

Making memory sovereign/ making sovereign memory

Memory Studies

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DOI: 10.1177/1750698019900953

journals.sagepub.com/home/mss**May Chazan**  and **Jenn Cole**

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Abstract

This article foregrounds the activist memory projects of four Indigenous women artists, recorded as part of a digital storytelling project in 2018. These memory projects collectively represent a refusal of settler colonial frameworks and a grounding in Indigenous knowledges, which challenge institutional understandings of the archive and dominant conceptions of memory. Through close reading and analysis, we argue that these storytellers' practices – rooted in Land, body, ancestral relations, and creativity – are not efforts to simply right the colonial archive, nor are they insertions into colonial narratives; instead, they remember differently, with distinct modes and mechanisms for accessing, producing and circulating memory. Their work, in concert with Indigenous scholars cited throughout this article, extends not only the epistemological basis of the archive. It also expands the ontology of memory: pushing memory scholars to expand their understandings of what is possible to remember, and how memory is accessed and shared.

Keywords

body memory, decolonization, Indigenous knowledge, land as archives, resistance, sovereign memory

‘And here I am, an Indian talking about what it means to be an Indian in the archive, what it means to be the object looking back, the objectified engaged in the process of making knowledge about the processes that led to my objectification’.

–Malea Powell (Indiana Miami, Eastern Shawnee, and Euroamerican), 2008

Introduction

This article foregrounds the memory work of four Indigenous women artists – Jenn Cole (Algonquin/ mixed ancestry), Michelle Nahanee (Squamish), Monique Mojica (Guna/ Rappahannock) and Alice Olsen Williams (Anishinaabe). They discussed their work during ‘Manifesting Resistance: Conversations about Intergenerational Memory Work across “the

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Americas””, a research project carried out in March 2018 in Nogojiwanong on Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe territory (i.e. Peterborough, Canada). Participants in this research workshop explored memory, resistance and creative archive-making through storytelling, media creation and embodied workshops.

In this article, we share 4 of the 12 stories recorded in this project, offering an analysis of how these stories collectively illuminate sovereign memory work and what this work, and indeed Indigenous perspectives and knowledges more widely, might offer to memory studies. Cole recounts archiving her ‘way home’ to a decolonial understanding of self, Algonquin-Anishinaabe identity, and place through arts practices, oral history, body memory and land-based (re)learning. Nahanee describes seeking to remember, archive, and circulate stories of Squamish women’s strength outside and beyond the colonial gaze. Mojica recounts how she accesses memory held in her body, ancestral relations and the Land through deep improvisational work and performances that re-story who she is outside oppressive colonial narratives. Finally, Williams details how she centres Anishinaabe stories, symbols, and teachings in her quilts to remind Anishinaabeg of who they are and remind viewers of ongoing Indigenous presence. Specifically, we explore the ways in which these storytellers describe their projects as: (1) making and (re)activating memory outside institutionalized archives, public commemoration and/or national narratives; and (2) grounded in and propelled by connections to land, body, creativity and intergenerational relations, all of which hold and are entangled in memory. We ask: How do these storytellers practice, perform and circulate memory? What and who is remembering, and for whom? What is being remembered, and to what effect? And how might their projects extend and nuance conventional concepts of memory and the archive? We argue that their projects resist dominant memory modes and narratives about Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island, reclaiming sovereignty over both narrative and memory work itself.

Our exploration aims to bring together and extend critical conversations at the intersections of feminist, decolonial and queer archival studies (Bly and Wooten, 2012; Dunbar, 2006; Eichhorn, 2013; Mbembe, 2015), and Indigenous writings on memory and sovereignty (Mitchell and Burelle, 2016; Nagam, 2011; Robinson and Martin, 2016). Engaging with scholarship on community-based archival practices in which the archival subjects determine the methods, location, ownership and access to the archive (Bly and Wooten, 2012), we build on epistemological questions about what constitutes credible archival knowledge; how such knowledge should be produced, preserved and interpreted; and who should be imbued with such powers (Mbembe, 2015). Such questions draw attention to often unbridled authority vested in archival and state institutions, challenging notions of the archive as complete, static and objective; suggesting instead an embodied archive that is dynamic, unfinished and created by active mediators of social memory (Mitchell and Burelle, 2016).

We similarly draw on Indigenous scholars who explore resurgent and sovereign memory practices – creative, ceremonial, land-based, embodied, and relational ways of accessing, making, keeping and circulating memory – challenging the colonial-normativity of the archive (Hunt, 2016; Mitchell and Burelle, 2016; Robinson and Martin, 2016) and extending conventional understandings of memory more broadly (e.g. Driskill, 2005 cited in Powell, 2008; Simpson, 2017). Nagam (2011) (Métis, German/Syrian), for instance, powerfully articulates that Indigenous artistic work can function as a ‘living archive that performs cultural memory’ (p. 147), citing Brant’s (1994) (Mohawk) reflection on fluid and ephemeral ways of making, keeping and sharing memory: ‘Memory is like the drum. One tap and the sound resonates and reverberates in to our very soul. One poem, one story, one painting, and our hearts and bodies respond to the message – we are here. We remember’ (p. 36, cited in Nagam, 2011: 164). We take the inclusion of land, body, heart and ancestors as archives to be a pressing ontological challenge to the very basis of the archive, what memory is, what and who can remember, and how memory can be accessed, stored and circulated.

