

## Editorial Introduction. Indigenous Historiographies, Place, and Memory in Decolonizing Educational Research, Policy, and Pedagogic Praxis: Special Issue in Honour and Memory of Professor Michael Marker (1951-2021)

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## Editorial Introduction

### **Indigenous Historiographies, Place, and Memory in Decolonizing Educational Research, Policy, and Pedagogic Praxis: Special Issue in Honour and Memory of Professor Michael Marker (1951-2021)**

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Writing from the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam) people, we are honoured to share this special issue of *The Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education (JCIE)* in honour, memory, and celebration of the life and work of Professor Michael Marker. Professor Marker was an Arapaho scholar, educator, storyteller, Elder, musician, gentle activist, and long-term relation of the Lummi Nation.

Professor Marker earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at Eastern Washington University in 1975 and a Master of Education at Western Washington University in 1987. He completed his PhD in Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in 1995. His dissertation was entitled *Lummi Stories from High School: An Ethnography of the Fishing Wars from the Late 1970s*. From 1997-2021, Professor Marker was a professor in the Department of Educational Studies, specializing in Indigenous Education. He served for many years as Director of Ts'kel, an integrated graduate-level concentration for advancing Indigenous access and Indigenous content in education and across disciplines throughout UBC.

Professor Marker's work contributed significantly to local and international studies in the fields of Indigenous knowledge, educational policy, and history of teaching. He drew on his own experience as an Indigenous person, both personally and professionally, to inform his writing. Marker published widely in leading academic journals, including *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, *History of Education Review*, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *History of Education*, *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, *Discourse*, *Urban Education*, *Paedagogica Historica*, *Counterpoints*, *Harvard Educational Review*, and *BC Studies*.

Professor Marker described his scholarship as follows:

My work is in ethnohistory of education and explores the politics of Indigenous knowledge primarily in the Coastal Salish region. My research has foregrounded the ways that colonizing powers have imposed ideologies and cosmologies on Aboriginal communities and the remarkable resistance strategies of Native people. This work also notes the ways that relationships to land and colliding worldviews continue to be animated by both the mainstream denial of culture and the culture of denial—in contrast to Indigenous holisms. My writing examines the varieties of hegemonies that neutralize a legitimate Indigenous voice and which are continuing to dismiss the Indigenous polemical Other as an exoticized outside case scenario. My assertion is that healing and relationship building can only come of a rigorous decolonizing related to exposing the persistence and pestilence of technocracy and historical amnesia within schools and communities.<sup>1</sup>

In his academic work and in his life, Professor Marker engaged a number of broad themes, including:

- coloniality and epistemological racism,
- history and politics of Indigenous Education,
- place-based pedagogies in the Coast Salish region and traditional ecological knowledge,
- the deep meaning of places in the context of violent disruptions of settler colonialism,
- history and cosmology of the bordered/borderless Coast Salish world,
- animate landscapes as methodology for inquiry,
- identity and respectful research with Indigenous communities,
- culturally responsive education informed by Indigenous epistemologies,
- deconstructing and decolonizing higher education/university,
- decolonizing educational research,
- Indigenous resistances,
- dismantling Eurocentric academic borders and practices, and
- troubling STEM/STEAM.

The articles in this special issue are contributions from scholars, educators, researchers, colleagues, former students, and those inspired by Professor Marker's courageous, disruptive, and necessarily political scholarship. As one of the first Indigenous scholars in the Faculty of Education at UBC, he worked endlessly to expose and decolonize the mainly Eurocentric scholarship and hegemony of the institution to make space for and amplify colonized voices, ontologies, epistemologies, and relationalities of Indigenous peoples and of Indigenous lands. Despite oppression and resistance, he never detoured from his deeply held convictions—not even in the last days of his life. The articles in this journal honour not only Professor Marker's spirited scholarship, but the passionate spirit of Michael himself.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to: <https://network.expertisefinder.com/experts/michael-marker>.

**Former Ph.D. student Alannah Young and colleague Eduardo Jovel** begin the special issue with their honouring songs, which were recorded around a sacred fire in memory and celebration of Professor Marker. As Dr. Young's oral citation for the first song indicates, her honouring song is a "Public Coast Salish Song." It was kept alive by Ed Leon Sr., from Sts'ailes, when Indigenous intellectual traditions had been outlawed. Similarly, Michael encouraged us to bring back the "outlawed" knowledges, in classes, through critical analysis, anti-colonial readings, and anti-imperial discussion. He would create educational space for that knowledge regeneration to move through the people. Michael encouraged us to move beyond the text knowledge, and he helped us to get outside, to the outdoor classroom, and to keep learning from Creation.

Following the first song, Dr. Jovel shares the "Healing Song" and acknowledges that every time we light the fire, we honor the ancestors. Michael has become an ancestor now. He's an ancestor that we can call – a relative. His teachings and his kindness, but also his resilience, were transferred to those who came into closer contact with him, especially in an educational context, so his legacy is still with us.... Singing is part of our life, and ceremony is a way of honoring. ... Each song has its own medicine.

**Heather E. McGregor and Marc Higgins** elaborate further on the concepts of Indigenous place and land-based knowledge and knowing in the first written article of the special issue entitled, "Relations in the Alluvial Zone: Place and Indigenous Knowledges in Michael Marker's Scholarship." In this piece, the authors provide a meaningful review of some of Marker's most significant scholarship. They begin by highlighting Michael's call to recognize the importance of "place" in education, history, and Indigeneity as an agent of knowledge, as well as a tool for analysis. Building on this conceptualization, McGregor and Higgins' work emphasizes Marker's scholarship of institutional relationality in the *alluvial zone*—a zone that opens a place for the possibilities of Western and Indigenous knowledges to come together in struggle, activism, and solidarity. Other crucial themes from Marker's scholarship that this article illuminates include: recognizing local ancestors; placing knowledges; sustaining land relationships; engaging responsibilities; nurturing spirits; and confronting place refusals. The authors end the article by encouraging scholars and educators to continue to share the gifts of Marker's teachings as they continue their decolonizing journeys in their own alluvial zones, whether it be in schools or other institutions.

**Kari Grain** delves deeply into Marker's scholarship of alluvial zones through the concept of *convergences*, in her article entitled: "What We See as One River Is a Convergence of Many: Three Convergence Commitments in University Teaching." Grain introduces three conceptual spaces of convergence informed by Marker's scholarship as a form of personal praxis commitments to decentre the Western hegemony of institutional spaces. Her convergence commitments include: locating of oneself; anamnesis (remembrance); and poetic, artistic, and storied methodologies. For Grain, these three convergence commitments represent meeting places/moments that allow for the pedagogical dissolution of concrete boundaries and compartmentalization, where borderless interfaces have the possibility to exist. Grain is moved by Michael's call to non-Indigenous scholars to question the "normative and ideological assumptions of universalized truth from modernist and scientific taxonomies of reality" (Marker, 2019, p. 510) and to "seek out Indigenous scholars and Indigenous critiques of the Western modernist hegemonies" (p. 510). Grain concludes her paper by softening and dissolving the

concrete wall of knowing and being. In doing so, she provides her readers with questions as pedagogical examples of the concept of alluvial zones found in Marker's pivotal scholarship.

**Gloria Lin** further extends Marker's work on alluvial zones as part of her research on decolonization and internationalization of higher education in her article: "Alluvial Zones of Decolonizing Internationalization of Higher Education." Lin employs Marker's concept of *alluvial zones* to explore the contradictions and tensions between discourses of internationalization and decolonization in higher education. Using personal story and the unearthing of colonial practices of institutions and markings of institutional structures, Lin's paper uncovers colonial and neoliberalist agendas that show how the international education phenomenon is rooted in university practices, cultures, and structures dominated by neocolonial priorities and hegemonic power relations. This neocolonial orientation of internationalization is a direct contradiction to institutional aims of decolonization and Indigenization, where land is not "a soulless commodity" (Marker, 2019, p. 501). Lin concludes by offering Marker's (2019) concept of the alluvial zone of paradigm shift that pushes for deep self-examination of institutional epistemic biases, ignorance, and dominance in order to facilitate a reimagined alluvial third space of decolonization—as turbulent, contested, and contradictory as it may be.

