

Bringing the Land into the Library

Land Acknowledgements in an Academic Library

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Land Acknowledgements have become commonplace in many institutional settings, especially at the start of events and the opening of some, often high profile, meetings (Keptwo [Algonkin/French and Irish], 2021).¹ The Canadian Federation of Library Associations' Indigenous Matters Committee (CFLA IMC/FCAB) recommends including Land Acknowledgements as part of the decolonizing process (n.d.), and Simon Fraser University's Aboriginal Reconciliation Council (SFU ARC) reminds us that Indigenous Peoples' "traditional lands define who they are as a people and are intrinsically linked to their Indigenous cultures, knowledge systems (epistemologies and methodologies), and their ways of knowing, seeing, and doing" (p. 81). As such, Land Acknowledgements can be a way to show respect to Indigenous Nations and their worldviews. Yet, the term "Land Acknowledgement" can easily give the impression that the central purpose of such a

¹ In keeping with current practices as outlined by many Indigenous authors (Joseph [Gwawaenuk], 2018; Justice [Cherokee Nation], 2018; Vowel [Métis], 2016b, Younging [Opaskwayak Cree], 2018), the term "Indigenous" will be used when discussing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. Additionally, where possible the name of an author's community or Nation has been included the first time we cite them. We are responsible for any omissions or mistakes and apologize in advance for them. In composing this chapter, we referred to author Gregory Younging's 2018 work *Elements of Indigenous Style* (EIS). When there were discrepancies in publication and style guidelines, we followed EIS.

statement is to simply name the lands² on which an event or meeting takes place. Indeed, this approach was taken to its logical extreme by Pride Toronto in 2019. The event's Land Acknowledgement was posted on a sign and prompted readers to:

Take a moment to connect with the land that you are currently standing on. Now introduce yourself spiritually; build a relationship with Mother Earth that provides for all our relations. No matter what part of Mother Earth our family originates from, we all have a relationship and a responsibility to the land. Let's build a healthy relationship together. ("Pride Toronto apologizes," 2019)

This statement was heavily criticized for failing to mention both Indigenous Peoples and the treaties that currently govern the legal relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples.³ As Skwx̓wú7mesh matriarch Ta7taliya Nahanee has explained, the practice of giving Land Acknowledgements can be about relationships and about building better relations – between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples, *and* between all people and the Land (Auger, 2021).

In *Decolonize First: A Liberating Guide and Workbook for Peeling Back the Layers of Neocolonialism* (n.d.), Nahanee writes:

A territorial acknowledgment is a personal commitment to and appreciation for the land you are in relations with. It is a way to respect the Ancestors who cared for the land that is now caring for you. It can connect you to the medicine of the land. When you acknowledge the territory in a good way, you build your strength, you give yourself medicine. You also model respectful relations. When you introduce yourself and say where you're from, you can include whose territory you grew up on. A territorial acknowledgment uses the name of the Nation who cares for the land, not the colonial name of the

2 Throughout this chapter you will notice that we use both "land" and "territory" when discussing place. In the literature and in practice these terms are sometimes used synonymously. However, some scholars and practitioners have clear preferences for one term or the other. As you will see in our references, some writers use Land Acknowledgement while others use Territory Acknowledgement. We made the choice to use both terms here, as a way of reflecting that our learning about terminology is ongoing. While we employ both terms throughout the paper, we use the phrase "Land Acknowledgement" more than "Territory Acknowledgement" for the sake of clarity and consistency. It is not our intention to suggest that one phrase is preferable over the other.

3 We use the broad terms "Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples" intentionally here. We discuss some common identity terms used in Land Acknowledgements later in the chapter.

place. It is a decolonizing practice to be in good relations with land and appreciating Indigenous Peoples['] stewardship is part of that. Territorial acknowledgments have become compulsory email footers but can be so much more. (p. 7)

We quote Nahanee at length because we want to amplify her work and expertise. We are grateful for the knowledge she has shared both with us directly in workshops at the library and indirectly through her published texts and interviews. We appreciate her insights about acknowledgements as a way to give yourself medicine. These are teachings that she carries and that she shares through her work, including through workshops she offers on Territorial Acknowledgements. These are not our teachings and we cannot elaborate on them in this chapter. However, we want to join our voices with Nahanee's in encouraging our readers to take the acknowledgement beyond the "compulsory email footer" by taking up this work as a "personal commitment." In order to come to a place where this practice is about relationality and not simply about reading a script or completing a checklist, many of us need to cultivate a different understanding about what Land Acknowledgements are, why we offer them and to whom, and how to do so differently.