In sharing detailed accounts of how Indigenous artists story memory projects, we are responding to calls within memory studies for attention to *practices* of archival work broadly defined, and to extend and challenge what constitutes an archive (Bly and Wooten, 2012; Ryan, 2010). We explore the ways in which these storytellers' memory practices converse with ongoing epistemological and ontological critiques of the archive: how they offer a pressing shift to dominant memory modes and narratives, circulate Indigenous ways of remembering, amplify Indigenous sovereignties, and thereby enable Indigenous futurities (Boissoneau, 2016; Nixon, 2016).

Conceptual framing: the crisis of the archive, the urgency to remember differently

We situate this analysis as one response to a broader crisis over 'the archive' – a struggle over what is deemed worthy of remembering, whose memory is viewed as legitimate, and how memory is understood to be practised, circulated and kept as forms of resistance (Ryan, 2010).¹ The stories offered in this article are perhaps best contextualized alongside the dynamics of this archival crisis as it is currently playing out in Canada, where controversy abounds not only over the colonial content of mainstream commemoration, but also over state-endorsed and institutionalized memory practices that are deemed resistant as well: for example, public commemorations (i.e. the toppling or removal of monuments to Canada's first prime minister, the architect of colonial residential schools), state-endorsed curricula (i.e. struggles to 'Indigenize' public school curricula that have long erased and objectify Indigenous peoples), and national reconciliation efforts (i.e. state-led efforts to make amends with Indigenous communities, including through compiling testimonials from residential school survivors in a Truth and Residential Commission process, Ladner and Tait, 2017; Regan, 2010).

These resistant national memory projects, which are aimed at righting the historical record, have resulted from continuous resistance from Indigenous communities – resistance to the systematic erasure of colonial experiences, the glorification of nation-building narratives and the denial of ongoing colonial violence. While they are critical for all who inhabit this land, many Indigenous writers still critique them as inadequate or limited: adding Indigenous experiences, contributions and perspectives into the colonial archive, but still leaving settler institutions in control of how Indigenous memory is communicated. Rather than quelling the crisis of the archive, these resistant memory efforts illuminate the urgency to remember differently (Ladner and Tait, 2017; Simpson, 2011, 2017).

This urgency to remember differently grounds Indigenous resurgence movements, which are growing across Canada and globally – marked by a remembering, reawakening and return to cultural practices long suppressed under colonial laws (Dutcher, 2018). The work of Indigenous resurgence, like the work of toppling monuments or re-writing curriculum, is about reclaiming memory – but conceived of and practised very differently (Simpson, 2011, 2017). It is about (re)activating Indigenous truths/memories of places, times, lands, histories, spiritualities and cultures. It is also about Indigenous communities reclaiming their value in ways that do not require state recognition; exploring and enacting their sovereignty in connection to their own communities, nations, bodies, lands and stories (Martineau and Ritskes, 2014; Robinson and Martin, 2016); not only inserting Indigenous memories into existing settler archives, but also making sovereign memory (and sovereign futures) outside of settler colonial structures (Boissoneau, 2016; Nixon, 2016). As Robinson (2016) (Stó:lō) explains, 'we must not be content to be included, and instead define new spaces of sovereignty' (p. 12).

In this context, we explore the stories offered in this article in dialogue with three particular critiques rooted in Indigenous resurgence movements and offered by Indigenous scholars/artists around the limitations of conventional memory projects and dominant modes of archiving:

1. The critique that colonial archives tell Indigenous stories from settler perspectives to prop up settler narratives, and in doing so frame Indigenous peoples as Other and start the clock on Indigenous existence at the time of colonial contact (Hunt, 2016; Mitchell and Burrelle, 2016; Nugent, 2013). As Robinson explains, the ‘desire or hunger to know’ Indigenous stories is part of the extractivist legacy of colonialism (Carter et al., 2018: 210).
2. The critique that settler-dominant memory projects too often fail to account for Indigenous ways of being, knowing and relating to memory (Hunt, 2016; Nagam, 2011). For instance, Simpson (2011) (Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe) reminds us that Indigenous memory is accessed, made and shared through creative practices, while Nagam (2014) writes of the body, the heart, the Land and ancestral relations as depositories of Indigenous memory, indeed as archives.
3. The critique that dominant archival modes tend to relegate Indigenous peoples to the past (Terrance, 2011), offering archive users tools to ignore that Indigenous peoples live vibrantly in the present and have inevitable futures on these lands (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013).

These critiques are similarly expressed by the storytellers in our work, who point to an exploitative colonial gaze that involves making use of Indigenous content to tell the story of the colonizer. Nahanee relates stories of family members and ancestors being photographed, left nameless, and labelled ‘squaw’ in official archives. Mojica remembers the shame of ‘playing Indian’ in sideshow spectacles for settler tourists: ‘Our purpose . . . where we were on exhibit, was to provide the contrast and the savagery’. Cole shares that a pictographic sacred site on the Ottawa River was once nearly carved apart to create a commemoration to Canada’s early prime ministers. Williams comments, ‘Settlers want to hear about Indians. They want to know how we do things. Oh, they love to see our stuff’. Storytellers thus highlight the urgency to understand and appreciate Indigenous-led memory practices as a challenge to institutionalized archival projects.

