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Introduction
Pyroepistemology: Reclaiming Knowledge, Histories, Lands, Relations

Paulette Steeves, Guest Editor

Tansi (hello), my name is Paulette Steeves. I am Cree-Métis, a descendant of First Nations and Métis people of the Western Hemisphere from the area we now know as North America. My research is framed in Indigenous method and theory, Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. In Indigenous research, respect, reciprocity, and relationality are central to all we do. Thus, I respectfully introduce myself to create a relationship with the reader before I share this story.

As an undergraduate student from 1995 to 2000 and a graduate student from 2008 to 2015, I never had the honor of having an Indigenous faculty member as a teacher or mentor. I was not required to read any books or articles authored by Indigenous scholars for my courses, with one exception in graduate school, when I was required to read one article by Vine Deloria Jr., a prominent Sioux scholar. Reading his words changed my life. It opened windows into a vast and diverse world of Indigenous knowledge.

It has been ten years since I earned my PhD in anthropology, and the number of Native American, First Nations, Métis, and global Indigenous scholars who have published books and articles has grown substantially across every field of higher education in the last twenty years. This is such a blessing for students and researchers today. The number of informed settler-ally scholars who have taken the time to become informed of critical Indigenous scholarship and the importance of decolonizing teaching and learning has also grown substantially. I always thought that an essential part of our work as Indigenous faculty and researchers was to create space to support new scholars and to create opportunities for bringing these windows of knowledge into academic and public spaces. This is central to weaving paths of decolonization, reclamation, and respect in higher education, to create safe spaces where the next seven generations would see and hear Indigenous knowledge in all areas of higher

education. This special edition creates space for Indigenous and informed settler-ally voices, scholars, and researchers focused on and centered on decolonizing education and research.

Pyroepistemology

In 2012, the creator brought me a cleansing gift of fire wrapped in a beautiful new word. I coined the term pyroepistemology, a metaphorical term that describes the work of critical Indigenous scholarship and the decolonizing work carried out by like-minded and informed peers and allies. For thousands of years, Indigenous people have practiced pyroregeneration, using fire to clean the land, burning away dense undergrowth and allowing the sunlight to *b*ring new life to the earth. A practice of pyroepistemology is a ceremony that cleanses the academic landscape of dehumanizing discussions of Indigenous people that misinforms worldviews and fuels racism. Such literary renewal clears the way for healthy growth in academic fields of thought and centers of knowledge production.

Reclaiming Deep Histories and Links to the Land

I framed my graduate dissertation research in pyroepistemology, weaving into it Indigenous communities' oral traditions and history held in rock art with published archaeological reports on habitation sites in both North and South America. This research allowed me to gain an informed understanding of the deep Indigenous past of the Western Hemisphere—the Americas.

Traditional teachings from Western scholars claimed that our ancestors had only been in the Americas for 12,000 to 14,000 years before the present. However, that did not match what Indigenous people knew from oral traditions, and it did not match what I had learned from the archaeological record. For the last century, Western scholars have aggressively denied that people had been in the Western Hemisphere before 12,000 years ago. Archaeologists claimed that the first people to enter the Americas had migrated across hundreds of miles of glacial ice from the area we know today as Asia to North America. Western scientists called the first people Clovis and claimed they were Asians from Asia. This was very uninformed and not based on what we know as scientific fact or history. The facts are that Asia and an Asian culture did not exist 12,000 years ago. The first people of the Western Hemisphere were early people who travelled the globe and traversed land mass areas between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres for thousands of years, just as our four-legged relations, mammoth, mastodon, elk, wolf, saber-tooth, and other relations did.

