

# Co-editors' notes

In February 2014, I attended a presentation at OCAD University on the visual culture of wampum belts. These ceremonial beaded objects are exchanged to endorse treaties between Indigenous nations of central Canada, primarily among the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and the Anishinaabeg (Algonquian-speaking peoples of Central North America). With the arrival of colonial empires, wampum belts were used for early negotiations with European governments in England, France and Holland. Throughout the lecture, I was dismayed, even shocked to find that these objects chronicled an entirely different history to the canonical version that I learned about Canada; my home 'and native land,' if you are to believe our national anthem. Even more disturbingly, the message of these intra-cultural agreements, as encoded in the symbolic imagery woven into the wampum belts, had been hidden due to colonial silencing practices that range from the seemingly innocuous act of misreading these objects as 'decorative arts' in the historical record to a more ominous campaign of suppression using a strategy of 'cultural genocide'; a bleak conclusion confirmed by the Canadian Government's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report completed in 2015.

Wampum belts are more than political documents; they serve as living cultural aides-mémoires that encode the legal, social, ethical and spiritual actions needed to live within these new alliances. One of the first, the Covenant Chain also known as the Hiawatha Belt, commemorates the alliance of five nations — the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) — into the Haudenosaunee confederacy sometime between 1142 to 1450.<sup>1</sup> Despite debates over the exact chronology, it serves as one of the world's first democratic agreements. The Two Row Wampum (*Kaswehntsa*) is a 17th century treaty with the Dutch in New York state that features a deceptively simple arrangement with two rows of purple beads separated by three white rows. The white represents peace, a good mind and strength. The wampum belt as a whole symbolises a river with two vessels (the purple lines) traveling side by side. The two lines are distinct, indicating that each has a right to steer their own vessel without interference.<sup>2</sup> Finally, and most directly related to my home in Toronto, is the Dish with One Spoon Agreement enacted on August 4<sup>th</sup> 1701 with over 1,300 people in attendance representing thirty distinct nations.<sup>3</sup> The belt created to codify this agreement acknowledges that we all eat out of one dish — that all of us share this territory — yet there is only one spoon. As a result, we are morally obligated to ensure that the dish is never empty.

As I learn more about Indigenous epistemologies in my work at OCAD University through the Indigenous Visual Culture program, I feel a complex state of excitement, hope, and frustration: hopefulness due to a vision that the fusion of Indigenous and Western European knowledge systems holds such promise for creating a new, equitable and truly democratic society for all Canadians, yet profound frustration knowing that we have had hundreds of years and countless treaties, reports, and governmental commissions to build this society but have, so far, failed to do so; a failure that is to the detriment of all in Canada. By my presence in Toronto as a member of the settler population, I must accept my implication in the injustices of cultural genocide, but I can also view myself as a

1. The debate focuses on whether oral histories can be recognized as a historical methodology, which highlights another complex issue for the decolonising process in academic institutions. Bruce Elliott Johansen and Barbara Alice Mann. *Encyclopedia of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy)* (Westport: Greenwood, 2000), xv.

2. "Wampum," *Museum of Ontario Archaeology*, January 23, 2015, <http://archaeologymuseum.ca/wampum/>

3. Victor P. Lytwyn, "A Dish with One Spoon: The Shared Hunting Grounds Agreement in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Valley Region," *Papers of the Twenty-Eighth Algonquian Conference*, 1997, <https://ojs.library.carleton.ca/index.php/ALGQP/article/view/507/409>.

participant in the treaty obligations symbolically encoded in the wampum belt agreements and other treaty documents signed with First Nations across Canada. Decolonising has been termed as ‘knowledge work’<sup>4</sup> and I will do everything in my power to meet this challenge and, through my work as librarian, spread knowledge about how our country can be re-envisioned. Indigenous knowledge systems are grounded in thousands of years of living on the land in North America and it is now time for us in the settler populations to sit down and listen and learn. I want Canada truly to be my home *and* Native land and not a home *on* Native land.

As we try to navigate through the current Covid-19 pandemic situation, I am firmly convinced that many of its disruptive and devastating effects could have been avoided if we had only embedded the principles of the Dish with One Spoon alliance into the fabric of our Canadian society. More broadly, I believe that the only path forward for navigating a post-pandemic globalising world facing the devastating impacts of massive environmental change is by recognising that the future is Indigenous.

In closing, I must offer heart-felt appreciation to Erica Foden-Lenahan for offering me this unprecedented opportunity. Being involved in the publication of this remarkable issue on such a profoundly important theme has been an honour and a privilege.