What would make a sovereign archive, set apart from the colonial gaze and from colonial principles of organization? What does sovereign Indigenous memory work entail? Who is it for? What is remembered? How is sovereign memory accessed, shared and understood? We explore these questions through the remainder of this article.

Methodology

The four stories featured in this article were shared during a 4-day storytelling and media-creation project in which both authors of this report were involved as researchers. Dr. May Chazan co-led the project (alongside Dr. Gabriela Aceves-Sepulveda) while Dr. Jenn Cole was one of six researcher-facilitators. The research team invited nine additional participants, all through existing relationships, and with a view to bringing together scholars, activists and artists involved in diverse forms of resistant memory work, and across varied ages, backgrounds, ancestries and geographies. Five participants identified as Indigenous to Turtle Island or of mixed Indigenous-European ancestry (three of whom were researchers). Because the project sought to challenge researcher-researched dynamics, many among the research team participated as both facilitators and storytellers, including Cole and Nahanee, whose stories we discuss below.

Over several days, participants interviewed and photographed each other in small groups, gathered for larger circle conversations, and engaged in embodied workshops, based on feminist, decolonial and queer approaches to storytelling (Carter et al., 2018; Zepeda, 2014) and participatory media-making (Iseke and Moore, 2011; Rice et al., 2018).² We opened the workshop by centring storytelling and memory work from the place in which we gathered – Nogojiwanong, Michi Saagiig

Anishinaabe territory – inviting additional local participants to ground our sharing. This offered all participants, particularly those visiting Nogojiwanong for the first time, an opportunity to learn about critical, resurgent memory work rooted in this place. We spent time in a tipi on Trent University campus, learning from one Anishinaabe Elder about memory and her residential school experience; we also learned from the cultural archivist of nearby Curve Lake First Nation, including viewing one her recent films on local treaty processes, *Inaakonigewin Andaadad Aki: Michi Saagiig Treaties*.³ We then moved from this first grounding day into two consecutive, full-group embodied co-creation workshops, both led by Indigenous performance artists (of different backgrounds) – making space for diverse ways of knowing and story-sharing, and for memory held in bodies, land, space and ancestral relations. We hoped such activities would build relationships among the group, while making clear that knowledge production in this research was not only solely about making digital stories, but also involved embodied and more ephemeral processes. For the remaining 2 days, we invited participants to share and record their own stories through full-group circle conversations and smaller group recording sessions. In the smaller groups, participants created audio and visual materials to later be turned into media capsules through collaboration with researchers. Elsewhere, we have written about some of the methodological challenges and insights gained through this process (Chazan and Baldwin, in press).

The project set out to understand alternative ways of practicing memory as resistance across different contexts, through arts, land-based practices, ceremony and oral history; to extend notions of what constitutes an archive; and to explore intergenerational dynamics within resistant memory work. While this project did not set out to study Indigenous peoples' resurgent memory work exclusively, nor to theorize the concept of sovereign memory, this emerged as an important thematic thread of the project through our analysis of stories and broader conversations during the workshop.

To situate the authors in relation to this work, Chazan's family settled on Turtle Island (in Montreal, Canada) as Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe three generations ago. She comes to this project on resistant memory work in part through her own memory practices, which include tracing back the stories of her ancestors' journey, now almost entirely forgotten, and the complex intertwining of her privilege as a white settler in present day Canada with the complex workings of white supremacy, anti-Semitism and settler colonialism that made her family's migration both possible and necessary. While her own memory project is not featured in this article, it does inform that her thinking around memory and thus this analysis. Cole is of mixed European-Anishinaabe ancestry, with long-standing connection to the Kiji Sibi (Ottawa River) watershed. Her memory project, also rooted in undoing the amnesia of assimilation, is discussed at length below. Both live in Nogojiwanong. As co-authors, we acknowledge the vital contributions of each researcher and participant in this project; we also take full responsibility for the analysis that follows.

Jenn Cole

Cole describes her memory work as a multi-dimensional project aimed at decolonizing her understanding of herself and her connection to her home territory, the Kiji Sibi watershed. Cole grew up fairly assimilated into the settler-dominant town of Deep River (Ontario, Canada); she laments her early disconnect from Algonquin culture, stories, teachings and histories. During the workshop, she described her work as 'trying to figure out what it means to be a mixed ancestry Anishinaabekwe . . . trying to figure out where I'm from'. Her ways of accessing, keeping and circulating memory are distinct from dominant/settler narratives, institutions and ways of understanding memory and archives. She makes sovereign memory through land-based visual art, performance, that includes sharing stories with audience members about landforms, relatives and family recipes, dance,

relationships with ancestors and with her child, and by (re)learning teachings from the Land, rooted in ceremony. Her memory work is about reclaiming what was taken from her family through colonization:

I grew up swimming in the Ottawa River . . . and I grew up with plants and rocks and shapes of the Land that are so familiar to me. But I didn't grow up knowing Indigenous history of the land that I was living in even though that's part of my family's history. And I didn't grow up receiving teachings about sacred sites on that land. So I'm trying to get to know the territory again. And get to know it in a richer way, more connected with Indigenous history and that means really decolonizing my understanding of where I'm from.

Cole is working to understand the impacts of colonial policies, but her work is more so about remembering other things, outside of colonial narratives and frameworks. These include remembering the beauty and joy of Algonquin cultures, knowledges and connections to the Land in her home territory.

Cole, like the other storytellers, frequently depicts the work of remembering as future-oriented. Her care for her young child's future is directly linked to honouring her ancestors:

I feel partly responsible to do that [learn Algonquin teachings] because of my son. I don't want to keep teachings from him or make him white and leave him there. That would dishonour the experiences of my ancestors. And also if they've saved things like seeds for me, it's really important for me to find those seeds and to nourish them and to pick them up.

She also explains the always unfinished nature of her work:

This book [holding it up] work that I have, it's a really long accordion . . . It's just a place that I have to map, map the watershed, to map family histories, and to play with materials. So, like this is an ink stamp of some sweet fern that I collected from behind my parents' house and this is a stamp that I made of me at the edge of the Ottawa River in friendship with a bear. There's a bunch of stuff in here. But there's also a lot of blank space and so I hope that Tom [her son] will draw into this later.

Cole further explains that she is archiving her process of returning home, linking her project to wider resurgence efforts. She frames her personal work to re-learn and remember as part of a collective struggle for decolonial, sovereign, Indigenous futures: making sovereign memory of Algonquin past and presence in the Kiji Sibi watershed, in order to bolster Indigenous resurgence and create decolonial futures. As part of this work, she is creating an artistic map, a collage of family materials and images of the Land, tracing away from the shame of not belonging towards finding her way home, a map she can share with others seeking to do similar work of decolonizing:

I feel responsible to gather up everything I can into my bundle because there's been so much cultural loss in my family. Leanne Simpson writes so beautifully about the process of *Biskaabiyang* and decolonizing one's own self, and recognizing that cultural loss is like part of the story of colonialism and genocide in Turtle Island . . . I'm excited to be able to pass on, not just the family stories and not just information, but also what it means to sketch out this, trying to map home . . . a process that many people of mixed ancestry are experiencing . . . I think it's important to archive the difficulty of the return – I feel like that's the most important thing that I can give right now.

Cole describes her memory practices as multi-faceted, extending well beyond what is typically archived in colonial memory projects and expanding colonial-normative ways of relating to memory. She offers at least five ways that she practices memory work, which resonate with Indigenous ways of knowing and being (e.g. Nagam, 2011). First, she is deliberately remembering teachings she

received in childhood: her mother taught her to put down tobacco and to smudge; her grandmother offered her important ways of being; her close relationship to river, rocks and plants offered memory of territorial relationships that she is now reactivating. Second, she is collecting family stories, including close study of treasured gifts from her late grandparents. She notes her grandfather's notebook from forestry school, a precious gift that connects her directly to his drawings, his knowledge of the Land and his handwriting. Third, she makes memory through performance, dance and other artistic practices that express relationships with grandparents, animals, plants and waterbodies from her childhood home, using these memories and materials in performance that reclaims and enacts sovereignty. These practices are simultaneously about accessing, relearning, archiving and circulating memories of culture and place. Fourth, Cole is, in her words, 'nesting back into ceremony', remembering and reclaiming what was taken. Participating in ceremony provides access to memory and knowledge about her identity and sovereignty. Often supported by carefully nurtured relationships, she is reclaiming memory stored within her person. For instance, she describes the way she (and her Nan) would 'come undone' and 'sob' in the presence of ceremonial drumming and singing. Nesting back into ceremony allows her to remember grief, power, beauty and reconnection. Finally, Cole's mothering is memory work. Mothering, she explains, is full of 'ancestral connection', and it brings her opportunity to learn from the wisdom and memory of her child.

On whether the concept of 'the archive' resonated with her work, Cole states,

I do think of archive quite a bit in the work. Of course, there are conventional archives . . . But when I think about archive in my own work I definitely think much more about my person as an archive – my body as an archive for a bunch of sensations and feelings and memories that I don't always know how to give expression to . . . I think of art-making as a way of archiving my own journey through family history and through re-relating to the territory I grew up in as a way of marking that process.

Cole's memory practices offer expanded notions of what and who can be acknowledged for remembering, thereby offering important ontological interruptions to dominant memory modes and archival practices. She points to her body/person as memory, accessed through arts or ceremony; memory contained in intergenerational relationships, past, present and future; memory contained within precious artefacts; and memory within the land and water. For Cole, bodies, Land, relation and the spirit world are dynamic archives, accessible through art and ceremony; the knowledges and memories she yearns for are not lost but rather await her. Cole reflects repeatedly on who her remembering is for – she is not working to right the national narrative, but rather to reclaim her sovereignty, honour her ancestors and support those on similar decolonial journeys.

Michelle Nahanee

Nahanee is a media artist, activist and matriarch from the Squamish Nation (British Columbia, extending north of Vancouver, Canada). Her memory work, 'The Squamish Matriarch Project', is rooted in her knowledge of herself as a strong, caring, change-making Squamish woman, as well as in the strength and power of the women who raised her:

I was born Squamish [. . .] and I was raised by my aunties. . . . Until I was five years old, I only knew my family and being Squamish and hunting and eating wild foods and being in a big pile of kids . . . Then I went to school and I found out that I was an Indian, and that I was not as smart as other people and all of these constructions were imposed on me.

Nahanee is reclaiming memory for the sake of her own sovereign Squamish identity, as well as for the sovereignty of Squamish women's power to support healthy and decolonial futures.

Nahanee describes her desire to collect, create, archive, and circulate stories, photographs, and knowledge, particularly about Squamish matriarchs. In similar ways to Cole, Nahanee is reconnecting with her childhood self through the knowledgeable archives of her body and the teachings of Elders, some of whom hold memories of life before colonization. Nahanee envisions that her project might include photography and media art installation, and digital archiving.⁴ She hopes to share her work widely, including with the local Squamish-run school.

Nahanee points to the importance of her work for Squamish women and girls into the future, especially in the ongoing context of gendered colonial violence. She believes reclaiming matriarchal power offers tools for strength and survival:

Indigenous women face the highest levels of violence in our country, and so I'm hoping to just expand out the power of decolonizing identity. I mean it's definitely other peoples' jobs too, to not be violent, but it can also help us protect ourselves, the more that we see ourselves in this way.

Nahanee's memory work, like Cole's, is oriented towards both the past and the future:

There are a few people in the community that still have access to that knowledge of how things were pre-contact. And so, I'm kind of excited about finding that information out and recording it in a good way for, you know, my grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Nahanee also describes how reinvigorating memory from Squamish perspectives offers new and truer ways of seeing the self, and that decolonizing identity can lead to more safety for Indigenous women.

Nahanee notes the importance of her own community maintaining control over the project – so that the stories she collects and articulates are never appropriated into an archive or institution that is mediated by settler perspectives. She says, 'I don't think I'd want to do a book like in the sense that I would try to own third party people's information . . . I don't want to re-colonize the stories'. Nahanee articulates further,

You know, it is important we share [information] in a good way with our families . . . We have our own school, for example, within our community. And so, there is now space to share knowledge that isn't mediated, you know between the government; where it could be Squamish to Squamish. So, I'm pretty excited about that, too. I think that's where the knowledge needs to be.

Nahanee's memory work is clearly for herself, her daughter, and her own community – not for Canadian education or Canada's national narratives:

Definitely my community first, right? My own Squamish community . . . the place where I come from is where it starts . . . I even think of it as things that I wish I knew as a younger woman. So, my audience is even like a younger version of myself. How would I have liked to understand this when I was eighteen? . . . I'm also the mother of a girl and so raising her of course has just strengthened my activism to make the world a safer space.

When asked whether the idea of 'the archive' resonates with her, she offers that hers is indeed a project of archiving, but not about the 'capital A archive'. She speaks at length about the harm colonial archives have caused through exclusively settler perspectives, and depicting Indigenous peoples as ancient, savage, powerless and so on. While Nahanee sees fixing those archives and disrupting their stories as important tasks, she is working towards a different, separate, Squamish archive, one that is community-controlled and not mediated by settler institutions. Nahanee offers

clear epistemological questioning over whose knowledge counts and who retains control. In refusing to prop up colonial narratives or recolonize her community's stories, hers is a sovereign memory project like Cole's. Her modes of practicing memory, through oral history, photography, media art and connecting to her younger self, may embrace conventional historicizing media, but her approach shifts the emphasis from storying about to storying for. Perhaps most crucial is Nahanee's desired outcome: a safer world for Indigenous women.

Monique Mojica

Mojica, a Guna and Rappahannock performing artist based in Tkaronto (Toronto, Canada), also describes her memory practices as reclaiming her identity outside of colonial power. Mojica's recent production, *Izzy M: The Alchemy of Enfreakment*, follows the story of a woman who learns to disappear herself as a way of resisting her experiences in psychiatric institutions and sideshows. Mojica includes childhood memory; embodied knowledge, accessed and engaged through performance; intergenerational connection; and listening to the Land among her memory practices. Resonating strongly with Nahanee's and Cole's stories, Mojica describes the need to remember 'who we were' pre-colonial contact as part of a process of becoming whole again:

I know that on the path to being whole, on the path of digging and clawing my way out of the . . . hole of all the different oppressions that have come and made us exiles on our own land, internal refugees under siege for more than 500 years, that remembering who we were in 1491 has been essential. And finding ways not to identify myself by virtue of those oppressions alone.

