
Indigenous Narratives: Global Forces in Motion¹

EMAN GHANAYEM and REBECCA MACKLIN

In the contemporary moment, the world has seen an increase in transnational Indigenous and decolonial activist movements. Idle No More, Rhodes Must Fall, the BDS movement for a Free Palestine, and #NoDAPL and Mni Wiconi have all garnered international attention and trans-cultural calls for solidarity. These movements exemplify and build on long traditions of Indigenous resistance in international contexts and commitments to other marginalized groups.² Mindful of these continued struggles and concerns, this special issue seeks to bring together some of the diverse ways in which Native American and other Indigenous narratives circulate to create an influence globally. While we foreground Indigenous narratives in North America as our primary loci of interpretation, we are interested in the ways that they move outside of cultural or national boundaries and how communities around the world, Indigenous and otherwise, engage with them. In doing so, we attest to the necessity of thinking *globally* as a way to understand some of the forms of connectivity and relationality³ that embody Indigenous experiences.

We understand as narratives the endless multiplicity of modes through which people represent, remember, and share their stories. The narratives discussed in this issue affirm Indigenous survivance,⁴ regardless of how they are conveyed: whether through literature, historical revision, visual or performative arts, or digital media; irrespective of language; and whether they transpire in public spaces, classrooms, or through interpersonal communication. Indigenous narratives embody what Anishinaabe author and scholar Gerald Vizenor terms “transmotion,” as they invoke an active sense of presence that is fluid, mobile, and which transgresses colonial structures of legibility. In various ways, they disrupt or otherwise challenge the global circulation of prominent narratives about Indigenous peoples understood by Vizenor as “manifest manners,” i.e. the processes of erasure that include “familiar themes of classical, heroic tragedy, and modern victimry” (Vizenor, “The Unmissable”).

In recent years, there has been an increase in Indigenous scholarship that attempts to consider separate and distinct histories, cultures, and literatures in comparative and connective frames. In 2011, Daniel Heath Justice observed the number of Indigenous Studies scholars globally, “reaching out, learning about themselves and one another, looking for points of connection that reflect and respect both specificity and shared concern” (344). Jodi A. Byrd, in *The Transit of Empire* (2011), employs the concept “transit” to describe the

interconnectedness and continuum of colonial violence that implicated multiple peoples and spaces. In 2012, Chadwick Allen established the concept ‘trans-Indigenous’ to develop a methodology for global Indigenous literary studies and, elsewhere, scholars have explored the potential for comparing Native American socio-historic perspectives with those of other colonized and oppressed peoples. In his latest book (2016), Steven Salaita adopts “inter/nationalism” as a term that embodies decolonial thought and expression, literary and otherwise, that surface in the intersectional moments between Native American and Palestinian struggles. Similarly, there is a long tradition of Native American authors exploring the transnational politics of oppression and the multidirectional movement of memory⁵ in fiction, poetry and on stage: from Leslie Marmon Silko’s transcultural decolonial revolution in *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) to LeAnne Howe’s coauthored 2017 poetry collection *Singing, Still, Libretto for the 1847 Choctaw Gift to the Irish for Famine Relief*.⁶ These academic and creative projects cross the traditional disciplinary boundaries of Indigenous, Postcolonial, and Settler Colonial Studies, bringing together histories and cultures that have been too rarely considered alongside one another.

In this issue, we ask: what can the global offer as a lens through which to understand the movement of Indigenous narratives? And how can “thinking globally” help to facilitate a shift away from exclusively localized perceptions of Indigeneity to a view that sees it as an (already) travelling force? To theorize the global as it pertains to these narratives, we borrow from the fields of Indigenous and postcolonial scholarship as they are embedded genealogically and politically in critiques of empire. These two traditions register the connotations of empire within the global, both through colonial histories and the neocolonial (read also neoliberal) present, as well as theorize the potential for disrupting these structures.⁷ A global Indigenous Studies, or “trans-Indigenous” framework, such as that presented by Chadwick Allen (2012), valuably asserts the need to undertake Indigenous-centered scholarship by reading Indigenous texts in comparative terms, rather than comparisons rooted in settler-Indigenous binaries. In our issue, as well as in our own research, we build on this approach and attempt a more expansive global frame. This accounts for interconnections between groups that have survived colonial or other forms of oppression, but which have different socio-political relations to dominant definitions of Indigeneity. Such a methodology complements Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s conception of globalectics (2012): a form of reading that foregrounds connections between disparate global and temporal spaces. A globalectical approach foregrounds periphery-periphery connections and dialogues,

particularly those in the Global South, over and instead of studies that are framed around a center-periphery dynamic. As Thiong'o asserts, "This attitude is germane to a global consciousness of our common humanity" (61). Reading texts in this way demands that we reconsider our understandings of how Indigeneity manifests in a global context, while fostering an acknowledgement of shared colonial experiences and understanding across cultural, linguistic, or geographic divides.