This chapter offers our shared insights for cultivating a reflective practice to guide the work of Land Acknowledgements. It is our intention to support others in libraries to (re)think their practices and approach their acknowledgements with a deepened understanding in order to craft more heartfelt statements. When we talk about statements being heartfelt, we want to specifically encourage readers to think about approaching Land Acknowledgements in a way that is intended to build, nurture, respect, and take care of relationships between people and between people and the land. Writing and speaking such acknowledgements is a process of self-reflection that should result in a commitment or compelling action. The reflective process that we offer has three main stages:

1. Reflect first on yourself and your positionality.
2. Reflect next on where you are and how you have come to be here.
3. Finally, reflect on who you are speaking with or to, why you are speaking in this place, and what you have come to say.

Our own engagement with this process of reflection prompted us to collectively decide *not* to offer individual acknowledgements at the beginning of this chapter because both the "where we are" (in this

case expanded to include where we will be read) and “who we are speaking with” are unknown to us in the context of this writing. We want to actively resist the scripted, standardized statement. In its place, we offer brief bios about each co-author in the “About the Contributors” section of the collection. We have crafted these bios specifically to accompany this chapter. They offer some insight into our individual positionality; however, it is worth noting that what we choose to share about ourselves is contextual. The positionality statements that we offer here differ from those that we may share orally as we build relationships through our practices of positionality and acknowledgement.

Situating Our Workplace

We recognize that we work at a colonial institution whose three campuses occupy the lands of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓x̓ wú7mesh (Squamish), sə́l ilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh), ḡ́íćəy (Katzie), k^wik^wə́ləm (Kwikwetlem), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), q^wa:ńłəń (Kwantlen), Səmyámə (Semiahmoo), and sćəwaθən məsteyəx^w (Tsawwassen) Nations. The province colonially known as British Columbia is home to close to 200 Nations, approximately one third of the recognized First Nations in Canada. There’s an amazing diversity of language, art, and cultural practices grounded in the Landscape of this place.

The text above, created by the authors, is a familiar example of an institutional Land Acknowledgement. Our intention in this paper is to differentiate between this type of acknowledgement, which simply names the Nations whose Lands you are on, and a Land Acknowledgement *practice* that involves one’s own positionality and comes from the heart. It is our goal to encourage the development of such a practice to deepen our approach to offering Land Acknowledgements. The focus of this practice is a continual reflection on our role(s) in the relationship between ourselves, the land, local Indigenous Nation(s), and the forces of ongoing colonization. This is a process of un-learning and re-learning, and it is for this reason that we resist the “once and for all” approach of scripted Land Acknowledgements that merely list the names of relevant Nations.

The practice of engaging deeply with Land Acknowledgements asks us to perpetually consider and reconsider the layers of meaning, history, and relationship embedded in the Land and our institutions. As we

engaged in this work, we have therefore needed to ask more questions about the university where we work. This institution was named for an American-Scottish explorer, Simon Fraser (Simon Fraser University Archives, n.d.). In a 2018 blog post, SFU undergraduate student Georgia Twiss shared research from her honours thesis in History. By consulting the SFU Archives, Twiss found that the name came about by accident, with “Simon” added after realizing that the planned name of “Fraser University” (for the local river) would have the acronym “FU.” From there, the university’s first president endeavoured to create a sense of tradition by embracing aspects of Scottish culture (Twiss, 2018). This naming occurred in 1965 and demonstrates how contemporary colonialism operates: instead of learning what the local Nations call Burnaby Mountain or the surrounding area, the university president and board embraced European conventions. The practice of naming buildings, streets, cities, etc. after “Very Important (white) People” is a colonial impact on the land, as it reaffirms a European cosmology wherein only people (and not plants or animals) are granted sentience (Geraldine King [Anishinaabe], *All My Relations* podcast, 2021).