Mojica comes from a long line of Indigenous performers, which she refers to as a continuum of four generations. Remembering family stories and reconnecting with ancestral knowledge is central to her memory work. She describes her dramaturgical research as exploring personal, 'refracted' memories contained in family stories, many of which have arrived through her childhood perspective:

That memory work was also what it was like to spend time in Brooklyn as a little kid. My mom would bring me Friday night, pick me up Sunday night. I would be . . . there alone with the old people. And in this house of mirrors: mirrors everywhere in this house with knickknacks and salt and pepper shakers shaped like Indian heads, you know, in this china cabinet. And the way that I felt myself slipping into mirrors, the way that mirrors go on forever . . . So, it's different levels of refraction, refracting stories.

Mojica's work is motivated by healing intergenerational wounds. She speaks at some length about working over many years to bring her play, *Izzy M: The Alchemy of Enfreakment*, to the theatre:

In the piece that I'm still working and re-working . . . I started to look at sideshow and freakshow because I knew that my mother had been in a sideshow as a child, and my family had performed in the sideshow at a place that . . . the family always just called Canarsie Carnival. So, doing archival research I found that [it] . . . was actually called the Golden City Amusement Park and it was a competitor to Coney Island. So, I started to look at some of the all rage, resistance, shame, that my mother carried, and that she had passed on. And where I carry my mother's shame, where I carry my mother's rage. My mother uses that word, 'freak'. Said, 'They're lookin' at me. They're lookin' at me like I'm a freak'.

In this case, archival research enabled Mojica to trace pieces of her family's history, and to connect this to broader stories of First Peoples across Turtle Island presented as savage Others to be

gawked at in colonial exhibitions. Mojica also turns to her own body as an archive of feelings and sensations passed on by the women in her family. She deliberately awakens ancestral memories through deep improvisational practices, accessing time beyond her lived memory or officially documented histories.

Mojica also remembers by connecting to the Land. She explains, 'The depository for that work [remembering] is my body. That my body is the archive and as an Indigenous person . . . the Land is our archive'. She reflects further,

The stories are in the Land. And I think that there's something that sustains me when people say to us, 'oh well, you've lost your language, well, you've lost your culture, well, you lost-' Well, you know, bullshit! I didn't lose anything. I wasn't careless and it fell out of my pocket on my way to school, you know? It was forcibly removed. But as long as the land is there, as long as the rivers are there, as long as we remain connected and open enough to be receptors and transmitters, the stories are there. And there are certain things that we do in order to open the doors and windows for that knowledge to . . . reappear, for it to come through. And that's why we do ceremony, you know . . . So, if we position ourselves properly, that knowledge hasn't gone anywhere; nothing's lost.

For Mojica, trusting Indigenous processes for connecting to the stories of the Land through relationship, ceremony and embodied knowledge opens new possibilities for understanding Indigenous histories of cultural loss. These stories allow her to story herself and her family anew.

Art-making is also central to Mojica's body and ancestral memory, as well as a means to share her work:

I've had the experience of being shown and remembering things that I could not have known . . . and then find that it was so. And sometimes that information came to me in places of deep improv to find the information I was looking for to create performance . . . and later on, to find out it was so . . . that I can trust that, and that it's true . . . The things that are true are not only things that are provable or that some white man has written in a book.

Mojica depicts her memory work as a process of 'picking up the fragments' of memory from various sources, piecing them together, and offering them back in sovereign ways, resisting objectifying, gazes:

If all you have is fragments, gathering those fragments, finding ways to make whole out of what's been so violently shattered, the rejoicing when you find the other side of the story, when you're able to pick up the path, when you can find the footprints, when you can stand on ancestral land and say, 'I'm remembering things I never knew!' You know? It's not only about remembering things that happened in my life . . . I'm remembering on a deeper cellular level. Memory work, for me, has been remembering beyond my lifetime, and finding ways to pull that knowledge through the centuries, through the levels, up from the heart of the Earth.

Mojica's story, like Cole's, offers a clear ontological intervention into modes of memory and what constitutes an archive. Memory, for Mojica, is contained in bodies, in the Land, in the spirit world; and it is accessed through creativity and making. Mojica's work, like Cole's, draws from epistemologies embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing – the knowledges that exist in relationship with ancestors, the remembering and speaking Land, and her own deep, cellular, extra-linguistic body and being. Like Nahanee, Mojica's words reflect a strong sense of sovereign memory making, explicitly offering her work as an alternative to colonial narratives on the one hand, while assisting in healing from colonial experiences on the other hand. All three storytellers are clearly

motivated by the vision of offering future generations Indigenous ways of knowing and recognizing themselves. All three recognize the need to piece together fragments through Indigenous modes of remembering in order to tell their stories more honestly, more self-determinedly.

Alice Williams

Williams, a well-known Anishinaabe quilt artist and Elder who lives in Curve Lake First Nation, (in Ontario, Canada), explains that her quilting practice remembers, and reminds us to remember, Anishinaabe stories and teachings that arise in relationship with Creation – the water, the Land, plants, animals, sky world and medicines. Through her quilting, Williams insists on Anishinaabe presence, bringing this together with her layered personal heritage and generations of blanket makers before her.

