

## What No Means Indigenous Feminist Refusal to Library Extraction

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### Résumé de l'article

Les bibliothèques ont bénéficié de l'extraction des savoirs autochtones et des matériaux culturels à travers lesquels elles ont cherché à compléter leurs collections. Cela a conduit les communautés autochtones à se méfier de la recherche et des institutions de recherche, reconnaissant les méfaits profonds et l'exploitation de ces pratiques de recherche. Cet article entreprend une étude de cas du livre *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway* afin de révéler les façons dont la recherche et l'édition extractives, et les pratiques de collecte sont connues des communautés autochtones et refusées par elles. Cette discussion poursuit l'histoire de la publication et des collections de ce livre à travers le cadre du refus, une pratique féministe autochtone qui affirme la souveraineté autochtone et les pratiques de soins sur le savoir. Le refus doit être considéré comme un espace génératif (Tuck et Yang 2014a) et doit être perçus comme une invitation pour les bibliothèques à remettre en question et à évaluer de manière critique les principes fondamentaux de notre profession et de nos pratiques. Cet article remet en question trois hypothèses profondément ancrées dans les bibliothèques qui sont révélées par le refus : (1) que l'extraction est inévitable, (2) que la bibliothèque est le seul endroit approprié pour gérer les documents, et (3) que les communautés devraient être investies dans l'avenir de la bibliothèque. L'appel à reconceptualiser l'extraction par le refus est essentiel : les bibliothèques qui ne s'efforcent pas d'être réciproques et transformatrices dans leurs relations avec les peuples autochtones ne feront que constituer un obstacle à la résurgence autochtone. Au lieu de cela, nous devons reconceptualiser les pratiques en bibliothéconomie vers une pratique libératrice.

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# What No Means: Indigenous Feminist Refusal to Library Extraction

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## ABSTRACT

*Libraries have benefitted from the extraction of Indigenous Knowledges and cultural materials through which they have sought to complete collections. This has led Indigenous communities to distrust of research and research institutions, recognizing the deep harms and exploitation of these research practices. This article undertakes a case study of the book *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway* to reveal the ways in which extractive research, publishing, and collections practices are known to Indigenous communities and are refused by them. This discussion pursues the publication and collections history of this book through the framework of refusal, an Indigenous feminist practice that asserts Indigenous Sovereignty and care practices over Knowledge. Refusal should be viewed as a generative space (Tuck and Yang 2014a) and should be taken as an invitation for libraries to question and critically evaluate the very foundational principles of our profession and practices. This article challenges three deeply held library assumptions that are revealed through refusal: (1) that extraction is inevitable, (2) that the library is the only appropriate place to steward materials, and (3) that communities should be invested in the future of the library. The call to reconceptualize extraction through refusal is essential: libraries that do not strive to be reciprocal and transformational in their relationships with Indigenous peoples will only serve as a barrier to Indigenous resurgence. Instead, we must reconceptualize librarianship practices toward a liberatory practice.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous feminisms · library collections · refusal

## RÉSUMÉ

*Les bibliothèques ont bénéficié de l'extraction des savoirs autochtones et des matériaux culturels à travers lesquels elles ont cherché à compléter leurs collections. Cela a conduit les communautés autochtones à se méfier de la recherche et des institutions de recherche, reconnaissant les méfaits profonds et l'exploitation de ces pratiques de recherche. Cet article entreprend une étude de cas du livre *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway* afin de révéler les façons dont la recherche et l'édition extractives, et les pratiques de collecte sont connues des communautés autochtones et refusées par elles. Cette discussion poursuit l'histoire de la publication et des collections de ce livre à travers le cadre du refus, une pratique féministe autochtone qui affirme la souveraineté autochtone et les pratiques de soins sur le savoir. Le refus doit être considéré comme un espace génératif*

*(Tuck et Yang 2014a) et doit être perçus comme une invitation pour les bibliothèques à remettre en question et à évaluer de manière critique les principes fondamentaux de notre profession et de nos pratiques. Cet article remet en question trois hypothèses profondément ancrées dans les bibliothèques qui sont révélées par le refus : (1) que l'extraction est inévitable, (2) que la bibliothèque est le seul endroit approprié pour gérer les documents, et (3) que les communautés devraient être investies dans l'avenir de la bibliothèque. L'appel à reconceptualiser l'extraction par le refus est essentiel : les bibliothèques qui ne s'efforcent pas d'être réciproques et transformatrices dans leurs relations avec les peuples autochtones ne feront que constituer un obstacle à la résurgence autochtone. Au lieu de cela, nous devons reconceptualiser les pratiques en bibliothéconomie vers une pratique libératrice.*

