

17. Possibilities and Limits of Telling One's (Own) Story: Contested Knowledge in the Field. Contested Knowledge in the Museum (Workshop)

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To research in and about (Indigenous) North America is to be confronted with 'Contested Knowledge' in the field and in representing that knowledge in museal spaces. This workshop approaches the conference's theme through the practice of storytelling in the creation and challenge of knowledge. Stories can be ethnographic material, powerful resources in sharing knowledge, ways of expression, linked to identity, and pathways to (understanding) other truths. They emerge from a complex entanglement of people, cultures, places, economies and bureaucracies and therefore are a means by which knowledge can be expressed, accredited, and contested.

Many elements influence interactions with storytellers and tellers of stories in (Indigenous) North America: institutional structures; a growing awareness and self-confidence concerning Indigenous self-representation; legal frameworks; or the (ongoing) settler colonial context more generally. The resulting stories can be contradictory, overlapping, incomplete, or controversial. Whether in the field or in museums, such factors can determine the possibilities and limitations of how (or if!) stories can be (re-)told, recorded, interpreted, shared, and represented.

As inspiration for paper proposals, we ask: Who has the right to tell which stories in which contexts? Who is speaking for whom and whose voices are being privileged? What kind of knowledge is embedded in a particular story? Which roles do anthropologists have in telling their own and others' stories? How do we address contradictions, in the field or scientific research? How are stories shared for different audiences? Which roles do oral histories and the written word play?

Simply a term without definition? Storytelling in the area of tension between orality and writing

Sonja Ross

At the latest with the beginning of political emancipation from colonial oppression, criticism and self-criticism of ethnographic documentation increased. The ethnographer, formerly the focal point of interdisciplinary interpretive sovereignty, increasingly found himself, according to James Clifford, "situated between powerful systems of meaning." To mediate these, influential experts such as Levy-Strauss, Geertz, Turner, or Douglas resorted to literary procedures and symbolisms. Can literature indeed help to better describe a symbolic field or the implicit content of an observation behind its presentation? At the boundary between the own and the foreign, we have come to understand that purely factual inquiry does not do justice to these "powerful systems of meaning" or is at least inadequate. With the growing proportion of Indigenous ethnographers and their "insider knowledge," new perspectives are also emerging. The use of "storytelling", told orally and narrated in writing or digital media, became the most important vehicle. Discourses have surreptitiously abandoned the categorization of the resulting product (mythology, legend, fable, fairy tale) and the significant narrative situation no longer plays a role. Current "storytelling" follows an implicit direction whose framing could be interpreted as a form of *Ethnogenesis*. I discuss this thesis on the basis of various examples.

Theories of European–Indigenous contact and interaction in North America revised

Renate Bartl

Theories explaining European exploration and settlement of North America are usually based on Euro-American ideas. The interactions with Native Americans are described through the lens of Europeans and Euro-Americans, thus historical writing mostly displays Euro-American viewpoints. The contact and interaction between Europeans and Non-Europeans in North America is predominantly analyzed in binary settings: Europeans and Native Americans, Europeans and Africans, etc. In these binary approaches the complexity and multi-ethnic character of North America is often simplified or totally ignored. Data presented will show that the colonial setting of North America was ethically much more complex, with persons coming from different ethnic and national backgrounds, interacting on a broad level from the beginning of exploration and colonization.

This talk will suggest to contest, revise, and adapt concepts of European – Indigenous interaction, like Early Borderland, Frontier, Middle Ground, and Settler Colonialism. An alternative interpretation of the data available and the theories and narratives established from these data will be offered.

„We want people to understand who we are and what we have overcome“: Stories for selling carbon offsets from the Great Bear Rainforest

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The Great Bear Carbon Project is a carbon saving project, generating offsets through a change of land use practices of nine distinct Indigenous Nations at Canadas Pacific coast. For the Nations, selling carbon offsets is rooted in traditional value systems and ancient land use practices. “We can focus on what we leave opposed to what we take”, one member says reflecting on the project. The Nations thus have an interest in also grounding marketing and sales on these values. They want “their story” to be told and heard, not at least to raise the monetary value of their good. The company however, in charge of the actual sales processes within the alliance, is rather customer oriented and creates technical material based on the clients need for information. This paper will paint a picture of how “their story” is tried to be created and how this story attempts to – and fails to be translated into the political and economic context. The paper further analyses the researcher’s role in this translation process and her contribution to failure.