In addition, we build our approach to the global in ways that undermine how the democratized and capitalist articulations of globalization reproduce imperial hegemony. Following Stuart Hall, we understand globalization as "a structure of global power, and therefore of global or transnational inequalities and conflicts rather than the basis of a benign cosmopolitanism" (Hall cited in Webner, 345-6). And yet, as theorized by Bouvera De Sousa Santos, it simultaneously affords possibilities for "new opportunities for transnational creativity and solidarity," which can facilitate counter-hegemonic movements "intended to counteract detrimental effects of hegemonic forms of globalization" (180). Several of the essays in this issue explore such examples of creative exchange and solidarity that arise through the circulation of literature, art, or expressions of resistance (see Garsha, Pitman, and Egeiq). While many artists, writers, and political actors strategically utilize such opportunities to facilitate new connections (see Stratton, Jobin, and Zahzah), others employ the circulation of narratives to emphasise Indigenous sovereignty on a global scale by resisting the dynamics of accessibility that characterise the transcultural movement of products, ideas, and knowledge (see Wiese and Pitman).

Yet, while recent political movements such as Idle No More and the "#NODAPL" protests have helped to render these types of transcultural exchanges and connections more visible to a wider public, the processes of exchange and interconnectivity that we highlight are not new. Neither are they a consequence of globalized capitalism, though the technological advances of late capitalism certainly have shaped the ways that many of these connections materialize. Rather, the concept of relationality is fundamental to many Indigenous standpoints. In contradistinction to the self-exceptionalizing and oppressive strands of transnational settler thinking, relationality both operates and frames Indigenous relationships with others domestically and internationally, as well as motivates the storyline of their political and cultural practices. Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson define relationality as an Indigenous practice and situate it in what they call "grounded normativity":

Grounded normativity houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place. Grounded normativity teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitive manner. Grounded normativity teaches us how to be in respectful diplomatic relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations with whom we might share territorial responsibilities or common political or economic interests. Our relationship to the land itself generates the processes, practices, and knowledges that inform our political systems, and through which *we practice solidarity*. To willfully abandon them would amount to a form of auto-genocide. (254)

Following this, we recognize that a global approach does not require a transnational or transcontinental focus. Neither should this be at the expense of understanding local connections and articulations of belonging or solidarity. Rather, we understand Indigenous narratives as having been always already global,⁸ and as having registered the culturally overarching networks of socio-political conditions not only internationally, but also locally. To state it differently, we believe that global conversations happen locally, in ways that are attuned to uneven experiences of colonial and capitalist oppression within regional or national spaces. By foregrounding this conception of globality, then, we argue that it becomes possible to develop a more holistic understanding of planetary conditions of subjugation, allowing for international and local solidarities to intertwine. Here, the article co-authored by Chew, Anthony-Stevens, LeClair-Diaz, Nicholas, Sobotta, and Stevens on the role of tribally-oriented pedagogy and its significance to Native nations and their languages offers an ethical practice that is simultaneously grounded and worldly, and whose instructive model could be valuably adapted by other communities.

This issue was originally conceived as a panel for the 2017 Native American Literature Symposium, entitled ‘Native American Literature in a Transnational Context’.⁹ Our panel considered Native American literary texts in relation to spaces of ongoing inequality in Palestine, South Africa, and Syria. This was inspired by our commitment to widening the conversation around the legacies and ongoing realities of colonialism across the world, in order to facilitate processes of mutual learning. In addition, by highlighting the globality of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and movements, we are actively pushing against the discriminatory logic of colonial management that perceives Indigeneity as unmodern, immobile, and insular. When conceptualizing the special issue, we sought to move beyond an

exclusive focus on literary studies to consider these questions in a transdisciplinary frame, thus attempting to create and sustain connections not only across global and temporal spaces, but also across the gaps that frequently exist between academic fields. From the beginning, it was important to us to include contributions that explore differential experiences of Indigeneity and colonial violence in geo-political spaces that are frequently left out of the conversations in trans-Indigenous studies that predominantly focus on the Anglo-settler colonial world. The pieces by Harris, Garsha, and Equeiq, in this way, make important provocations by expanding upon this focus, incorporating Mexican, Namibian, and Palestinian experiences. We see this issue as both inspired by and contributing to the conversations taking place across Indigenous Studies that consider points of interconnection between separate and distinct cultures, literatures, and colonial histories (Byrd 2011, Allen 2012, Jackson 2012, Salaita 2016). Our call for the special issue garnered interest from scholars around the world who were already actively engaging with these questions across a wide range of disciplines.