For many Indigenous Nations, however, the land and all beings on the land carry their own knowledges. Indigenous naming practices are therefore focused not on imposing names meant to memorialize people, but rather on learning to listen to the land as a practice of coming to know an appropriate place name. With that in mind, our own practice of Land Acknowledgement has been deepened through learning and practicing saying a Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh place name, Lhukw’lhukw’ayten, to refer to the Land the university occupies. This name was suggested by Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh community leader and spokesperson Khelsilem Tłak̓wasik̓ā n as an appropriate place name. It derives from the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh word for arbutus, lhulhukw’ay, which comes from lhukw’ (peel), and means “always peeling tree” (Bill Reid Centre, ímesh Mobile App).

Who Are We To Do This Work?

While writing this chapter, we experienced a shared discomfort about the authorial role and the way it might set us up as experts. We are not experts in Land Acknowledgements. We approach this work with humility and in the spirit of ongoing accountability to ourselves and others.

We also recognize that as institutions become more active in decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation, there is work

for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples to do, and our responsibilities differ. As Carol Arnold (Métis-Cree) writes “the act of acknowledging colonization, theft of land, and the displacement of Indigenous Peoples is for white people, settlers, Europeans, and non-Indigenous members of any assembly” (2021, p. 20). The Decolonizing the Library Interest Group at SFU Library is made up of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members. We have taken up a shared responsibility to humbly learn, connect, and build relationships to support more meaningful practices of Land Acknowledgement and decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation across the library.

Returning to the Pride Toronto example that we discussed in the introduction, it is worth noting that when the society was called out about their acknowledgement, their response was that their statement was “written by an Indigenous person.” This response was problematic for a number of reasons, not least because it placed blame solely on the author while the organization refused to be held accountable. A tweet by Nickita Danielle (@auntykita) (Saulteaux) critiquing Pride Toronto’s response cites a talk by Dr. Marcia J. Anderson⁴ (Cree-Anishinaabe) to explain that, “one of MANY ways organizations get in the way of themselves when ‘decolonizing’ or ‘Indigenizing’, is their unwillingness to stand in the fire with us when things get challenging” (2019). In uncritically responding to concerns about their Land Acknowledgement by stating that it had been “written by an Indigenous person,” Pride Toronto applies pan-Indigenous logic. This is akin to saying that something was done by a “European.” Their response provides us with no information about who wrote it, what community or Nation they are from, or why they were asked to undertake this work on behalf of Pride Toronto. Their response also implies that the work of creating and offering Land Acknowledgements “belongs” (only) to Indigenous Peoples and that there is no work for non-Indigenous people who occupy Indigenous lands to do.

We recognize the leadership, knowledge, and expertise of Indigenous Peoples and are grateful for the opportunities that we have to benefit from each. We also strive to respectfully pick up the pieces of this work that are ours to carry. We believe that challenging ourselves and our colleagues to approach the work of Land Acknowledgements with deeper understanding and more heart is one facet of that work.

4 The lecture by Dr. Marcia J. Anderson that Nickita Danielle cites can be accessed here: <https://www.facebook.com/IndigenousStudentCentreUofM/videos/367421163855990/>

Our Positionality Statement and Land Acknowledgement Workshop

In December 2020, our Decolonizing the Library Interest Group (DIG) offered a Positionality and Land Acknowledgement Writing Workshop. The SFU ARC report recommends that an acknowledgement of the people and land should be done “at the start of meetings, classes, and events” (p. 48). The report states that this recognition is “one of the most important acts of reconciliation” (p. 81). After the inception of the interest group in 2019, we heard regular requests for a Land Acknowledgement workshop, perhaps because our colleagues were eager to enact the ARC’s recommendation in a good way. Our planning team agreed that, though we are not experts and none of us are from the Nations whose land SFU occupies, we could create a meaningful opportunity for colleagues to come together to deepen our understanding of the practices of offering Land Acknowledgements. We were also clear that we could not provide insights into any Nation-specific cultural protocols. Learning about those protocols is different work and must be undertaken through consultation with community members and Knowledge Keepers.