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‘Behind every beautiful object and historically important building or monument is trauma.’<sup>1</sup>

As individuals, and as art librarians, we are implicated in cultural imperialism. But as art librarians we are also in a position to contribute to setting things right, by recognizing, and celebrating, the cultural sovereignty of every different community and tradition – communities and traditions which do not invariably coincide with the political entities we call nations, but whose identities wise nations will seek to embrace, not to erase.<sup>2</sup>

It was a conversation with Daniel Payne at the 2017 ARLIS/UK & Ireland conference in Dublin that led to this issue. He described how OCAD University Library was addressing the calls to action published by the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada. I asked him to co-edit this issue with me about colonial legacies in our libraries and archives. It is also about continuing professional development – addressing librarians’ roles, including our own, in perpetuating colonial perspectives in the libraries in which we work and learning about approaches to specific problems of colonial legacy within our collections and activities. It has been a pleasure to work with Daniel and all the authors and to read their varied contributions. It is just the start of learning and unlearning for me and, I sense, in our profession generally. I hope our libraries and the journal will progress over the coming years, to be more reflective of the make up of our respective countries.

Daniel and Howard Munroe have collaborated on an article that incorporates Indigenous knowledge in information literacy sessions and in the design process at OCAD University, demonstrating how libraries support the curriculum and how outputs of creative research, in turn, inform the libraries. Education is central to Storm-Lee Hogan and Krista McCracken’s article, where they discuss the legacy of Canada’s Residential School system and how they care for and curate objects made by some of the Survivors. The artworks created at both OCAD University and at Shingwauk Residential School attest to the resilience of Indigenous communities in navigating through a colonial infrastructure imposed upon them.

In the UK Marilyn Clarke describes the Liberate our Library programme at Goldsmiths College in London, one of the leading voices for curriculum decolonization in higher education and the role critical librarianship has to play in this process. The biases inherent in the eurocentric academic model that Clarke

4. Marisa E. Duarte and Miranda Belarde-Lewis, “Imagining: Creating Spaces for Indigenous Ontologies.” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 53, no. 5–6 (2015): 679.

1. Sumaya Kassim. “The museum will not be decolonised.” *Media Diversified*, 15 November 2017. <https://mediadiversified.org/>. Accessed 26 June 2020.

2. Philip Pacey, “The universal availability of art publications: a global context”, *ALJ*, v.10, no.3: 7–30, 26.

challenges are perpetuated also in online environments, such as Wikipedia. Alexandra Duncan looks at how the involvement of librarians and other activists are subverting these biases through the diversification of the contributor base and deploying Wikipedia's self-proclaimed strength, the permissive contributory editing model.

The final article of conversations between Nistiman Erdede, an artist and refugee in Switzerland, and librarians Regina Vogel and I, ranges across decolonial art and 20th-century colonialism in the context of Turkey and the Middle East region and its reflections in attitudes, organization of and classification schemes within art libraries in Europe.

This issue of the *ALJ* may be put to bed, but the issues of colonial legacies will continue to engage and challenge the profession and until it becomes more diverse and reflective of the populations it serves, there will be much more work to do. Yvette Mutumba recently said it was insufficient to organize an exhibition or event about decolonization and then move on to the next project.

'Decolonization means transparency from the institutional side. This includes re-centring... This includes giving up power and re-distributing resources... Decolonization means changing structures as much as building new structures.'<sup>3</sup> She may have been referring to curators' and museums, but it also applies to professional bodies, journals and libraries.

As this is the final *ALJ* for which I am the principal editor, I would like to thank a few people: my fellow editors Mike, Kraig and, above all, Gustavo, whose counsel and clarity has been calming during often turbulent times. I am pleased that all three will be continuing as editors, with Gustavo assuming the principal role. Gillian Varley, Beth Houghton and Philip Pacey have provided helpful advice over the years. Our editors at Cambridge University Press have done so much to facilitate the journal's (and ARLIS's) transition to a more sustainable future. ARLIS Council and members, *ALJ* subscribers and contributors have sustained us. Their enthusiasm for the journal is a reminder that it plays an important role in our profession: it offers those who work in art libraries the space to reflect on their practice and improve it. And that, surely, is one of the steps toward facing, then changing, our colonized collections and profession.

3. Pablo Larios. "Yvette Mutumba on why decolonizing institutions 'Has to hurt'", *Frieze* online, 6 July 2020. <https://frieze.com/article/>

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