The contributors to this issue acknowledge modern-day colonialisms by emphasizing their local and international utterances, while foregrounding Indigenous responses to them that function within and outside their geographical boundaries. As these pieces show, though acts of resistance always spring in response to irreducibly local experiences of colonialism, the global is discernible in many expressions of resistance. In different ways, these articles foreground Indigenous peoples as global actors—whether by tracing the transnational influence of protest movements or the material circulation of Indigenous literatures, or by recognizing that Indigenous belonging operates simultaneously on local and global registers. While Indigenous belonging is always deeply rooted in place, these pieces show us that it is, too, continuously mobile and relational.

Some of these questions are taken up in Billy Stratton's article, "Transnational Narratives of Conflict and Empire, the Literary Art of Survivance in the Fiction of Gerald Vizenor." In an essay that impressively weaves together texts written over the course of Vizenor's career, Stratton examines the enduring "interest in international and transnational experiences" in Vizenor's work. Stratton reads tropes of "border-crossing, international exploration, transnational native liberty, and dynamic transmotion" to theorize an Anishinaabeg sense of global presence that animates the writing of Vizenor and which challenges circumscribed ideas of culture, identity, and geographic belonging. Danne Jobin in "Gerald Vizenor's Transnational Aesthetics in *Blue Ravens*" also frames Vizenor as a

transnational writer, whose aesthetics intentionally infuse Anishinabe knowledge into new geographies. Jobin analyzes the way Vizenor’s *Blue Ravens*, as a novel that is located in Paris during World War One and which centers Native characters, explores the question of Native agency and creativity as it manifests in moments of deep cultural encounters.

By exploring Vizenor as a traveling figure whose writings underlie a global aesthetic and mode of communication, Stratton and Jobin bring to our attention a long-standing tradition of Indigenous figures traveling to different parts of the world as cultural and political ambassadors. Two other contributors also center figures who, like Vizenor, pursue and participate in politically-motivated modes of global communication. Amal Equeiq in “Aesthetics of Indigenous Affinity: Traveling from Chiapas to Palestine in the Murals of Gustavo Chávez Pavón” shares her reflections on and conversations with Gustavo Chávez Pavón: a Guechepe muralist from Mexico City who is involved with the Zapatista movement. Chávez Pavón paints murals in Palestine and Mexico that connect Indigenous resistance in both spaces and, as Equeiq shows us, register the significance of Indigenous art, its traveling prowess, and the history and future of solidarity between Palestinians and the Zapatistas. Also discussing Palestine in a global context, Omar Zahzah’s essay “The Intelligentsia in Dissent: Palestine, Settler-Colonialism and Academic Unfreedom in the Work of Steven Salaita” gives an overview of Arab American scholar Steven Salaita’s *oeuvre* vis-à-vis his commitment to comparative Indigenous critique and anti-colonial movements. In 2014, and as a result of his critique of Israel on social media, Salaita’s scholarship was put into question, and he was denied a faculty position at the University of Illinois. Zahzah’s thorough exploration of Salaita’s books on Palestine, Israeli settler colonialism, Indigenous North America, academic freedom, and the ethics of solidarity returns us to Salaita’s importance in the growing field of global Indigenous Studies. Particularly, Salaita’s work and life represent how discussing Palestine in relationship to Indigenous contexts, Indigeneity as concept, and settler colonial violence globally is not only a significant feat, but one that is essential to its actual liberation and solidarity work with others.

Other articles explicitly consider the movement of texts produced by Indigenous artists and authors, examining the processes of material, linguistic and digital circulation that enable literary and visual narratives to journey across distinct cultural and geographic spaces. Doro Wiese’s article, “Untranslatable Timescapes in James Welch’s *Fools Crow* and the Deconstruction of Settler Time” foregrounds the transcultural circulation of Native American literature. Specifically focusing on the 1986 novel *Fools Crow* by Blackfeet and A’aninin

writer James Welch, Wiese draws on the concept of untranslatability to interpret Welch's engagement with temporality. She argues that the vision of time in the novel "cannot be transposed into Euro-Western temporal epistemologies": a literary strategy that, she suggests, can be read as an assertion of Indigenous cultural autonomy.

Audrey Harris' creative piece, "Two Maya Tales from the Mérida Cereso," also deals with questions of translation—both cultural and linguistic—in a contribution that seeks to shine a light on two emerging Mexican writers. She translates into English two short stories based on Mayan folklore written by Zindy Abreu Barón and Yesli Dayanili Pech Pech: two women writers of Mayan heritage, who have been imprisoned in the Mérida Cereso prison. Her introduction to the stories frames the enduring nature of Mayan narratives amongst Mexican communities and clarifies the politically-contested system that produced the authors' criminality and, consequently, led them to storytelling as a means of self-expression.

