CFP: Storytelling, Identity Formation, and Resistance in North American Indigenous Culture

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Through stories, knowledge and culture within and between communities is passed from generation to generation. Oral narratives were used and are still used to share rituals, customs, and traditions of a community. The truths within Indigenous communities are reflected and grounded within their stories and Elders play a key role in passing knowledge. They “mentor and provide support and have systematically gathered wisdom, histories, skills, and expertise in cultural knowledge” (Iseke 561). Their stories shape identity and empower Indigenous communities and peoples.

Stories indicate beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of people. For instance, Datta emphasizes that “stories can vary from the sacred to historical, some focus on social, political, and cultural ways, some are entertaining, even humorous, some tell of personal, family, community, or an entire nations’ experience” (37). Indigenous stories represent Indigenous knowledge and can be a way to resist colonial power, through memories of the past. Additionally, memories as expressed through story for the basis for … the future. Elders “use their knowledge for the collective good” (Iseke 561).

A person’s identity is shaped not only through their experience and knowledge of life but also by what is passed through community. Identity is shaped through cultural memory of the groups and communities. A common shared knowledge serves to connect individuals to the community. Memory can maintain the identity of the people who live within a community. The shared memory that passes from generation to generation, fashions culture and history. According to Assmann, “the term is cultural memory, it is ‘cultural’ because it can be realized institutionally and artificially, and it is ‘memory’ because its relation to social communication it functions in exactly the same way as individual memory does in relation to consciousness” (9). Culture connects history, myth, tradition, and identity which are bound together through story.

Through memory, one can preserve the past and shape the future. With the aid of memory, communities can remember their traditions, history, and values and while making them speak to the present. One recalls not only what he learned and experienced but also how others have reacted to this knowledge; therefore, there is always interaction between an individual and their community. Storytelling is a way to share memories between generations.

This call for papers will focus on the importance of storytelling in Indigenous communities, specifically within the context of North America. The storytelling can function as a method to overcome the past traumas, shape identity, resist colonial power and resurge the community. Moreover, storytelling helps the Indigenous community to avoid the false information spread about
their culture while bringing awareness to both the community and outsiders. Fake news is widespread by colonializers has been damaging Indigenous peoples’ rituals, history, and identity while stories told by Elders can be a way to inform the people about the true facts remained untold, masked, or deformed.

Some previous books focused on the importance of stories. Fagundes and Blayer’s edited book *Oral and Written Narratives and Cultural Identity: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (2007) contains 6 sections which emphasize on place, autobiographical voices, oral identities, textualized identities, and children’s stories. The book emphasizes on a general understanding of identity and storytelling. Archibald’s *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Soul* (2008) is an attempt to bring in storytelling in educational context. In her book, she emphasizes on the power of stories in teaching about Indigenous people. Christensen et al. edited a book entitled *Activating the Heart: Storytelling, Knowledge Sharing, and Relationship* (2018) that deals with understanding, sharing, and creating stories. They use various mediums such as autobiography, poetry, and scholarly books to indicate how storytelling educates people. Besides, Xiem et al. also edited a book related to Indigenous studies entitled *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology* (2019) and focused on Indigenous communities in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand and shared some knowledge on how stories work as a method of decolonizing Indigenous history. *Perspectives on Indigenous writing and literacies* (2019) edited by Cocq and Sullivan explored Indigenous literacy across five continents. It deals with challenges that Indigenous writers face and new approaches that can pave the path for hopeful future for Indigenous writing. These books tackled the importance of storytelling and the current call for paper will focus on the role of storytelling among Indigenous peoples in Canada to heal the trauma, shape the subjectivity, and resist the colonial power. The call for paper seeks contributions from literary and non-literary disciplines such as memoirs, novels, diaries, movies, tv series, and documentaries to give a more holistic view of the power of the stories among Indigenous peoples in Canada. Through storytelling, the Indigenous people are not passive victims of colonization but active participants of shaping their own culture, rituals, and traditions.

Hence this CFP for a volume, tentatively titled *Storytelling, Identity Formation, and Resistance in North American Indigenous Culture*, seeks expand the existing literature on the concept of storytelling as healing and identity formation by seeking for contributors from a range of different fields. Therefore, this call for papers seeks to gather proposal exploring literary and non-literary texts (including but not limited to feature films and documentaries) that exploit the power of storytelling, among Indigenous people of North America, and the Indigenous people in the United States as a therapeutic tool in different contexts.

In this light, we are seeking contributions that engage with but not limited to Canadian and United States Indigenous Studies and related disciplines.

Contributions are sought concerning, but not limited to, issues such as:
• Storytelling as an act of resistance and empowerment
• Storytelling and notion of self in relation to others
• Storytelling as a testimonial act
• Stories and historical construction of events
• Stories and representation of Indigenous knowledge

The papers will be peer-reviewed. Interested contributors should send their proposals to Kamelia Talebian Sedehi (Kamelia.talebiansedehi@uniroma1.it). Please write in the subject: abstract for CFP on Storytelling.

The manuscript collection will be submitted to John Benjamins press for consideration for publication.

**Timeline**

Deadline: 31/10/2023 – Abstracts (300 words)

Notification of acceptance: 15/11/2023

End of April 2023 – Manuscripts of chapters (up to 7,500 words, including abstract, and references)

Key terms for this research would be: identity formation, healing, North American Indigenous culture, resistance, and storytelling.

References:


