



Collective Trauma and the Sustainability of Indigenous Identity Through Storytelling

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Abstract

Collective indigenous trauma has been caused by the colonialism and forced displacement, cultural oppression, violence by their host nations, and other processes of socialization. These processes occurred in some of the geographical and cultural locations. Besides the psychological impact that these processes had on these communities, they are seen to have endangered the indigenous worldview, language, and method of knowing to extinction. This essay discusses the significance of storytelling, which is the cultural process itself, among the Indigenous. In this case, it is proved that storytelling assists the Indigenous to deal with collective trauma and preserve their identity in terms of collective trauma theory. Collective trauma history theories together with the Indigenous theory. The paper determined that narration is crucial to maintenance of relational worldviews. Moreover, storytelling enables these communities to evade the intergenerational trauma; and indeed, storytelling leads to cultural continuity despite the general tendency to be marginalized. The study in its conclusion gave the finding that we must revisit the popular theory of trauma through the Indigenous process of storytelling. The research also came up with the fact that we should consider the art of storytelling a live knowledge rather than cultural knowledge.

Keywords: Collective Trauma, Indigenous Identity, Storytelling, Cultural Sustainability, Trauma Studies

Introduction

The total misery that indigenous people have suffered the world over; that is, through colonization, loss of indigenous land, assimilation, and through common destruction of indigenous traditions and culture has contributed a lot to the history experienced by the indigenous people. Such traumatizing events have not only occurred in history as episodes but can as well be considered in form of underlying structures. Different researchers of the cultural trauma theory and the history have mentioned that the collective aspect of cultural

trauma occurs when it affects the identity and memory of a people (Alexander et al., 2004). Among the indigenous people, collective trauma has not only been identified as an individual and suffering, but also social relationships and relation with the past and place (Kirmayer et al., 2014).

Moreover, the frameworks pertaining to the historical trauma allow explaining the fact that the effects of colonization are longitudinal in their manifestation and extend past the present, they bring grief, loss, and marginalization to our communities (Brave Heart, 1998). Thus, it is clear that to



comprehend how the process of indigenous peoples being able to preserve their identity after the shock of the occurrence of a traumatic experience, there must be analyses and integration beyond the models of individualistic healing and the integration of culturally-imbedded analyses.

Indigenous cultures are based on storytelling as the most crucial system to make sure that the memory is not lost, the knowledge is transferred, and the identity is preserved. The history of survival, resistance and relational accountability is common in the narrative practices of indigenous people. These narratives assist the narrators to associate with the greater society, their culture, and their unity to the land. Cruickshank (1998) argues that narrative representation of events is not all that the Indigenous can do in terms of storytelling. Instead, narrative knowledge is performed by means of narration; storytelling is a social process. Indigenous narrative of storytelling is usually oral contrary to the Western literary culture that dwells on the written word and the linearity of time. The position of cultural sustainability as a storytelling suggests the reader a new paradigm of trauma that does not accentuate the role of the written word and personalized subjectivity that Caruth (1996) does.

Review of Literature

Trauma theory has been developed in Western scholarship with the main concern on the individual psychic discontinuity, fragmentation in the memory and the retrospective narration (Caruth, 1996). Although influential, such models run the danger of universalising trauma as a purely psychological occurrence that has nothing to do with collective and cultural settings. The cultural trauma theory extends the latter scope and investigates how collective identity and symbolic systems are transformed due to the collective experience of history (Alexander et al., 2004).

Colonial history academic literature also highlights cumulative, intergenerational damages as the result of colonisation embedded in the structure of communities (Brave Heart, 1998; Kirmayer et al., 2014). These frameworks offer a valuable redress to

individualised conceptions of the trauma but can be too careless when it comes to paying attention to Indigenous epistemologies.

Indigenous scholars claim that telling stories is not an act of expression only but is epistemological. Smith (1999) is critical of the Western research paradigms that marginalise the Indigenous knowledge systems and argues in favour of paradigms based on community accountability. On the same note, Wilson (2008) conceptualises research as such, as a relational and ceremonial process within networks of responsibility. In this view, storytelling is a core practice in which cultures are maintained by communities.

Cruickshank (1998) proves that Indigenous narratives are dynamic social practices and not a historical map of the past. Simpson (2017) also states that storytelling serves as a sovereignty and relational knowledge preservation practice amidst colonial forces, which can be described as Indigenous resurgence. Cultural continuity should, hence, be perceived more as dynamic continuity as an active, adaptive continuity rather than passive preservation, achieved through narrative practices.

Theoretical Framework

The paper unites the collective trauma theory, the Indigenous epistemologies, and cultural sustainability. According to the collective trauma theory, the collective identity and the shared meaning systems that transform trauma into socially important entities leads to the social relevance of trauma (Alexander et al., 2004). This is further developed in historical trauma research that supports the existence of psychological and structural intergenerational effects of colonial violence (Brave Heart, 1998; Kirmayer et al., 2014).

One way of questioning western ideas of knowledge and subjectivity is through indigenous epistemologies that highlight relationality, reciprocity, and accountability (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Knowledge is perceived to come out of interrelations between individuals, land, ancestors, and nonhumans. These relationships are maintained through storytelling by enshrining memory into the



social practice. Simpson (2017) points out that resurgence of the Indigenous population relies on the renewal of narrative traditions that uphold relational sovereignty.

Collectively, these frameworks make it possible to analyze storytelling as an affective, epistemic, and political practice that helps to maintain the identity under the conditions of communal trauma.

Methodology

This paper will use a quality, interpretive research based on Indigenous research ethics. In line with Smith (1999) and Wilson (2008), the study does not involve extractive interaction with the Indigenous stories, but rather focuses on contextual sensitivity and relational responsibility. These act as sources of publicly available Indigenous testimonial writings, recorded oral histories, and academic discussions of community storytelling programs.

Narrative analysis focuses upon thematic trends, narrative patterns, and language practices by which trauma and identity are expressed. Specific focus is made on the use of the stories in regulating the conveying of painful histories, as it can be seen as an element of historical trauma scholarship (Brave Heart, 1998; Kirmayer et al., 2014). Translation and textualisation are also taken into account in the analysis as acts of translation and interpretation that might result in epistemic loss (Cruikshank, 1998).

Discussion

Indigenous storytelling is often seen as a way to transmit cultural memory and keep alive what has been pushed to the margins by the mainstream histories. The cultural trauma theory states that collective memory redesigns identity in cases where communities symbolically explain traumatic experiences (Alexander et al., 2004). Displacement, violence, and resistance are placed in the context of relational patterns which connect the past, present, and future in the indigenous stories. This is because storytelling is not a form of dead writing used as a repository of information, as Cruikshank (1998) notes but rather an act of living history which comes alive whenever people interact with each other.

Intergenerational trauma also occurs through narrative strategies. The historical trauma scholarship highlights the fact that the transmission of trauma is social and cultural (Brave Heart, 1998; Kirmayer et al., 2014). Traumatic expression in indigenous storytelling tends to be governed by metaphor, ritualisation of telling as well as culturally particular silences. These norms enable groups of people to pass information without replicating mental abuses. The identity is therefore maintained not by erasing the past but by the culturally based ways of remembrance.

The central focus of this process is language. Indigenous languages do not tell the relational and cosmological meanings in a way that can be simply translated by the colonial languages. Smith (1999) emphasizes that the sovereignty of epistemology requires the maintenance of Indigenous systems of knowledge in their own languages. Although translation has the potential to make a person more visible and politically noticed, it will lead to the flattening of relationships. The aspect of language revitalisation is thus a part of the trauma recovery as well as cultural sustainability.

Telling of stories is also a political tool. Simpson (2017) states that narrative resurgence lies at the core of Indigenous sovereignty and resistance. Indigenous stories have been used as mobilisation in legal, educational and activist practices to contest dominant histories and seek reparative justice. Nevertheless, commodification of Indigenous stories is morally questionable in alignment with the criticism of extractive research (Smith, 1999). The sustainable practices in storytelling necessitate community management and the cultural procedures.

Conclusion

According to this article, story-telling is a vital cultural experience in which Indigenous people are able to preserve identity following collective trauma. Storytelling works as a kind of cultural sustainability by safeguarding cultural memory, mediating intergenerational damage and facilitating political opposition. The re-evaluation of the trauma theory with the use of the Indigenous narrative practices



confronts the androcentric and text-oriented theories (Caruth, 1996) and is more consistent with relational and collective approaches to healing (Alexander et al., 2004; Kirmayer et al., 2014). Indigenous storytelling is neither just a continuation of culture but a part of reparative justice and decolonial futures. The study of trauma, resilience and cultural continuity needs to further focus on the use of Indigenous epistemologies and community-led approaches (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008) in future research.

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