Our workshop was designed to engage participants in solo reflection through writing prompts, as well as through discussion with one another. Prior to the workshop, we asked registered participants to engage in some prep work such as finding out whose land they live on (Native Land Digital, 2018), locating the Residential School site closest to where they grew up (CBC News, 2018; see also Indian Residential School History & Dialogue Centre, n.d.), and watching a segment of a talk given by Dr. Kim Anderson (Métis) where she identifies the “glazing over” effect that scripted Land Acknowledgements can have on audiences (Anderson, 2019).

Using a writing activity from Dr. Shield’s English 359 course, *Literatures of British Columbia: Place, Space, and Indigeneity*, participants worked to craft their positionality and Land Acknowledgement using the following prompts:

- What is your name?
- Are you a settler/non-Indigenous person?
- Are you Black? Are you a Person of Colour? Are you Indigenous?

- What is your relationship to SFU (are you student/faculty/staff/etc.)?
- What department are you located in at SFU?
- Whose territory/territories are you located on? Grew up on?
- Why are you engaged in this work/area of study?
- What is your “compelling action” in doing this work? (i.e. how are you engaging in a meaningful relationship with the Land and/or Nations?)

The focus in our workshop was to understand *why* this statement was being written and used. In an interview with CBC Unreserved (2019), Hayden King (Anishinaabe) says that he regrets writing Ryerson University’s⁵ Land Acknowledgement back in 2012. His regret, he says, comes from how often these statements can become superficial. What is needed is voicing an obligation or, as he says in an episode from *The Red Road Podcast* (Skye & King, 2019), a compelling action. In the context of academia, and libraries, we asked workshop participants to think back to Dr. Anderson’s talk and how she connected her Land Acknowledgement to her course lecture.⁶

What Land Acknowledgements Are and What They Are Not

Land Acknowledgements have become a common practice across institutions all over Turtle Island (Robinson, 2018), the name used by some Indigenous Nations to refer to what is colonially known as North America.⁷ For non-Indigenous people, the act of providing a Land

5 At the time of our writing, this university was also often known as X University. After years of work from Indigenous students, staff, and faculty, the university was engaged in a community consultation process to change its name. Before the chapter went to press, the university announced that it would change its name to Toronto Metropolitan University.

6 For a detailed description of the workshop, please visit our webpage: <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/academic-integrity/indigenous-initiatives/icrc/Land-acknowledgement-workshop>

7 Individual Indigenous Nations have their own distinct creation stories. Some Indigenous Peoples prefer not to use the term “Turtle Island,” especially because it can perpetuate pan-Indigenous assumptions and stereotypes. Others embrace the term as a way of referring to this place without relying on colonial references (which “Canada,” “the United States of America,” and “North America” all are). Turning our attention to creation stories for a moment, here on the Northwest Coast, many Indigenous Nations maintain traditions focused on Raven as the creator of landforms, including mountains and islands such as Haida’Gwaii and the volcanoes along southwest Alaska. You can read the story of how Haida’Gwaii came to be, as narrated by GwaaGanad (Diane Brown, Haida) here: https://www.historymuseum.ca/history-hall/origins/_media/Creation-of-Haidagwaii-EN.pdf

Acknowledgement can be a way to centre Indigenous presence on the lands, express gratitude to the original and ongoing stewards of the land, and take a small step towards reconciliation.

As western colonial institutions have been called to decolonize and Indigenize,⁸ Land Acknowledgements have sometimes been misunderstood as enactments of Indigenous cultural protocol or practice. In her 2021 book *We All Go Back to the Land*, Suzanne Keptwo writes that Land Acknowledgements are relatively contemporary and that it was not until after the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Reports and Calls to Action in 2015 that these statements were offered more widely. Through our work we have come to recognize that there is no such thing as a pan-Indigenous Land Acknowledgement protocol outside of the contemporary, institutionalized practice that is often led and enacted by non-Indigenous peoples. Instead, there are culturally and contextually-specific oral practices that guide and structure events, ceremonies, and meetings within and amongst Indigenous Nations and communities. For example, in the Haudenosaunee tradition, there is the Thanksgiving Address, or the words that come before all else (Stokes and Kanawahienton, 1993; Kimmerer, 2013). As another example, Sxwpilemaāt Siyám (Chief Leanne Joe, Skwx̱ wú7mesh) shares,

For the Coast Salish People, we would welcome our guests coming to shore on their canoes, by listening to each canoe ask for permission to come to our shore, state their business or purpose and acknowledge their kinship ties to the welcoming Nation. This would be followed by the Chief [...] either denying or welcoming them to their territory, asking them to come and feast with them and do their business. (2020, n.p.)

The orality of these traditions is noteworthy and raises questions about written statements, such as those included on institutional websites and in email signatures. Often, significant time and energy is invested in crafting these written statements to “get them right.” Of course, it is important to do the learning required to offer an acknowledgement

8 The terms “decolonize” and “Indigenize” are both complex and, at times, fraught, particularly as the terms and the work associated with them are taken up within white colonial institutions, such as libraries. Each term has been defined in a wide variety of ways, sometimes in direct conflict with one another. We encourage readers to start learning and reflecting on these terms and what they might mean within library work by engaging with the work of Indigenous scholars, as in this example: <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/a-brief-definition-of-decolonization-and-indigenization>

that is accurate, respectful, and reflective of the linguistic and rhetorical preferences of the Indigenous Nations whose lands and sovereignty are being acknowledged. However, this investment in the writing can have the unintended consequence of reifying the written statement as *the* way that all acknowledgements must be done, resulting in the institutional Land Acknowledgement “script.” What is lost in this process of reification is the responsiveness, flexibility, and contextual possibility of acknowledgement as a practice: the understanding that offering acknowledgement can be an opportunity for relationship building in a specific context.⁹

Scripted statements can also end up being delivered by rote or simply repeated, without recognition of the speaker’s positionality or reasons for including the acknowledgement at the event. When delivered in this way, Land Acknowledgements can allow us to feel that we have completed our “due diligence” and are somehow excused from complicity in systems and structures that continue to perpetuate and reproduce colonialism. In a blog post, Métis author Chelsea Vowel (2016a) notes that “territorial acknowledgments can become stripped of their disruptive power through repetition. The purpose cannot merely be to inform an ignorant public that Indigenous peoples exist, and that Canada has a history of colonialism.” Jennifer Matsunaga (2016), a settler-Canadian of mixed Japanese-British-Scottish descent, adds that Land Acknowledgements remain as mere presentation etiquette if they are not followed through with actions such as developing one’s knowledge about the local territory and history and making efforts for deeper engagement with the people of that territory. With this chapter, we raise the question: If acknowledgement is not just about making ourselves feel better, what can we actually do to (re)build relationships and address the ongoing impacts of colonialism? What does this work involve?

What is Positionality? Why Does It Matter in a Land Acknowledgement?

One aspect of making Land Acknowledgements more meaningful comes from the practice of positioning or situating oneself in relation to the land, work, and context. There are two theories at work: positionality

⁹ This tension speaks to the wider conversation about orality and the written word and the ways that each is understood and valued in Indigenous and settler colonial societies, about which much has been said and written.

and intersectionality. In her 2017 book *Network Sovereignty: Building the Internet Across Indian Country*, Marisa Duarte (Pascua Yaqui/Chicana) writes that “the methodology of positionality requires researchers to identify their own degrees of privilege through factors of race, class, educational attainment, income, ability, gender, and citizenship” (p. 135). This recognition helps researchers “understand how their way of making meaning, of framing research, within their conceptual universe is tied to their positionality within an unjust world” (p. 135). How these factors come together is known as intersectionality, a term coined by Black feminist lawyer and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s.¹⁰ Intersectionality is how the overlapping facets of one’s identity impact their lived experiences and therefore their worldviews. Acknowledging the intersectionality of our own identities is an important part of positioning ourselves. The work of positioning and situating ourselves in a Land Acknowledgement is also a way of demonstrating our relationship with the land and with other beings. In many Indigenous cultures, situating yourself within your community and kinship networks indicates your relationships and accountability (Keptwo, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Anishinaabe scholar Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm argues that understanding one’s position shows an awareness of “the colonial history that may come to bear upon the process and upon [one’s] relationships” with Indigenous topics (2016, p. 32). Consider the creation of a “positionality statement” as an opportunity to acknowledge your position and identity in relation to the work that you’re doing.