There is a well-documented history of early humans existing in the area we know today as northern Asia more than two million years ago. Paleontologists have documented a record of mammalian migrations from the Western to Eastern Hemispheres; saber-tooth cats, horses, and camelid species originated in the area we know today as North America and migrated over thousands of years from the Western to the Eastern Hemisphere. After years of studying archaeological reports and theories on the Americas, I found that archaeologists did not discuss the possibility that early

humans traveled between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, just as the four-legged mammals did before the beginning of the Last Glacial Maximum. As it is well documented that early humans were in the Eastern Hemisphere in the area known today as Northern Asia, I wondered why this was not discussed. The answer to this question was easy to find, and supported by documented evidence of deeply rooted historical racism and bias in American archaeology. For the last century, discussing research results and publishing on any site in North or South America dated to earlier than 12,000 years ago was a dangerous pursuit for archaeologists. This area of archaeological research was known as an area of academic suicide. If you wanted to end your career in archaeology, you published on an archaeological site dated to be older than the technologies of the so-called Clovis people.

My research clarified a great deal: one crucial fact was that there was no such thing as the Clovis people, as archaeologists claimed. Archaeologists have and often still do discuss the Clovis people, inferring a cultural group that covered all of North America. Cultural groups are regional and smaller than the size of an entire continent. Claims of the Clovis people being throughout the area we know today as North America erased the incredible diversity of Indigenous people who existed in North America. The only place the Clovis people ever existed was in the wildest imagination of the archaeological mind.

Many archaeologists today accept that early people were in the Americas before the last glacial maximum 24,000 years ago. However, some American archaeologists suffered their peers' wrath and overzealous critique when they published what they knew to be the truth: that people had been in the Western Hemisphere much earlier than 12,000 years ago. Recently, archaeological reports have been published on early human sites dating to more than 130,000 years before the present in Southern California. I owe a debt of gratitude to archaeologists who published on Pleistocene-age archaeological sites in the Western Hemisphere, as their archaeological reports made reclaiming more than 200,000 years of Indigenous history and links to the land possible. My research into early human archaeological sites, oral traditions, and rock art, *The Indigenous Paleolithic of the Western Hemisphere*, was published in 2021.

Knowledge-Sharing as Pyroepistemology

The authors in this special edition speak their truths and share stories about ongoing racism and bias in knowledge-production and higher education. They work to decolonize knowledge-production, practice pyroepistemology, and open paths to safer spaces in higher education for the next seven generations. I am in awe of their scholarship and courage in reclaiming and rewriting knowledge, history, lands, and relations, speaking their truths, and clearing paths to healing for the next seven generations. Indigenous voices and scholarship have risen like a beautiful sunrise, heralding a new time of healing. Over the last thirty years, the number of Indigenous scholars has grown and continues to grow, healing Indigenous communities and Western institutional and public spaces. There are Indigenous scholars, knowledge-holders, and informed settler allies in all areas of education, research, and governmental and nongovernmental

spaces, weaving Indigenous knowledge and reviving once outlawed cultural practices. The Eighth Fire has been lit, and every Indigenous voice, knowledge-holder, and informed settler ally adds one more flame to a healing fire that will benefit all people. The articles in this special edition reclaim and revive thousands of years of Indigenous history and knowledge. They create safe spaces for Indigenous voices, weaving oral traditions and Indigenous science through hearts and minds to create healing fires of respect, reciprocity, and relationality of all our relations. Oral traditions are woven through Western-centric histories throughout the papers in this special edition. Doing so is pivotal to decolonizing discussions on Indigenous peoples' histories, cultures, and environments. This is a methodology of pyroepistemology and Indigenous theory.

Colin Elder grew up in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, known to the Anishinaabe as Bawating (the rapids). He weaves oral traditions of the Anishinaabe that reflect on ecological and landscape changes to the area during the early Holocene. Elder discusses how Anishinaabe oral traditions document environmental and ecological changes in the Great Lakes area and provide insights into ancient landscapes and lifeways through the Anishinaabeg Great Lakes world. Elder is well informed of Anishinaabe oral traditions and Anishinaabe genesis histories. In adding these oral traditions to knowledge of Anishinaabe histories previously written through a Eurocentric lens, he applies pyroepistomology, enriching our understanding of the deep past in Bawating. He shares oral traditions that tell the story of the significant environmental changes after glaciers retreated, with the ensuing floods creating the new world of the Great Lakes. He shares the Anishinaabe genesis histories and adaptations made by animals and people during this time of environmental change and renewal.