**Victor Brar** shares that Marker's teachings "provided the impetus for this inquiry...His wisdom has stretched the canvas upon which I now paint my thoughts" in: "'The Scream': Using the Visual Critical Pedagogy of Subversive Indigenous Art in the Elementary Classroom to Discomfort the Comforted and Activate the Empathic, Ethical, and Relational Dimensions of Reconciliation." Brar's article argues that the British Columbia curriculum, with its focus mainly on textual forms of knowledge, emphasizes the distant, factual, non-relational view of colonial history. This approach, Brar articulates, falls short of engaging K-12 students' and practitioners' emotional responsiveness or ethical responsibility, particularly with regard to the history and violence of Residential Schools in Canada. Through his personal experience with the Cree artist Kent Monkman's painting called "The Scream" (2017), Brar demonstrates how "The Scream" awakened his emotional and critical consciousness and motivated him to reimagine K-12 curriculum for his investigation. As such, Brar discusses the importance of bringing aesthetic education into the classroom, specifically the artwork of Indigenous artists, to raise an embodied awareness of the violent oppression of Indigenous people and to encourage a deeper emotive, ethical, and relational impetus to unearth truth and work toward genuine reconciliation.

**Daniel Gallardo Zamora's** article, "Embodying Milpa: Centering Place to Cultivate Polycultures of Reciprocity in Learning Environments," illuminates his lived experiences as a Mestizx educator from Mexico, as well as his embodied teachings and learnings of *milpa*. Zamora begins with a Nahua story that was told to him by his *abuelito*, to expose the perpetuation of the "myth of frozen exotic sameness" (Marker, 2003, p. 367), where due to colonial and capitalist agendas, the many colours of the ancestral seeds have been destroyed to the point where societal consciousness cannot even imagine anything but yellow corn. Zamora extends this violent cultural erasure and the colonial obsession with single truths to the homogenous curriculum of monocultural education, which teaches students to value whiteness, Eurocentrism, and capitalism—rendering Indigenous knowledge primitive. In an attempt to disrupt the centeredness on individuality toward ontological pluralism, relationality, and entanglements with the land, Zamora proposes the metaphor of the cultivation of *milpa*, an

inherited ancestral knowledge system, that not only supports a growth of diverse crops, but also acknowledges a deep, intimate intention to nurture self, community, and the land in wholeness, care, and reciprocity.

**Sharon Jarvis's** article, "Michael Marker Dialogues with Francis on Primacy of Place: Advocating for Papaschase First Nation," is presented as a conversation between herself and two interlocutors, Dr. Michael Marker and Francis, inspired by the Pope's 2022 visit to *manito sakahikan*, also known as Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta. This place, she notes, holds spiritual significance for Indigenous people, including the Papaschase First Nation and Jarvis's family, who are in ancestral relationship with the lake and surrounding landscape. Jarvis composes the imagined dialogue in three acts, which allows her to unpack and critique the multiple layers of dispossession that Indigenous communities have undergone. Specifically, she critiques the concept of *terra nullius*, "an element of what became known as the Doctrine of Discovery, which gave license to European colonial powers to claim so-called vacant land in the name of their sovereigns." Drawing from Marker's scholarly work, the current and earlier popes' homilies and decrees, as well as her own childhood stories, dreams, and family photos, Jarvis contrasts "the Western view that one can own the land with a traditional Indigenous emphasis on the importance of sharing and caring with and for the land."

**Sam Rocha**, in his contribution "How Sweet the Ground: The Metaphysical Vision of Michael Marker," provides deeply personal glimpses of Michael as a scholar, colleague, friend, father, teacher, folk musician, and "unwritable" human being. Drawing from his conversations and email correspondence with Marker, Rocha illuminates Michael's idea of the "metaphysical demand" of place, in part, by locating it in relation to the work of Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux). "For Michael," Rocha writes, "the Great Spirit speaks in the voice of the Land and those who mute it do so to escape and hide from its authority." Distinctions between the sacred and secular blur in Indigenous knowledge systems, as Marker illustrated in his 2018 article, "There is no *place of nature*; there is only the *nature of place*." Rocha engagingly reveals some of Marker's "cosmic vision" through juxtaposing memories of their encounters in "various convivial sites of intellectual and artistic work." An artifact from one such get-together, a sound-recording of their musical improvisations on the hymn "Amazing Grace," is included as part of Rocha's contribution.

**Cecilia Morales, with Nakos Marker, Yonina Marker, and Miska Marker** remember Michael through their sharing of family photographs, documents, drawings, stories, and songs. Cecilia's stories of the year Michael spent teaching at Juneau-Douglas High School in Alaska, followed by his participation in the creation of the high school at Northwest Indian College at Lummi, document his anti-colonial, decolonizing, and anti-oppression advocacy on behalf of Indigenous students as well as others marginalized by ableism, racism, classism, and other forms of injustice and colonialism. Such moments as Michael handing out used books to students rather than detention slips, when forced by the Juneau high school administration to serve as hall monitor, reveal his creative activism and deep resistance against practices that serve to selectively push students out by making them feel unwelcome. In a different vein, this article also features excerpts from a fun curriculum that Michael devised for the first two of his three children who were being homeschooled. His doodles and naming and description of courses—science, for example, consisted of "Newton on Rollerblades 103," "Blow It Up, Clean It Up



104,” and “Shock and Talk 105” —exemplify the humor and creativity that Michael brought to all his projects and all aspects of his life. Finally, Michael’s family lovingly gifts the readers with four songs, thoughtfully selected specifically for this collection.

The contributors to this special issue found resonance with many of the influential works of Professor Michael Marker. One of the key themes that found its way into almost all the articles—whether the authors were writing about relationality, institutional commitments, international education, aesthetic education, primacy of place, embodying *Milpa*, or the metaphysical demand of place—was Marker’s concept of the *alluvial zone*, the term evoking “a transforming river delta” (2019, p. 503). As envisioned by Professor Marker, the alluvial zone comprises an elusive and complex place of contested epistemic, ontological, and axiological distinct “mixings.” As he explained, landscape elements combine (and don’t combine) to “shape the lines of emerging landforms and waters,” where although “the sediments unite in one sense, many elements and pieces remain in a suspended colloidal flux, sharing liquid time and space; not fused, but distinct and separate particles. Alluvial processes combine sediments at one level but the essences remain discrete at another level” (Marker, 2019, p. 503). The alluvium of mixing, Marker asserts, has “the potential to nurture a paradigm shift [that] recogniz[es] the sacredness of places [and] counter[s] a pervasive view of land as strictly a soulless commodity” (2019, p. 501). As editors, we found the continuous re-emergence of the concept of the alluvial zone to be very significant and relevant, given the current geopolitical realities, both locally and globally, and the need for understanding, valuing, and honouring the complexities of the world relationally and anew—something Professor Marker dedicated his heart and soul to doing as he called for Indigenous sovereignty and solidarity.

Professor Marker, in both his scholarly work as well as his music, encouraged a wide array of expression and saw this as an important avenue for decolonizing the academy. He wrote, for example, about the struggle, ultimately successful, of Dr. Patrick Stewart (2015), a member of the Nisga’a Nation and an architect, to write his PhD dissertation at the University of British Columbia in non-standard punctuation. Marker described how Stewart declined Standard English grammar and certain academic conventions, instead opting for a system using “spaces on pages that represented pauses and breaths as in giving a speech; text became images or patterns of an idea visually represented on a page” (2019, pp. 504-505). This better represented Stewart’s “Nisga’a sense of orality” (p. 504) and, Professor Marker argued, allowed for greater “expression of some aspects of Indigenous experience” (p. 504). Similarly, in one of Professor Marker’s last publications (2020) with Ph.D. student Shirley Anne Hardman of the Sto:lo people, they call upon educators to “destabilize the normal” (p. 298) in order to continue much needed institutional decolonization and indigenization. We are pleased, therefore, at the number of contributions to this special issue that appear in onto-epistemically decolonizing mediums. Moving away from traditional academic papers, many of these contributions include: remembrances, photographs, drawings, dialogue, and audio files for songs and stories. As a former doctoral student of Professor Marker noted, he would have approved of how the *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education* special issue “is reflecting the other ways of educating and knowing, [such as] through song and ceremony, through performance, or re-enacting our responsibilities to the rest of Creation and to the local peoples upon whose territories we are living” (Alannah Young, personal communication, September 21, 2023).

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