Approaching Land Acknowledgements With Heart

In this section we will use an example to demonstrate an approach to offering Land Acknowledgements that contrasts with the institutional script provided above. This example is included as a way of making some of the conceptual points above more concrete.

My name is Jaad Les¹¹ and I am a white settler living on the ancestral, unceded, rightful, and occupied Lands of the “məθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓x̓ wú7mesh (Squamish), sə́l ilwə́taʔ (Tsleil-Waututh),

10 See “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour” (1991); and “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1994).

11 This person does not exist. The name was created by combining letters from the co-authors’ names.

and kʷikʷə́ləm (Kwkwetlem) Nations. I was born and raised in Treaty 1 territory in Southern Manitoba. Treaty 1 was signed between representatives from the Swampy Cree Nation, the Anishinaabe Nation, and the Imperial Crown of Great Britain and Ireland. As a descendant of British settlers in this place, I recognize that horrific violence was and is committed against Indigenous Peoples in order to secure the comfort and privilege that I now experience.

As we begin this workshop, I am also reflecting on the fact that these lands that we gather on today have been shared territories for many countless generations. People from the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓x̓ wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), sə́l ilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh), and kʷikʷə́ləm (Kwkwetlem) Nations all have a long and ongoing connection to this place. Colonially, this place is known as Burnaby Mountain and as Simon Fraser University. Khelsilem (spokesperson for the Squamish Nation) has taught me that it can also be called Lhukw'lhukw'áytən in the Squamish language, meaning “where the bark gets peeled” in spring. The name is derived from the Squamish word for arbutus, lhulhukw'ay, which comes from lhukw' (peel), and means “always peeling tree.” This information is also on the Bill Reid Centre’s website (2022), which provides useful resources for learning more about Coast Salish place names and about the Indigenous art on SFU’s campuses. We are privileged to learn together on these lands and I recognize my own responsibility to continue the work of learning how to live well in shared territories. I also commit myself to engaging with both the histories and contemporary realities of the Indigenous Nations whose lands I occupy to better uplift the sovereignty of those Nations and take up my responsibilities as a settler living in an Indigenous place.

In this example, our fictional speaker positions themselves in relation to the Indigenous lands they occupy. We learn that the speaker identifies as a white settler and they provide information both about the lands where they were raised and where they are currently offering the workshop.

There are several language choices that a speaker must make when offering a Land Acknowledgement. In the example above, Jaad has chosen to position themselves as a “white settler.” The term “settler” has become increasingly widespread but it can cause confusion and a sense of disconnection or alienation. In *Indigenous Writes* (2016b), Vowel unpacks the term. She writes that when we consider the

identities and trajectories of the peoples who live in what is colonially known as Canada, “we are left with three broad, unsatisfactory, but possibly usable categories: settlers (the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European-descended socio-political majority), non-Black persons of colour (hereafter, non-Black POC), and Black people” (p. 17). She further articulates that these distinctions are necessary because “the term *settler* does not, and can never, refer to the descendants of Africans who were kidnapped and sold into chattel slavery. Black people, removed and cut off from their own indigenous lands – literally stripped of their humanity and redefined legally as property – could not be agents of settlement” (2016b, p. 17). Tuck (Unanga¹²) and Yang (2012) also draw a distinction between settlers and immigrants, suggesting that settlers are those who applied colonial logics to exert control and enforce their own systems of governance over those that already existed in this place. Immigrants are those who arrive in this place with the expectation that they will live according to the existing laws and customs.