Jack Hoggarth (Anishinaabe) and Jackson Pind (settler-Anishinaabe) weave their discussion through flames of pyroepistemology to reinterpret the Hopewell tradition and the mound-builders theory through Anishinaabeg perspectives. Hoggarth and Pind critically discuss historical narratives that informed archeological interpretations, which continue to echo colonial thinking by marginalizing Indigenous knowledge systems. Both scholars are Anishinaabe from the Great Lakes area. They fan the flames of pyroepistemology to challenge and decolonize historical archaeological narratives of the Hopewell mounds and theories. Hoggarth and Pind share a story that weaves oral traditions of the seven fires of creation from the *first thought* to the emergence of the *first human being*, to reclaim and reinterpret the Hopewell mounds tradition through Anishinaabe views. Hoggarth and Pind discuss a critical need to critique and reform colonial legacies embedded in archaeological practices by integrating Indigenous traditional knowledge into stages of archaeological inquiry.

Kristi Gansworth (Anishinaabe) takes readers on a journey through the swirling water home of eels, highlighting their agency and spirit. She shares knowledge on the eels' decline as they navigate human and environmental impacts that have led to a massive loss in their communities. Gansworth shares Indigenous knowledge and oral traditions of the eel as a sacred and medicinal relative and storyteller. This is pyroepistomology, discussing and adding knowledge and voices from all our relations through oral traditions of sacred relations whose homelands are the vast flowing waters of Eastern Canada. She acknowledges that these connections must be restored

and reinvigorated. Reclaiming, retelling, and remembering the sacred place of eels, according to Gansworth, highlights a healing of the human relationship with water that supports all life.

Caleen Sisk (Winnemem Wintu) and Mark Dadigan share knowledge and a story centered on Indigenous community research and their relations, the Chinook salmon (*nur*). Salmon historically thrived in the tribe's ancestral watershed, the McCloud River in northern California. Sisk and Dadigan share traditional knowledge of the environment and the history of human and environmental impacts that have depleted salmon populations from their homes. The authors discuss how the salmon and the Winnemem Wintu were left homeless by colonial industries and governmental institutions that built dams on the river and removed the people from their homelands. Oral histories that have been passed down on the environmental degradation and destruction of the rivers in the Winnemem Wintu homelands lead to a present and a future of hope and renewal for both the salmon and the Winnemem Wintu—none of which would have been possible without the oral traditions and knowledge shared by the Winnemem Wintu.

Sisk and Dadigan weave pyroepistomology throughout their discussion, through oral traditions of historical events that destroyed the salmon and the people's homes. Their paper is a pivotal discussion that will inform communities and scholars on the work that must be done in many places to heal the earth, waters, and environments for present and future generations.

Kendall Lovely (Diné, Navajo Nation) shares an Indigenous view of historical salvage archaeology and institutional collections that erased Indigenous views of the past through colonial narratives and processes of cataloguing, framing Indigenous materials as imitative, a form of Indigenous dispossession, categorizing peoples, communities, and collections for the benefit of colonial governments. Pyroepistomology requires truth-telling, critical discussions that address the damage of colonialism and the impacts of dehumanizing narratives and Eurocentric thought regarding Indigenous communities and histories. Lovely is a truth-teller; she clearly discusses the adverse effects of salvage archaeology, museum collections, and colonial narratives on Indigenous communities. The story is focused on areas of the Southwest United States, a significant area of salvage archaeology. Lovely calls for the cleansing of archival records focused on comparing ancient civilizations. This is pyroepistomology in action, cleansing colonial interpretation of the Indigenous past and weaving new ways of creating knowledge throughout colonial institutions and knowledge production. Lovely challenges the Eurocentric view of the Indigenous past, arguing for new ways of cataloguing and caring for museum pieces.