Thea Pitman's "Indigenous New Media Arts: Narrative Threads and Future Imaginaries" takes a wide-lens view, showcasing dynamic examples of Indigenous new media art and community art projects across the US, Canada, Aotearoa, and Australia. She considers how a diverse number of artists are utilising new technologies as modes of cultural expression, ranging from large-scale digital video and multimedia installations; to digital photography and computer game design. While recognizing the necessity of careful and respectful curation practices, Pitman celebrates the inclusion of Indigenous new media arts in galleries around the world. She cites Hunkpapa Lakota artist Dana Claxon, who evokes the potential for the circulation of Indigenous artworks to non-Indigenous audiences to facilitate exchanges "of pedagogy, understanding, truth, hope."

This type of connective work is developed in articles by Jeremiah Garsha and Paul Mackenzie Jones, who contemplate the parallel and interconnected conditions of modern-day colonialisms in distinct geo-political spaces and their corresponding protest movements. While mindful that transnational solidarities are always complicated by specific experiences of oppression and different conceptions of decolonization, we understand this type of connective analysis as necessary work to help bring about the conditions for meaningful and productive exchange between Indigenous and other dispossessed communities. Garsha's "Red Paint: Transnational 'Vandalism' of Colonial Relics in the Postcolonial World" centers "red paint" as an iconography that emerged out of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and influenced Indigenous struggles elsewhere. Garsha discusses the use of red paint in Namibia and Australia to vandalize colonial monuments in homage to its use in 1969 during the AIM

occupation of Alcatraz, revealing the similitude of both colonial violence in global spaces and the resistance movements that emerge in response. In “Indigenous Activism, Community Sustainability, and the Constraints of CANZUS Settler Nationhood,” Mackenzie Jones engages with transnational expressions of anti-colonial resistance by drawing on Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson’s concept of refusal to understand recent Indigenous movements across the Anglo-settler colonial world. This piece reads examples of Indigenous rights and environmental protests across the US, Canada, Aotearoa, and Australia as acts that forcefully refuse the absolutism of settler-colonial nationhood.

Finally, “Enacting Hope through Narratives of Indigenous Language and Culture Reclamation,” coauthored by Kari A. B. Chew, Vanessa Anthony-Stevens, Amanda LeClair-Diaz, Sheilah E. Nicholas, Angel Sobotta, and Philip Stevens, intervenes into anthropological and pedagogic discourses in order to theorize the sharing of narratives as a decolonial research methodology. Through reflective narratives, the contributions that form this article understand hope as a mobilizing and connecting force that is “an essential conduit between thought and action, belief and practice.” As such, hope plays a transformative role in the context of initiatives for language and cultural reclamation and education, across personal and transnational scales.

In many ways, hope is traceable throughout this whole issue—from its early inception to the thematic inclination of its pieces. Hope reminds us of an Indigenous continuum that travels in place and time, rooted yet mobile, introspective yet conversational. Recognizing colonialism in the many forms in which it exists today, this issue attempts to bring together global experiences in the aim of fostering understandings of shared struggles. We hope that it lands in places far and near, and reaches those who, like us, can see that a global framework can aptly foreground Indigenous narratives: not only as important in their respective contexts, but as necessary for everyone in the world to seek out, comprehend and recognize as global forces in motion.

Notes

¹ We are grateful to David Stirrup, David Carlson, Theodore Van Alst, and James Mackay for supporting us with the production of this special issue from the very beginning. Their interest, guidance and feedback have been instrumental in helping to bring this issue to fruition.

² See Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (New York: Verso Books, 2019).

³ We borrow relationality as Indigenous conceptualization of solidarity and intercultural connection from Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xvi; 118, and Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity,” *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 254.

⁴ Following Gerald Vizenor, we understand survivance to refer to “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry.” (*Manifest Manners*, vii).

⁵ As theorized by Michael Rothberg, multidirectional memory refers to a mode through which distinct cultural memories and experiences are able to circulate and coexist in a non-competitive space. Rothberg suggests this “has the potential to create new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice” through “productive” processes of “ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing” (Rothberg, 32-33). See *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁶ This self-published trilingual chapbook, coauthored with Irish poet Doireann Ní Ghríofa, remembers Choctaw and Irish historic gestures of anti-colonial solidarity.

⁷ On neoliberalism and neocolonialism as interchangeable, particularly as rooted in transnational exploitations of Indigenous and racialized labor, see Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

⁸ An argument made by Richard Scott Lyons and the contributors in *The World, the Text, and the Indian* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017).

⁹ We are thankful to Diane Glancy for participating in the 2017 NALS panel and to James Mackay for facilitating this.

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