In addition to identifying themselves as a settler, Jaad has also added the racial qualifier, “white.” Vowel suggests that “a strong argument can be made that non-European-descended peoples who come to live in Canada are also settlers” (2016b, p. 17), demonstrating a different understanding than the one advanced by Tuck and Yang and articulating that “settler” can be used as a relational term, rather than a racial category. Understood in this way, it is possible for individuals to identify as both a Person of Colour¹² and a settler in Indigenous territories. Furthermore, within white supremacist societies, white is often the unnamed and unacknowledged racial category. Choosing to name one’s self as white and/or as a settler can signal a person’s critical awareness of the impact that their presence and their speaking a Land Acknowledgement, especially in a colonial institution, may have on others. The naming of whiteness is an important practice, especially in contexts where white has been assumed to be neutral or the default. The practice of naming whiteness can be deepened in an acknowledgement that specifically addresses the harms perpetuated in the name of white supremacy, through European settlement of these lands and beyond (Lowman and Barker, 2015). The complexity of these identity categories and language choices clearly demonstrates

12 Person of Colour: Used to refer to a person who is not white. This term is often used to signal shared experiences of systemic oppression and racism in a culture of white supremacy.

the personal work that must go into crafting a meaningful, heartfelt Land Acknowledgement—work that includes learning more about how you and your family came to these lands and coming to understand how you have benefitted from (and also potentially been harmed by) the ongoing colonization of the place where you live (Singh, 2019).

Some other terms worth noting in Jaad’s Land Acknowledgement are “unceded” and “occupy.” In most parts of British Columbia, you will hear the word “unceded” in Land Acknowledgements. Unceded means that the Nation(s) being acknowledged never surrendered their rights or ties to the Land. It effectively means the land is occupied by the colonizer government (British, and then Canadian), and by those non-Indigenous peoples living on it. In other parts of this country, there is a long history of treaties being signed between governments and Indigenous Nations, as Jaad also references by acknowledging Treaty 1 territory.¹³ While it is important for non-Indigenous peoples to recognize whether land is treated or unceded, both terms are insufficient for a full understanding of historical and contemporary land politics. The words that a speaker chooses to use in their Land Acknowledgement can signal their own understanding of and relationship to these land politics. Consider, for instance, the difference between simply stating that land is unceded as compared to saying that it is “unceded and occupied” or even dispensing with the esoteric legal term “unceded” and stating that the land has been stolen.

What becomes clear in working through this example is that the words we use in Land Acknowledgements are powerful and must be chosen with thought and care. When making these decisions, we should keep in mind some key questions:

1. What is the work that we want our Land Acknowledgements to do?
2. What language choices can we make to reflect this work and positioning?

When our language choices are made in line with those questions, the words we use can extend what we share directly about ourselves to

¹³ There has been sustained criticism of the treaties related to broken promises, forced signatures, and misinterpretations of intent (both deliberate and unintentional) stemming from language and cultural differences. The modern treaties that are being negotiated for unceded Lands are often significantly different from the historical treaties. The Canadian Encyclopedia provides a starting point for learning about the history of treaties here: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aboriginal-treaties>

position us in relation to the land, the Indigenous Nations of that land, and those in attendance.

It is also worth noting that Jaad's acknowledgement provides significantly more information than is generally furnished in an institutional script, including a local Indigenous language and a resource those in attendance can access to learn more. Finally, Jaad makes a public commitment to continue their work. What is clear in this example is that the work is not completed at the end of the speech act. Instead, the acknowledgement is an opening to further learning, relationship building, and commitment.¹⁴ In short, the spoken Land Acknowledgement is only one piece of a larger *practice* of acknowledgement and action.

What Does it Mean for Libraries to be on This Land and to Give Land Acknowledgements?

Libraries are places of learning. As perceived gatekeepers of information, libraries are also complicit in the attempted assimilation of Indigenous Peoples. Recognizing and understanding the colonial roots of educational institutions is an important step in decolonizing. Libraries are not, and have never been, neutral spaces. Through our collections, the English language and written works have been prioritized, leaving little room for other languages and other ways of engaging with information. As Daniel Heath Justice writes, "literature as a category is about what's important to a culture" (2018, p. 20), and Indigenous literatures can be found in "texts, such as cane baskets, wampum belts, birchbark scrolls, gourd masks, sand paintings, rock art, carved and painted cedar poles, stones and whale bones, culturally modified trees, and so on" (p. 22). Where are these forms of knowledge and literature in libraries?