Rachelle Besaw (Menominee) takes us through her childhood as a Native American who gained privileged access as a certified student tour guide to the Indigenous Museum collections at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. This was her only access to her cultural heritage. She discusses the history of extractive anthropology that Indigenous groups faced throughout history, focusing on her Menominee community. Besaw, like Kendall Lovely, addresses the history of extractive archaeology and colonial museum practices. As an Indigenous scholar, she walks a path

of pyroepistomology through the institutions she metaphorically sets on fire, focusing on cleansing knowledge and opening spaces of healing for Indigenous communities. Besaw discusses what it means to be an Indigenous researcher navigating an academic journey while paying the debts owed to her community through her research. She reflects on the trauma still felt today by Indigenous communities regarding the rush of salvage archaeology that stripped away so many family and cultural items for museums such as the Heard. Besaw takes the reader through her journey, as a Menomonie person who was not privileged to grow up in her own community, and learning to live in marginal spaces. She shares how her hope has grown with new waves of Indigenous researchers rising in the ranks.

David Lewis (Santiam Kalapuya, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde) shares his experience and knowledge of the many silences regarding environmental changes and impacts on the environment and communities that settlers made to his traditional homeland. He shares how he worked with elders to understand, revive and document his history and culture. Colonial narratives and practices erased Indigenous knowledge, communities, and lands. Lewis applies pyroepistemology through reviving and reclaiming his community's history and culture. He reclaims and revives Indigenous understanding of all his communities' plant, animal, and water relations on the land. He discusses the importance of fire in healing the land, while applying the flames of pyroepistomology to reviving knowledge and healing communities. The homeland of his ancestors was a rich, vibrant, wealthy life in what is now known as the Willamette Valley. However, today, the valley is a dry landscape of agriculture and cities. Lewis' story about the plants, animals, land, and waterways before colonization paints a view of a beautiful and healthy land before colonization. As his homeland area is now mainly agricultural and urban cities, he discusses work to restore the lands, reviving Indigenous species and spaces. Davis shares how some areas of these former homelands are recovering with many Indigenous plants and animals. Davis acknowledges the importance of fire and the return of waterways to restoring Indigenous habitats to areas where they have been eradicated through colonization. His story is one of hope woven through reviving, reclaiming, and restoring Indigenous communities of plants, animals, and people.

Andres Moraga and colleagues discussed their participatory community research with the Quechua Indigenous Community of Quipisca (CITQQ) in defending cultural landscapes and reviving cultural practices. Their paper aligns with the work of David Lewis in recovering and reviving Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices. The community-centered work of Moraga and colleagues and CITQQ is centered in pyroepistomology; truth-telling; critical assessments of the negative impacts of mining and industry on Indigenous lands and communities; investigation of governmental polices meant to erase Indigenous communities and their histories on the land; and protecting cultural landscapes and reviving Indigenous cultural practices and knowledge.

In many Indigenous communities today, we see this again and again, where colonial institutions, governments, and industries silence and erase Indigenous knowledge, history, and sacred landscapes. Indigenous peoples see the land as sacred, as relations, and colonial industries see the land as a place to extract resources for financial profit.

Moraga and colleagues created a path of pyroepistomology that is a strong map for others to follow in community-centered, Indigenous research to reclaim, revive, and protect Indigenous lands, knowledge, and culture. Their interdisciplinary methodologies weave Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and being, with Indigenous community memories, oral traditions, and symbolisms on the one hand and academic knowledge of anthropological and archaeological sciences on the other.

The authors of these papers weave oral traditions, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing throughout their articles, applying pyroepistemology in many ways throughout their research and discussions. A central focus of the articles is reviving and reclaiming Indigenous cultural practices, protecting and reviving Indigenous landscapes and homelands, and challenging governmental and institutional colonial practices to create healing spaces for indigenous communities after enduring ongoing colonization. Reading these papers brings me to a place of healing, where hope springs eternal, where pyroepistemology and Indigenous knowledge are centered in all research and discussion, reclaiming and reviving Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. I am very thankful to all of the authors. They bring me a great deal of inspiration and hope for a better future for all people and for the future of knowledge-production.

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