made blood quantum the key determinant of the authentic Indian, and tribal membership as sanctioned by the settler-colonial state. As a result, settler-colonial discourses of blood also functioned to undermine the validity and authenticity of Anishinaabeg people of mixed descent. As Ellinghaus explains, the consequences of this for the White Earth people were dire:

The allotment period was one of overwhelming loss for the Anishinaabeg, a time when the discourse of blood, and the implicit

assumption that Anishinaabeg of mixed descent did not deserve government protection or tribal assets, set in motion policies and practices that were devastatingly unjust. It was not just that the US government explicitly excluded people of mixed descent from the nation or from their share of its resources, but the assumption that people of mixed descent were not entitled to tribal membership pervaded the many policy decisions of the period and gradually shaped a tendency to deny them recognized Anishinaabeg status. (21)

In the second case study, “The Dawes Commission and the Five Tribes,” Ellinghaus continues to document how Indians of mixed descent were viewed with increasing suspicion by government official and ultimately as undeserving of status and the access to resources this provided. Focused on the theme of chaos, Ellinghaus demonstrates the many practical shortcomings in the enrollment and allotment process carried out by the Dawes Commission, arguing that many Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Seminole, and Muscogee people were excluded by administrative inefficiencies and the barriers to enrollment imposed by time and location restrictions as much as by settler-colonial narratives of the “undeserving Indian.”

In the next two case studies that follow, Ellinghaus shows how the settler-colonial obsession with blood quantum and the narrative of the undeserving Indian that emerged from this idea came to underpin federal-government agendas through both the assimilationist period shaped by the policy of competency and the cultural-preservation thinking that was initiated by the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. Applying her meticulous archival research of these policy eras to the theoretical insights of Wolfe, Ellinghaus makes a compelling case that competency and reorganization were ultimately driven by the settler-colonial desire to eliminate the native. In the case of competency, Ellinghaus argues that the settler-state policy sought to define and exclude Indians of mixed descent on the basis that they were “practically white” and therefore capable of a high level of assimilation into the mainstream of settler-colonial society. Their capability was determined by the degree of white blood they were said to carry, blood which made them undeserving of state recognition of their Indian identity. In the case of reorganization, the same category of Indian found themselves excluded because they had failed to maintain their cultural traditions and links to their tribe. Here the seemingly nonracist emphasis on culture was used to eliminate Indians regardless of evidence derived from blood. As Ellinghaus notes, “A number of applications [seeking status] demonstrate the irony of a situation in which the federal government, which had spent the last four decades attempting to assimilate Native Americans, now refused to identify people as Indians because of the perceived extent of their acculturation. One

man, who applied to be recognized as a *Kawick* of full descent, answered the question ‘Have you abandoned tribal life and adopted the habits and customs of the white community’ by writing ‘No, except as compelled to do so by economic necessity’ (90).

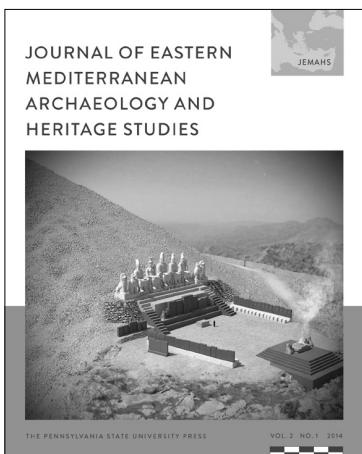
Whereas most attempts by the federal government to eliminate Indians sought to do so with reference to the degree of white blood people of mixed descent were said to carry, the final case study outlined in *Blood Will Tell*—“The Indian Nations of Virginia and the 1924 Racial Integrity Act,” which draws attention to the theme of color—provides an intriguing twist in the story of blood as a key determinant of Indian-ness. In this case study, Ellinghaus shows how the Commonwealth of Virginia attempted to eliminate all Indians within its jurisdiction on the basis of tribal intermarriage with African-Americans and the one-drop rule, which determined their race as “colored.” This was a policy of blood prosecuted by Walter A. Plecker, an overzealous public official in charge of the State Bureau of Vital Statistics. The description of his racial agenda that Ellinghaus is able to construct is the most captivating contained in *Blood Will Tell*. In the context of Southern politics and society, the indigenous peoples of Virginia were viewed as a problem because their existence undermined the racial dichotomy of black and white. “Plecker did all he could to establish that there was no Native American person in Virginia who was ‘untainted’ by African American blood” (97). As Ellinghaus shows, “the *Rappahannock*, *Chickahominy*, *Pamunkey*, *Mattaponi* and *Monacan* peoples mounted a courageous and unrelenting campaign, collectively and individually, against Plecker’s efforts” (100). In many ways, this is the most important of the case studies included in *Blood Will Tell* because the combined Indian nations of Virginia refused to submit to settler-colonial attempts to impose discourses of identity based in notions of blood and blood quantum. Their rejection of external intervention in determining indigenous identity is a testament to their assertion of self-determination in the face of the coercive and corrosive power of the settler-colonial state.

*Blood Will Tell* provides an extremely useful reference that provides historical context to contemporary debates about indigenous identity that continue to take place in the United States today. This book will be particularly useful to Indigenous studies scholars outside the United States since it does much to explain why the language of blood and blood quantum has become widely accepted, embedded, and embraced by Americans in ways that might be considered incomprehensible as well as odious and offensive.

Although it is a highly recommended resource on the topic of indigenous identity, *Blood Will Tell* is not an easy read. In part, this is an outcome of the emotional responses this book may evoke. Engagement with such

histories are likely to leave readers with feelings of sadness, anger, and bewilderment. It is also not easily read because Ellinghaus is so extremely careful to evidence her argument with primary source material, which at times feels overwhelming and intrusive to the historical stories that she tells. Nevertheless, the analysis of public-policy discourses of blood and their application to indigenous peoples in the United States that Ellinghaus develops is complex, subtle, and insightful. She successfully shows that the history of settler-colonial state efforts to eliminate the natives through racial definition were messy, incomplete, and influenced by a variety of factors that included much more than grand theories of racial hierarchy, including the parochial agendas and personal caprice of local officials and a myriad of inconsistent outcomes delivered by the inept and inefficient workings of bureaucracy.

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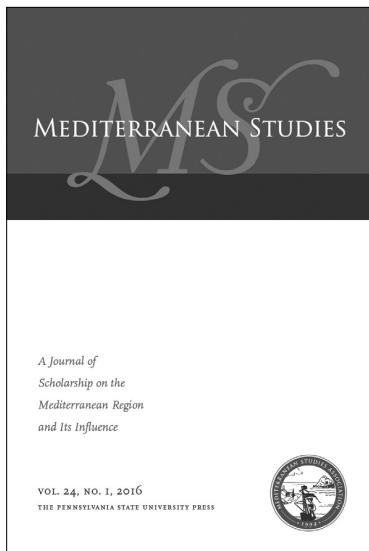
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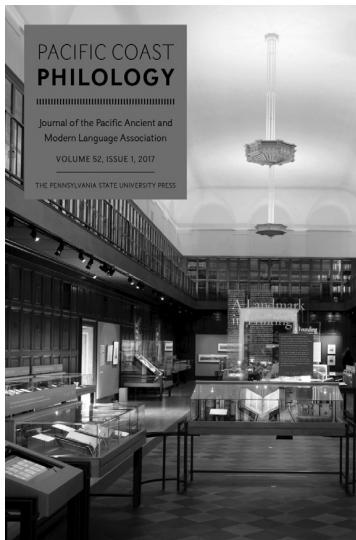
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