A meaningful Land Acknowledgement practice requires us to ask critical questions about ourselves, our work, and our institutions. Working as we do for an academic library, our own practice of Land Acknowledgement has led us into deeper engagement with understanding education as a colonial and assimilative system. The history of education provided to and forced upon Indigenous Peoples is full of trauma. Dating back

14 We also want to be clear that we are not suggesting that this is a perfect Land Acknowledgement. The central focus of this chapter is on resisting the notion of a singularly defined, "once and for all" approach to Land Acknowledgements. We offer this example only to demonstrate an approach to offering acknowledgement and the kinds of personal reflection, research, and commitment-making that can accompany heartfelt, meaningful Land acknowledgement practices.

to the mid-1800s, education was used to attempt to assimilate Indigenous children through Residential Schools and boarding schools run by religious institutions with support from the government (Battiste, 2013; Cote-Meek, 2014; Joseph, 2018; Maracle, 2017; Vowel, 2016b). Stó:lō storyteller Lee Maracle (2017) uses the United Nations definition to label these assimilationist tactics “acts of genocide.” While people often celebrate the ways that the education system has improved, the authors of *The Equity Myth: Racialization and Indigeneity at Canadian Universities* (2017) demonstrate how education-as-assimilation continues to this day. Mi’kmaw scholar Marie Battiste has described this ongoing process as “cognitive imperialism” (2013) – a eurocentric, westernized curriculum that leaves little room for Indigenous Knowledges and voices.

Recognizing and acknowledging this ongoing assimilation is the first step in taking up the broader engagement with reconciliation and decolonizing work that should be implied by practicing Land Acknowledgements within libraries. Q’um Q’um Xiiem (Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Stó:lō) talks about the tradition of sharing information and knowledge (2008), which is also at the heart of what libraries strive to do. When giving a Land Acknowledgement at a library, it is therefore important to think about who or what the library is in relation to the land on which it is located. For example, you could consider whether materials created by members of the local Nations are included in the collection, or if library programming includes (paid) speakers from the Nations where the library is located. If not, what initiatives could be undertaken to change things? As mentioned previously, a strong and heartfelt Land Acknowledgement includes a compelling action reflective of the institution, the person offering the acknowledgement, and the specific event.

Our Compelling Action

One critique of Land Acknowledgements is that they have become statements devoid of both action and heart, rendering them essentially meaningless. Courtney Skye and Hayden King (2019) encourage us to counteract this trend by including a “compelling action” in our acknowledgements – an action or call to action that deepens the relationship between the speaker and the land and Nation(s). This chapter acts as part of our own compelling action, and was written in the spirit of knowledge sharing (Archibald, 2008). It is our hope that this work inspires other libraries and library staff to examine and ultimately deepen their engagement with Land Acknowledgement practices.

Land Acknowledgements can become a practice through which libraries and library staff come to recognize not just our place and our relationship to this place, but also the value of knowledge traditions beyond what libraries have conventionally collected (the written word). This would be another step towards decolonizing, recognizing that the land itself plays the role of library for many Indigenous cultures. As we step into this work, we must engage in an ongoing reflective practice that challenges us to examine our relationship and the relationship of our institutions with Indigenous lands, Indigenous Nations, and Indigenous Peoples. Significantly, we must start to recognize that the work of delivering meaningful, heartfelt Land Acknowledgements begins well before words are spoken at an event. Furthermore, the work that the Land Acknowledgement represents must extend well beyond the few moments required to complete the speech act. Instead of thinking about Land Acknowledgements and the larger work of decolonization and reconciliation as projects to complete, we encourage readers to understand each as a practice that we perpetually take up, re-committing ourselves to building healthier and stronger relationships with one another and with the Land.

In this way, the work of Land Acknowledgements embodies the work of decolonization and reconciliation. None is a destination at which we can arrive. Instead, each is a practice that we perpetually take up, as we commit ourselves to the ongoing work that needs to be done.

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