For Williams, quilting is about remembering and celebrating her mixed ancestry.⁵ Through it, she foregrounds Anishinaabe culture as living presence in connection to wider quilting traditions.⁶ As she explains,

In the centre of my quilts, I usually have an Anishinaabe picture. By that, I mean animals or birds that figure heavily in the culture . . . We are part of the natural world but we get a lot of our values and directions through the natural world. And so, I honour that and put it in the centre of my quilts. That is the heritage that my mother gave me. She is Anishinaabe from northwestern Ontario, Trout Lake, Lac Seul territory . . . My father was white, and I represent the culture, the heritage he gave me, in my quilts, by making conventional quilt blocks that white women do and have re-invented since their trip across the ocean to this land. So, I use those quilting blocks to frame my pictures or to decorate my central theme. But also, somewhere in the central picture, I always put in the medicine wheel. And that is a reminder of the teachings that we live by.

Williams describes her role as a quilter as part of a generational history of women's work:

I make quilts, a form of blanket making, and I'm very proud to partake in work that women have done all through the ages. Women are blanket makers, which brings warmth and comfort to the family. And also, many times they tell a story, and so the stories can also be passed on through the help of blankets and the design of the blankets.

Adding Anishinaabe images, voices and stories into quilting (as a form of blanket-making that 'white women do') could be understood as akin to inserting Indigenous stories into the colonial archive. But, like other storytellers, Williams has a deep understanding of what makes her memory work devotedly sovereign, even if she does not use this language herself: Williams' quilts-as-memory-practice are explicitly for Anishinaabe people. In this way, her quilts are creating spiritual and cultural memory spaces that resist colonial patriarchy:

We get our guidance and teachings from Creation. We have four directions. A lot of Indigenous Peoples all over the world talk about the four directions. And to us they are sacred because Creation happened in four sacred directions. And I honour those teachings, those teachings which give us guidance on how to live in a good way on this earth. Our life, our lifestyles, our daily lives have been so horribly interrupted and perverted by the invaders' patriarchal, capitalistic values that some of us have to have reminders of connecting back to keep our connection to our ancestors and to all of Creation.

She quilts reminders for Anishinaabeg to enact their sovereign relationships with the sacred, beyond stories of settler contact. She explained, 'I am Anishinaabe. I have ties to this land . . . from

time beyond memory. And I want to help remind people, Anishinaabeg, that their connection to this land goes very, very deeply’.

At times, Williams’ practice also aims to remember and circulate Indigenous perspectives and memories of others. Many of her quilts are collaborative – assemblages of patches contributed on themes like the environment; missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people; residential schools; and the truth and reconciliation process. Although they do occasionally include settler contributions, these quilts ‘help Anishinaabe voices be heard’ as they circulate across Turtle Island. Compellingly, Williams describes her quilts as ‘working quilts’ that should not be ‘shelved somewhere’. She insists on Anishinaabe presence: ‘All these women’s stories, all the people’s stories who never get heard, I wanted their voice to be seen and heard and read’.

Williams’ quilts, taken as sovereign and living archives of Anishinaabe knowledges, relationships, stories and voices, carry Indigenous memory predominantly for Indigenous peoples. While she also shares her work with settler governments, organizations and artists, Williams’ quilting is devotedly Anishinaabe and ‘mindful of the gifts of Creation’. Williams’ work deepens the notion of the archive, extending how memory might be accessed and circulated. Like Cole and Mojica, she amplifies stories from Creation, expressing that there are many generations and relatives present in her quilts. Williams describes herself as active in the resistance in every breath she takes. Having made more than 450 quilts since 1980 (Gehl, 2018), Williams’ commitments to the sovereignty of memory are continual and prolific. As with the other storytellers, Williams circulates individual and family stories (her own and others’) creatively retold through Indigenous frameworks. She takes up a typically settler crafting practice and decolonizes the medium by quilting from a distinctly Indigenous epistemological and ontological paradigm. What appears in her quilts are teachings from Creation, stories of relationship to Land, reminders to Anishinaabe people of who they are and what they know, resonating with Robinson’s call to not simply be included in settler spaces but to create sovereign spaces.

The immense value of the understandings provided by these four storytellers cannot be overstated. Dominant memory projects and modes tell both settler and Indigenous stories from settler perspectives, fail to account for Indigenous ways of being and knowing, and relegate Indigenous peoples to the past in harmful ways. Cole, Nahanee, Mojica and Williams extend and transcend these limited ways of remembering, decentering the settler and taking up Indigenous storytelling, shaking up understandings of memory. These storytellers reclaim and retell pasts, while offering up vital Indigenous presents and futures.

Discussion and conclusion

This series of sovereign Indigenous memory projects represents a refusal of settler frameworks, and a grounding in Indigenous understandings and ways of being, profoundly challenging institutional understandings of the archive and dominant conceptions of memory. The storytellers recognize legacies of colonization, but also legacies of Indigenous knowledges and cosmologies. Their memory practices are not efforts to simply right the colonial archive, nor are they insertions into colonial narratives; instead, they remember different things, for different purposes, on different timelines, with distinct modes and mechanisms for accessing, producing, collecting and circulating memory. Their work, in concert with Indigenous scholars cited throughout this article, extends not only the epistemological basis of the archive: questioning whose knowledge is kept, accessed, and circulated, by whom, and for what purposes (Eichhorn, 2013; Mbembe, 2015). It also expands the ontology of memory: pushing memory scholars to expand their understandings of what is possible to remember, and how memory is accessed and shared (Hunt, 2016; Nagam, 2011).