**Mots-clés :** collections de bibliothèques · féminismes autochtones · refus

FOR centuries, libraries have seen relations and work with Indigenous communities as sites of extraction to fill our collections. There are many tensions between Indigenous epistemologies and library ethics, which Indigenous communities have critiqued and resisted since contact with settler researchers and their representative institutions (Loyer 2021; Lee 2019). Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2021, 1), a foundational Māori scholar, reminds libraries and researchers that “the word itself, ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary.” Similarly, Indigenous librarians, such as Cree-Métis librarian Deborah Lee (2019), have explained the ways in which Indigenous epistemologies foreclose the possibility of settler concepts of open information and dissemination. Within our research institutions, there have been and continue to be countless histories of researchers, especially scientists and social scientists, who have engaged with Indigenous communities, only to take Indigenous Knowledges,<sup>1</sup> important objects, tissue samples and the literal bodies of ancestors, and return to their institutions to store these Knowledges, materials and people in libraries, archives, and museums. This is done to achieve a sense of “completeness” or comprehensiveness, of which libraries ethically believe is in service to collective knowledge keeping (Simpson 2007) and destroys any trust or relationships that can be built with our institutions. However, archivist and scholar Rebecka Sheffield (2020) reminds information practitioners that completeness in information repositories such as libraries and archives are an impossibility, and that the pursuit of this completeness is a project of queer failure. Despite this failure, libraries maintain their goal of completeness and openness to

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1. Following Greg Younging’s *Elements of Indigenous Style A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples* (2018), I capitalize Knowledge in reference to Indigenous Knowledges. In Principle 13, Younging asserts that terms for Indigenous identities; Indigenous governmental, social, spiritual, and religious institutions; and Indigenous collective rights be capitalized. Other capitalized words in this article include Scroll, Story, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Nationhood, and Sovereignty. Where the K in Knowledge is capitalized, I am referring to Indigenous Knowledge and where it is not, I am referring to knowledge more broadly.

maintain power and control over the information landscape and to ensure their relevance as an institution. Libraries only seek to ensure and maintain library futures and we, as librarians, have long positioned our institutions as the “correct” and indeed only place that can properly steward and care for Knowledge and information. Such practices have led to a deeply extractive model of library collections practices that strengthens the power of the library at the expense of Indigenous communities. Libraries and other cultural heritage institutions benefit from being viewed as the appropriate repository for all information, where it can control access and the usage of these materials.

In this article, I present a case study of a contested book from our collection, *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway* by Selwyn Dewdney (1975). I follow the progression of the title, which was published by the University of Toronto Press and held by various institutions across Canada. Through this work, I theorize alongside Indigenous feminist practices of refusal as a means of understanding resistance to research and library extraction. In the second half of the case study, I reveal an Indigenous community response that left the library behind. In so doing, I investigate the ways in which acts of refusal are both an act of restorative justice and can be transformative for library practice. Indigenous feminist scholars tell the research community that refusal is a generative space that encourages practitioners to revisit their relations, ethics, and practices (Tuck and Yang 2014a). This pursuit of refusal reveals what the larger intentions and implications are for a library when an Indigenous community says no to collaboration. Importantly, I do not seek to rescue library futurity, but instead hope to push our practices into a relational space with Indigenous peoples so that our institutions will approach collaborative projects from a place of trust and be deserving of the labour of Indigenous communities. Through the case study of *The Sacred Scrolls*, I trace the publication, tensions, and subsequent reclamation of the material as an example of how refusal is an opportunity to rethink the role of the library in the world and to abandon extractive practices as a means to build relationships and trust. Woven within the story of this title, this work discusses the ways in which refusal reveals underlying assumptions that preclude libraries from working in reciprocity and trust with Indigenous communities. To conclude, I call for transformative practices that will elide a future wherein libraries are valued community partners that work with Indigenous peoples to strengthen partnerships working toward posterity.

To begin this article, I position myself and my ethic in relation to the Anishinaabeg Nations, these Lands, and these Knowledges. Positioning myself is an important first step in identifying how I come to this work and the teachers from whom I have learned. Revealing my positionality is not merely an act of researcher

ethics, but also allows me to affirm my commitment to this work and my hope that this article aligns with Indigenous liberation movements. From there, I discuss the methods I use to analyse this case study, a method which is further enriched by Indigenous Storywork (Archibald 2008). I then offer the first part of the case study, which is the initial research up until the publication of *The Sacred Scrolls* in 1975, in order to set the context, to which I will return in a subsequent section. To deepen our collective understanding of the latter half of the case study, I then turn to a theoretical discussion on Indigenous feminist practices of refusal, the extractive and invasive nature of collections work, and understanding refusal as a generative space. From there, I return to the second part of the case study, which details the subsequent history from its publication and collection in various library collections, including at my own institution, and its reclamation by Dr. Debby Wilson Danard to enrich the lives of Indigenous youth. Following this, I discuss three crucial assumptions that were made throughout the case study that the theoretical framework and methods of this article reveal, and these assumptions' implications for more collaborative and transformative work with Indigenous communities.

