

Arts as witnessing, healing, and resurgence

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When the World Indigenous Suicide Prevention Conference special issue editorial committee drafted the call for submissions an exciting opportunity emerged to expand the scope of the Journal of Indigenous Social Development to include arts-based submissions. The call for submissions welcomed poems and artwork that connected to the overall theme of Strength in our Communities. We are excited about the works that were shared and honour the voices and strength of the artists who submitted their experiences, journeys, and insights through this special issue.

Storytelling fosters resurgence: Indigenous knowledge production disrupts colonial expectations of objectivity and knowledge (Sium & Ritskes, 2013). In *I Am Woman*, Lee Maracle shares that the “result of being colonized is the internalization of the need to remain invisible. The colonizers erase you, not easily, but with shame and brutality. Eventually you want to stay that way. Being a writer is getting up there and writing yourself onto everyone’s blackboard,” (1996, p. 8). The stories that are offered by Indigenous artists provide an opportunity to learn from diverse understandings of what it means to be Indigenous, to resist, to resurge, and to decolonize. As listeners, we carry the responsibility to be open to the possibility of stories becoming transformative, where we are witness to stories of pain, healing, and transformation (Sium & Ritskes, 2013). Anishinaabe scholar Dr. Leanne Simpson shares:

Storytelling is an important process for visioning, imagining, critiquing the social space round us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives. In a similar way, dreams and visions propel resurgence because they provide Nishnaabeg with both the knowledge from the spiritual world and processes for realizing those visions. Dreams and visions provide glimpses of decolonized spaces and transformed realities that we have collective yet to imagine. (2011, p. 34-35)

Artistic processes and engagement are a powerful method of storytelling that Indigenous people have used on their healing journeys (Archibald & Dewar, 2010). The Aboriginal Healing Foundation in Canada documented the potential healing impact by asking, “What happens when art, music, dance, storytelling, and other creative arts become a part of healing programs?”

(Archibald & Dewar, 2010, p.4). The study demonstrates the connection between arts, culture, and healing for Indigenous peoples who attended Residential Schools in Canada. It has produced opportunities for restoration of health and wellbeing (Archibald & Dewar, 2010), and for sharing family stories of resilience and survival (Fontaine et al, 2014).

Creative expression of story also lends itself to the telling of resistance and resurgence. “As Nishnaabeg, we are taught to see ourselves as part of these narratives, and it is the responsibility of each generation to tell these stories in a way that is relevant and meaningful to the way we live,” (Simpson, 2013, p. 3). There are many mediums through which stories can be told. In this issue the artists shared through poetry. Poetry has been a tool/offering/process for self-examination and making visible stories that connect, counter, resist, and re-build:

Writing is a kind of reaching out, of connecting, of reaching inside and touching. It’s a reaching for words, for space, for breath, for a pause. It’s the breath of our humanity. The poetic line glides, skips, is stubborn sometimes, it shouts, dances, and whispers. And asserts itself as beings do in the world. We know that words are not just words as our voice is not just lines on paper. (Allen, 2015, p. 294).

As an academic journal that holds central the mission of the advancement of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous peoples’ efforts to preserve, defend, and promote their life ways, knowledges, and values; and that holds social development, as processes of resurgence, and/or social change, that improves individual, family, community, and cultural wellbeing so that all involved are supported to reach their full potential the contributions in the following section provide sparks and threads to exactly this.

References

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