The storytellers in this project offer alternatives to dominant memory modes, reclaiming sovereignty not only over Indigenous stories but also over the very practices of memory work. Four ways of practicing, accessing and circulating memory emerge as especially important to them. First, all four storytellers engage in creative or artistic practices. Creative modes of remembering offer alternative paradigms for what can and should be remembered and how (well beyond institutionalized archives, school curricula, or commemoration), reflecting the long-standing centrality of creativity in Indigenous communities (Simpson, 2011). Second, their stories turn to the body as an integral source of knowledge and memory, as particularly evident in Cole's and Mojica's practices. This reflects Robinson and Martin's (2016) understanding, that 'some of the most powerful and integral ways in which knowledge is produced, conveyed and understood is through the body' (p. 11). For the storytellers in our project, the body is a living archive – a repository and transmitter of memories, sensations, histories, ways of being and relations – and a way of keeping the embodied nature of memory going (Nagam, 2011). Third, many of these storytellers also depicted the Land as an archive – as an entity with distinct memories. And fourth, their ontological conception of memory is distinctly Indigenous – viewing memory as reciprocal and relational, networked across generations, throughout time, and among all beings (TallBear, 2016).

What we learn from the storytellers in our project, alongside Indigenous scholars, is that settler-dominant memory projects too often fail to account for Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and relating to memory (Luker, 2017; Nagam, 2011). Limiting memory to artefacts, records or even oral history, overlooks what is known and held in other ways – through bodies, relations, creative practice, ceremony and in the Land. Furthermore, it perpetuates damaging myths that colonization has effectively assimilated Indigenous knowledges. It is thus pressing to expand what we consider memory and how we understand the archive – to make possible entirely different worlding narratives, different futurities, about remembering and making anew (Boissoneau, 2016; Recollet, 2018).

Settler lenses and frameworks too often eclipse the vibrancy of Indigenous cultures, relegating Indigenous peoples to the past (Nagam, 2011), thereby enabling the denial of ongoing colonization. This relieves the settler state of its responsibility for nation-to-nation diplomacy, and allows for continual exploitation of Indigenous lands, labour and bodies (Tuck and Yang, 2014). Furthermore, Cole's and Nahanee's stories illuminate that cutting members of Indigenous nations off from their rich cultural legacies, obscures the possibilities of vibrant Indigenous presents and futures. As Mojica expresses, these damaging narratives 'fragment our stories'.

In response, the four storytellers rescue the deep past – time immemorial – by opening spaces in which ancient – but not lost – knowledge can be received. From quilted teachings from Creation to improvisation for performance, reflective relationship with ancestors and continued connection to community, they explicitly engage memory to generate sovereignty. As Williams says, memory work can help us to 'remember who we are'. Sovereign memory, as seen here, does not focus on colonial trauma, nor does it seek to insert Indigenous people and stories into state archives. Sovereign memory, we learn, is much more than this – it is memory that exists beyond confrontations with colonization; memory about and from Land, spirit, knowledge, gender, power, creativity and relationships. This is a powerful, future-oriented circulation of Indigenous memory.

These storytellers insist upon a shift that is both timely and pressing in this era of national reconciliation. While these projects effectively disrupt the archive in crisis, we view these memory projects as vital in and of themselves; sovereign memory is not simply for settlers to, as Williams says, 'see our stuff'. These stories present ontological and epistemological shifts to remembering that can open understandings of Indigenous presence. The four memory projects shared in this article are only a few of countless Indigenous practices that engage memory towards sovereignty.

Resistant memory practices that unsettle the archive are everywhere if we choose to look beyond monuments, or to follow where they point as they are toppling.

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Notes

1. We are referring here to ‘the archive’ as institutions vested with power to record, remember and circulate history. This includes institutionalized archives, as well as other public history efforts, like commemorations, monuments and educational curricula (Burton, 2005). The scare quotes question the authority of institutionalized apparatus to the exclusion of other modes of memory making.
2. Access the project at: www.agingactivisms.org/manifestingresistance
3. See: The People of Curve Lake First Nation (2017).
4. Given that this work was in the planning stages at the time of this interview, the authors cannot offer a full description of the artist’s concrete works. She has, however, as part of her broader decolonial memory practice, designed an interactive game called *Sínulhkay and Ladders*, which showcases another example of her resistant design work. See: <https://decolonizingpractices.org>
5. Williams’ quilts often feature a symbol from her Anishinaabe culture in the centre – often geometric or floral, sometimes from a traditional story, other times images from the land – with quilt blocks surrounding that she describes as more typically European in style. She describes her quilts and offers extensive photographs of these on her website: <http://www.pimaatisiwin-quilts.com>.
6. Resonating with Driskill (2016), McEwan (2003) and Chan Fung Yi (2012).

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