This article is a call to dream and to create a more just and transformational praxis that will bring our work in line with Indigenous epistemological ethics and stewardship, because it is libraries that must shoulder this reconciliatory labour. When libraries attempt to engage with Indigenous communities, those offers are often declined. Refusal is a rich, deep, and tense space for theorizing and visioning library praxis, but also an invitation to think about why communities say no and what work must be done on the library side to earn the trust and engagement of communities.

## Positionality and Ethics

To preface the discussion in this work, there are several important ethical and relational disclosures to position my relationships to Land, Knowledges, and Nations. Tracing my ancestry through Hong Kong and China, I am a settler who was born and raised, and has lived, in what we now know as Toronto. I am a librarian, and throughout this article, I interchangeably use the pronouns “I,” “we,” “us,” and “they” to refer to the collective of librarians who engage with Indigenous communities, Knowledges, and collections. This is done so to identify myself with life-promoting practices and to separate myself from extractive forms of collections works. However, I am also implicated in the extractive practices that we will discuss. As a librarian, I have worked with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and communities to learn about my obligations to the Lands and Waters that have been stewarded by the Anishinaabeg, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples and that have served as a

gathering place for many Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The teachings of these Lands have shaped my life and practice just as they have cared for and sustained me as a guest in these Nations. My commitment to upholding Indigenous sovereignties, especially in Knowledge and information practices, are due to my deep relations with my Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee teachers.

I have only engaged with *The Sacred Scrolls* as a title only where it was the source of appropriate contextual information, such as the nature and origins of Dewdney's relationship with Red Sky and the ethnographic and museological methods of research and gathering that created the volume. I have not read beyond the introductory and contextual information, as I know that the information contained within *The Sacred Scrolls* and the navigational text are not appropriate for me to know. I will not share the contents of the book, or any information about *The Sacred Scrolls* because those are secret Knowledges that were never intended by its creators to be published and widely disseminated. I do not share the contents and did not engage with them because I do not want to recreate the paradigms of extraction by further disseminating the contents of the title through the writing and publication of this article. Similarly, the contextual information of the use of the book and its reputation within the community as well as information about other Sacred Scrolls that were not published are shared forthwith with permission from the generous perspectives of Dr. Debby Wilson Danard and Robin King Stonefish. Their consent and Knowledge form the basis of the appropriate ethical scope of this article, and this work would not have been possible without their generosity and guidance. It is through their examples that refusal became clear as a framework for understanding Indigenous peoples' relationship to the library.

## Methods

In this article, I employ a combination of qualitative methods to examine *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway* and what these methods can reveal about library extraction and relationality. I do so to pursue different aspects of its journey, namely a case study, and Storywork (Flick 2018; Archibald 2008). Using this book and its subsequent epistemic reclamation as a case study allows me to analyze the details of this book contextually, positioning my study focus on the institution of the library itself (Priya 2021). This analysis is further enriched by the intervention of Storywork, which enables me to attend to the Story of this book, its research, and the Stories shared with me by Anishinaabeg Experts and Knowledge Keepers. Storywork brings Indigenous epistemologies into this conversation to educate the heart, body, and soul and to reframe the Story of this book back to its relations to Land (Archibald 2008). This method and methodology represent an important intervention because they



allow me to think about the Stories shared through conversations and the journey of *The Sacred Scrolls* holistically to reveal a larger understanding about relations and reciprocity between Indigenous Nations and the library. Storywork provides me with the opportunity to consider the stories contained within the volume and the stories of the item's use in the community holistically, in relation to the seven principles of Indigenous Storywork—namely respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, inter-relatedness, and synergy; these principles are especially rooted in the context of these Lands, from which the Knowledge of the Sacred Scrolls derive and upon which I live and work, in Anishinaabeg territory (Archibald 2008). Storywork, paired with an Indigenous feminist framework, allows me to reveal the invisible movements of extractive systems in librarianship and to interrupt epistemic violence. This is to say that methodological obligation compels me to root this work in these Lands and to analyze this case study in a way that is appropriate to Anishinaabeg teachings and protocols.

It is important to recognize that the methodological framework for this work, informed deeply by Indigenous research methods and Indigenous theory, requires that the analysis, writing and any subsequent action be relational, community informed, and assertive of Indigenous sovereignty in its outcomes (Wilson 2008). There are countless Indigenous research paradigms, but in order for this work to be legible to the stewards and holders of Anishinaabeg and Midewiwin Knowledges, it must engage profoundly with Anishinaabeg people and practices. With the drawing of these methods, I seek to present but one example of this engagement as a counter to and denunciation of library extraction. Library research with Indigenous research paradigms must be transformational and requires a holistic revision of epistemology (Wilson 2008; Smith 2021).

I have learned from my Anishinaabeg Teachers and Elders that introducing and positioning oneself is an Anishinaabeg epistemology that is crucial to attending to my obligations to my relations. This positioning work is both a necessary and radical act to locate myself when working with Indigenous peoples and Knowledges. With my commitments to Indigenous sovereignties and Nationhood in mind, I will now turn to the first part of my case study, namely the research and publication history of *The Sacred Scrolls*.

### **Case Study Part I: Researching and Publishing *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway***

*The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway* was written in 1975 by Selwyn Dewdney and jointly published by the Glenbow-Alberta Institute through the University of Toronto Press after many years of research and observation. Dewdney was a Canadian

artist, writer, and pictographer who worked alongside Anishinaabeg artists, most notably Norval Morriseau (Robertson 2016). It is through his work and relationships with Indigenous artists that Dewdney began his passion projects of preserving and writing the histories and Stories of the Anishinaabeg. Through this work, he was introduced to James (Jim) Red Sky, the steward of the first seven Birch Bark Scrolls that Dewdney encountered. The Scrolls were subsequently sold by Red Sky to the Glenbow Museum in 1966 (Dewdney 1975). The Birch Bark Scrolls are sacred texts that were produced to preserve and disseminate information among the Anishinaabeg. Dewdney subsequently began his journey seeking other Scrolls in museums, private collections, and archives internationally. Red Sky was Anishinaabeg from Shoal Lake and was trained in the traditions of the Midewiwin. He sold the Birch Bark Scrolls due to his fear that they would not be preserved or that the contextual information that is essential to its interpretation and value would be lost. Dewdney shares that Red Sky feared that there would be no successors for the Knowledge and the stewardship of these Birch Bark Scrolls, and he therefore sold them to the Glenbow Museum with explicit instructions to preserve the Knowledge and contextual information that he would share and without which these items would be useless. Red Sky's Scrolls led Dewdney to pursue other Birch Bark Scrolls in institutions and amongst private collectors primarily in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, only to find that they were often poorly conserved and were without the contextual information that rendered them useful and active. He subsequently traced and published these materials in the volume that became *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway*.

I will now turn to a theoretical discussion on Indigenous feminist practices of refusal and Indigenous peoples' relationship to the library as a means to further enrich and contextualize the second part of this case study. The theoretical framework in this discussion will also help define the assumptions revealed later in the Discussion of this article.

## Refusal as an Indigenous Feminist Practice

Refusal as an Indigenous feminist practice originates from the work of Kahnawà:ke anthropologist Audra Simpson (2014), who theorizes that Indigenous people in her community were refusing something that was seemingly a benefit from an institutional standpoint. However, Simpson's work invites those engaging in research to think about the ways in which an institutional good may not be good for the community. Instead, Simpson recognizes the inherent performance and acknowledgement of Sovereignty and ownership of Knowledge by Indigenous communities in refusing to participate or engage. Similarly, refusal is described by various Indigenous feminist scholars as a performance of refusing to be written (Tuck



and Yang 2014a), resisting individuality in favour of the collective (Grande 2018), and interrupting settlement (Simpson 2014). Settlement assumes that Indigenous peoples are always on the precipice of losing something and that Knowledges, materials, and practices must therefore be extracted from communities in the late stage of existence (Risling Baldy 2018). This fatalism is often used as a rationale for extraction, an epistemic “burden” that is carried by libraries without any critique of the systems and violence that knowledge institutions participate in and proliferate. Refusal is a reminder that Indigenous people continue to resist and to create spaces of survivance and futurities (Risling Baldy 2018).

Refusal is a practice that asserts the right of Indigenous Nations to the stewardship of their Knowledges, which simultaneously maintain Sovereign rights and resist modes of extraction from researchers (Simpson 2014). Put another way, in *Unbecoming Claims*, Tuck and Yang (2014b, 812) remind us that for many Indigenous communities, inquiry is invasion and “objectivity” is code for power.” Refusal is an assertion of the future, keeping materials and Knowledges sacred to be able to pass them along to future generations away from imposed forces of fatalism and extraction. Librarians should understand refusal as an inherent space of possibility, working toward a future that is relational and that does not involve the external intervention of cultural heritage institutions.

## Collections as Invasion

Cree-Métis librarian Jessie Loyer (2021, 27) reminds librarians that the impulse towards completion and fullness in library collections stems from a singular drive to own, from the desire for “white man’s joy.” Tuck and Yang (2014a) note that Knowledge that has been extracted from communities is territorialized and decontextualized so as to render it powerless. They warn us that invasion disguises itself as a public good through universalist objectives of bringing Knowledges that should not be viewed by other people and communities as a common good. Libraries rarely, if ever, stop to consider who benefits and who suffers from the collection of materials and how these practices might impact the future ability of the originating community from developing and caring for that knowledge. Indigenous scholars note that researchers and research institutions stake claims to the benevolent and transformative power of research, but that material benefits to Indigenous communities associated with those ideals remain unrealized (Simpson 2014; Tuck and Yang 2014b). It is understandable that Indigenous communities would be suspicious of research institutions who continue to assert these claims without a deep recognition of the harms of extraction or a vision of reciprocal and transformative relationship with Knowledge Keepers and community members. Loyer (2021, 33) reminds us that, “When participants reject

questions, they choose to restrict access because proper protocols, which create the context for a true expression of the information, have not been adhered to.” In this context, refusal is one of the best ways in which Indigenous community members can indicate that the mode of collection is extractive and violent. Meeting refusal should prompt immediate reflection on the ways in which we, as librarians, and our libraries are complicit and benefit from extraction at the expense of Indigenous futures.

## Viewing Refusal as Generative

Tuck and Yang (2014a) tell us that refusal should be considered a generative space to revisit relationships and dynamics between community, research, and the institutions that house these Knowledges. While many librarians meet refusal as the end of a discussion, it should instead be a space to reconsider our practices and the roles in which our institutions have played in extraction and invasion. To be clear, the generative space that refusal creates should not be taken as justification for continuously bothering Indigenous communities to capitulate to extractive demands. Instead, it should be viewed as a challenge for librarians and libraries to reflect on the ways in which their institutions are positioned in relation to power. It is an invitation to dream of transformative practices rooted in reciprocity, mutuality, and care. On this note, Grande (2018) notes that refusal practices necessitate a re-envisioning of universities to accountability and relations that are not bound in capital but that theorize justice. Bringing practices of refusal to the Library, I will investigate the ways in which Indigenous Nationhood and refusal manifests in and against extractive collections work in Libraries through a return to the case study.

## Case Study Part 2: Reception and Subsequent History in Libraries

*The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway* was controversial from its publication. Contemporary anthropologists, especially ethnographers, were quick to point out that the interpretive nature of these Scrolls made for difficult work, given the many contextless examples that had been taken by collectors or returned to the Land (Lurie 1976; Woolworth 1975). However, Indigenous reviewers viewed Dewdney’s attempt at relational research and care for Indigenous epistemologies favourably, as it was a relatively novel concept for contemporary ethnography (DeLoria 1976; Thompson 1977). Among its supporters was Vine Deloria Jr., a legendary Standing Rock Sioux scholar and a towering, foundational figure in Indigenous Studies (DeLoria 1976; Johnson 2005).

The book was widely purchased by libraries and museums, with WorldCat showing copies held in 468 libraries worldwide as of 2024. The University of Toronto Libraries purchased copies for various libraries in its system, where the book was in public view until it was flagged by a user in 2017 at the library at OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education). A non-Indigenous user brought the book to my

attention in my role as the Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education librarian, and I subsequently brought it to Elders and Knowledge Keepers for review. The community members to whom I spoke suggested that I should continue consultative conversations and while that happened, I elected to return it back to the stacks for use. However, it was flagged again in 2020 in the midst of the coronavirus shutdown. A group of librarians discussed this item with Dr. Debby Wilson Danard, a scholar, Knowledge Keeper, and activist who is a trained Midewiwin leader. Dr. Danard expressed the need for these materials in the community and the lack of access due to the limited printing. As of 2024, a copy of the book has been listed for \$1,951 Canadian by a book reseller on Amazon. Like the other Knowledge Keepers with whom we engaged, Dr. Danard (pers. comm., 2021) expressed strongly that the material needed to be returned to the community and that the public access model in the university library system was inappropriate for this item. As a library system, we hesitated to immediately work on repatriation and to ameliorate the extractive model in which we operate. Instead, we struggled with the idea that the collection would be incomplete, that we would be missing an important title from a university press for which we served as a repository. Sensing our hesitation, Dr. Danard offered to bring this issue back to her local Lodge leadership. In the meantime, she requested a copy of the book for her own review.

### ***Reclamation***

Upon receiving the book, Dr. Danard determined that it contained lifesaving and sustaining information for Anishinaabeg youth. She made the decision to reclaim the item, electing to pay the lost item fine and to keep it for her references (Francis 2021). She shared that she would be using this material to enliven Anishinaabeg practices and to pass them along to the next and successive generations of youth (Francis 2021). She has used this book in her work and has incorporated its Knowledge into her project Indigipedia.ca: The Indigenous Digital Encyclopedia, which is focused on disseminating vital cultural information through digital transmission, especially for those who are disconnected from community for a variety of reasons (Danard 2021). In 2024, the University of Toronto Libraries has been working with Dr. Danard to return all copies of *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway* to her and the Midewiwin Lodge. We will not keep a physical or digital copy. It is not appropriate that an academic library should hold this Knowledge, and the only appropriate stewards of the Knowledge contained within the volume are the Midewiwin themselves.

## Discussion

Libraries have anointed themselves the authority on information and knowledge stewardship and dissemination, but this assertion of authority is built on extraction at the expense of Indigenous and other marginalized peoples. The assertion that libraries are the appropriate and expected final destination of all knowledge undercuts the capacity of community cultural stewards through settler colonial expansion and extraction. The library's unquestioned place as the main repository that cares for knowledge has been established through centuries of collaborating with empire to demean and negate community care and stewardship practices, a concept which Marie Battiste refers to as cognitive imperialism (Battiste 2014). We must seek to name and challenge these assumptions in order to understand the underlying claims to Sovereignty within acts of refusal if we are to work in good relation with Indigenous communities. Inherent in the publication and the afterlife of *The Sacred Scrolls* are a number of assumptions that benefit the library and cultural heritage institutions. By way of a discussion, I will seek to explicitly name the assumptions that Libraries have made in its extraction and handling of the sacred Knowledge within the Birch Bark Scrolls, and its assumed authority over Midewiwin and Anishinaabeg Knowledge stewardship.

### *Assumption 1: Extraction is inevitable*

Given the favourable review from DeLoria, it is understandable why librarians would be interested in selecting *The Sacred Scrolls* for their collections. It is an early example of relations with Indigenous peoples that would reasonably fit within a library's objective. However, I trouble this interpretation, as well as DeLoria's review, through a lens of Knowledge Sovereignty. DeLoria comes from the Standing Rock Sioux, while the Knowledge published in the volume was from the Midewiwin Lodge. As libraries build capacity to understand the nuances of Nationhood, so too will our practices become more discerning in understanding the intricacies of Sovereignty.

Here, I also return to the idea of refusal in which Indigenous people refuse something that is seemingly good or beneficial (Simpson 2014). To understand this as an extractive practice, we must first question the underlying assumption that Red Sky, Dewdney, and many of the ethnographers held and continue to hold, that persistent belief in fatalism (Risling Baldy 2018) and that the only appropriate and long-term stewardship strategy would be to deposit these materials in a cultural heritage or memory institution. Red Sky himself worried about his community's capacity to continue to steward the Birch Bark Scrolls in his possession (Dewdney 1975). Dewdney was dismissive of Anishinaabeg practices of returning Birch Bark Scrolls to the Land, referring to them as having been abandoned by Keepers

without understanding the immense cultural value of these materials rather than acknowledging that the return of the Scrolls to the Land were part of the stewardship and lifecycle of these Scrolls. At this juncture, it is important to mention that the Anishinaabeg and Indigenous Nations in Canada and the United States have experienced ongoing violence through assimilationist and nationalistic policies and systems aimed at displacement and genocide, including the Sixties and Millennial Scoops, the Reserve system, and, notably, the Indian Residential School system. These systems have deeply impacted Indigenous capacity to steward and care for their own cultural materials by separating Indigenous peoples from their Lands and Waters, making Ceremonies illegal, and forcibly removing Indigenous children from their communities and families, who would teach them about themselves and their Cultural Knowledges (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). Within the Anishinaabeg communities that created these Sacred Scrolls, Knowledge Keepers recognized the damage that these genocidal policies had wrought on Midewiwin and Scroll making practices (King Stonefish, pers. comm., March 19, 2024). That Red Sky, a practitioner who for decades sought to find students to teach and steward the Scrolls, was unable to do so is indicative of this damage. Inherent in any critique of fatalism is the urgent need to remember that fatalism was the desired result of settler colonialism, which cultural heritage institutions supported and from which we have deeply benefitted. Cultural heritage institutions have operated on the belief that the creators of Knowledge and culture (in this case the Anishinaabeg) did not have the capacity to enact their agency and epistemologies, intervening to extract this material in an effort to “complete the cultural record.” However, if libraries were to merely observe the damage wrought on Anishinaabeg cultures, we would simply be furthering practices of fatalism and extraction. Tuck (2009) reminds us that the antithesis of damage-centred research is a move towards desire. It is important that we consider now what the desires of the community were and what they have become. Dr. Danard’s reclamation of *The Sacred Scrolls* was both an example of refusal and desire-based action. She did not need the permission of the Library to reclaim Knowledge that was rightfully hers to steward, and she did so in desire of a better world and future for Anishinaabeg youth so that they might know Knowledge that was created for them.

***Assumption 2: The library is the only appropriate place to steward materials***

An examination of Dewdney’s documented process of gathering of materials to publish this book reveals that Red Sky believed that the only appropriate place to continue the stewardship of the seven Sacred Scrolls in his possession was a museum, alongside a publication of its contextual information for its continued survivance. However, it is important to note that both Dewdney and many Knowledge Keepers

have been critical of the conservational and museological practices that have led to the further degradation and inaccessibility of these Scrolls (Dewdney 1975; King Stonefish, pers. comm., March 19, 2024). Cultural heritage practices of keeping the Scrolls in temperature controlled, low humidity spaces have led to the Scrolls becoming brittle and inaccessible (Dewdney 1975; King Stonefish, pers. comm., March 19, 2024). Additionally, the very people who need access to these Knowledges, Anishinaabeg people themselves, are largely barred from accessing them due to fears of the fragility of the material (King Stonefish, pers. comm., March 19, 2024). King Stonefish (pers. comm., March 19, 2024), whose family continues to hold deep Knowledge of the Sacred Scrolls, shared that the materials retain their ability to unfurl only through their constant usage, especially in teaching and Ceremony. These are items that are meant to be used, and only by the appropriate people. Community care practices have enabled their dissemination and preservation for centuries within Anishinaabeg ceremonies and teachings. Instead, the Scrolls have been dried in place for decades, rendering them brittle and fragile as they have been stored far away from the people who have created them, cared for them and need them. In conceptualizing the constitution of appropriate care practices, libraries consider the material form and its subsequent long-term preservation, which keeps these community-created materials decontextualized and out of reach for the very people for whom these items were created. Dewdney (1975) himself acknowledges that Red Sky was adamant that the Sacred Scrolls needed to be kept with the contextual information that he shared in the gathering of this book, and yet when Dewdney pursued Scrolls in other collections, he found them without any contextual information from the communities for whom they were created. In his insistence on the preservation of its context, Red Sky refused the pursuit of a cultural object at the cost of its community and role. Like many Elders who resisted fatalism by redirecting cultural heritage institutions (Risling Baldy 2018), Red Sky has used the museum and the publication of this book to hold this Knowledge temporarily, while his community rebuilt its capacity to hold it. As librarians, we must also ask ourselves whether the Library, which is both a product and producer of epistemic violence, is truly an appropriate place to hold sacred Knowledges. The future that Red Sky envisioned in the 1960s and 1970s is here. Many Anishinaabeg people believe that we are in the time of or at the beginning of the Eighth Fire (Talaga 2023). The Eighth Fire is a time that is foretold in Anishinaabeg prophecy where Anishinaabeg people would reclaim their Lands, Knowledge and reclaim their rightful place on the Land. The Eighth Fire will see a return of Indigenous ways of Knowing to the Lands that enact their care and obligation. Indigenous people have the time and the capacity to resume their stewardship of their Knowledges. The Library is not the only place where Knowledge stewardship can occur; the communities that created these Knowledges have a desire



to resume their care for their own Knowledge. Writing in 2018—at a time that she writes was in the Seventh Fire—Anishinaabeg playwright and scholar Jill Carter writes of the Eighth Fire Prophecy:

Long before contact, the Anishinaabeg lived on the Eastern shores of the lands now called Canada. At this time, the stories tell us, the people were visited by seven prophets, each speaking of what was to come through seven eras (represented by seven fires). Each by each, they foretold the coming of a “Light-skinned Race” and outlined the stages of colonization that would unfold over these years. To reduce the impact of first contact, such as disease and/or outright attack, the Anishinaabeg were instructed by the first prophet to migrate west and north away from the sea to where food [wild rice] grows upon the water. If they did not, they were told, “[they would] be destroyed.” As was prophesied, the agents of colonization have visited greater and greater destruction on the land and peoples in each new era. Today, many Anishinaabeg believe that we are now in the time of the Seventh Fire: in this historical moment, the dominant culture has the opportunity to consult Indigenous peoples and to respectfully integrate our ancient knowledge systems into their own practices at every level of existence. If this is done, the seventh Prophet promised, both peoples would enter the time of the Eighth Fire—a time of peace, fraternity, and good life for all. If the disrespect and disregard for [Indigenous Knowledge] continued, we were told, then all would be lost, and all life would end. (Carter 2018, 566)

As we engage or approach the time of the Eighth Fire, Indigenous people across Turtle Island resist the violence that assimilationist and genocidal systems have wrought and assert their rights and roles in stewarding Knowledge in ways that libraries cannot.

### ***Assumption 3: Communities should be invested in the future of the library***

In reclaiming the material and using it to support the resurgence and well-being of Anishinaabeg youth, Dr. Danard presents us with a practice of refusal. Her refusal to engage with the library as we attempted to rescue a future wherein this item had an appropriate home within our collections signalled to us that we needed to reconfigure our expectations and our practices. As a library, we operated under the assumption that the library was a community good and that community members would want to work with us to further library goals. However, in her refusal, Dr. Danard asserted the Sovereignty of Anishinaabeg Knowledge and sent a strong indication that the initial extraction and subsequent holding of this title was neither appropriate nor welcome. In her interview in the *Toronto Star*, Dr. Danard shared that Anishinaabeg practices saved her life and that she intended to share these practices in life sustaining ways for Anishinaabeg youth (Francis 2021). Here we are presented with a clear dichotomy: the library practicing genocidal extraction and Anishinaabeg people refusing that extraction, reinvigorating community practices towards life-giving and sustaining stewardship. Refusal here reminds library workers that communities are invested in the continuation and stewardship of their own Knowledges irrespective

of their relations with libraries and other cultural heritage institutions. Fobazi Ettarh (2018) tells us that the assumption that libraries are a public good, a concept which she calls vocational awe, often shields libraries from criticism and examination. At worst, institutional extraction has inserted itself into these practices to benefit their collections while supporting settler-colonial and genocidal practices and systems. What value would Indigenous communities derive from their continued participation and engagement with the library? It is Euro-Western museums that have taken the Sacred Scrolls uncritically as an expression and overriding preoccupation of long-term preservation and collection, and that have allowed them to become fragile and inaccessible. What is the value proposition of our institutions if our practices remain unchanged and extractive? Refusal demands that we question these collection practices at their foundations, that we reveal the true costs of library extraction, and that we sincerely turn away from such deadly investments.

## Conclusion

Throughout this discussion, I have continuously returned to Indigenous feminist practices of refusal. Refusal reveals the many ways in which the library has extracted from Indigenous communities at great expense. This practice often expresses itself as Indigenous community members declining engagement, a performance of saying no that challenges libraries to think deeply before engaging again. Many library workers have taken refusal as a lack of interest in library work and cultural heritage. Refusal challenges libraries to reconsider this engagement entirely. In questioning the assumptions that libraries have made, we return to Indigenous feminist practices of refusal as an important theoretical and practical intervention against library extraction and an avowal of Indigenous Nationhood and Sovereignty. As libraries continue to consider their relationships with Indigenous Nations and our obligations to the Lands and Waters that they exist on, refusal exposes questions that we must first answer before doing this work in earnest. Do we, as an institution, have existing relationships built on trust with the community? Have we considered its practices and questioned the very foundations of extraction and exploitation? In other words, have we sought to understand the harms our work and institutions have perpetuated and do we desire to move towards transformative practice? Have we earned the space to work alongside Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders? I want to reiterate that when an Indigenous person or community says no, it is not appropriate to continue to try to engage in an attempt to convince them. Instead, refusal offers us an opportunity to question the very foundations of our work and serves as a guide to consider how we might reposition our entire profession away from the extraction inherent in our work.

Many readers of this work will want definitive answers for a more collaborative and reciprocal practice that disavows library extraction. However, and perhaps unsatisfactorily, universal answers cannot exist. Each library has its own history, relations to Indigenous peoples, collections policies and obligations. These practices are iterative, hyper local and context dependent. Are there restitutions and acknowledgements that need to be made? Have there been ongoing conflicts around collections or kinships? This article cannot reveal all the ways in which libraries have been extractive, even in the case of Indigenous peoples and their Knowledges. Instead, I hope that this work spurs discussion in your own institutions and departments about where such refusals have occurred and about how the library may work towards being a deserving community partner.

Through the case study of *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway*, I have discussed one particular example of extractive publishing and collection practices but also the Anishinaabeg community's desire, vision, and creation of Anishinaabeg futures. This case study reveals that Indigenous people will move on without us, especially if they do not trust us. Anishinaabeg people do not need the University of Toronto Libraries. As we consider our practices, it is important to attend to Loyer's (2021, 27) reminder that "Indigenous communities consider these collections to be living relatives" and that transformative practices that consider kinship and love in our care and collections practices are vital interventions to being in good relations. If cultural heritage institutions are to move in tandem with the ongoing resurgence of Indigenous Nations, we must heed her words and stop extracting. We must work alongside Indigenous peoples in ways that support and help enliven that resurgence. As Dr. Danard shows us, communities will do the work of survivance and future building; the library's failure to transform accordingly will result in a further breakdown in relations. The library must not be a barrier to Indigenous futures. It is critical that we reconceptualize our practices now so that we do not stand in the way of liberation.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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