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TOWARDS RELATIONAL MODELS OF PUBLISHING IN NATIVE AND INDIGENOUS STUDIES

BETH BOULOUKOS

As the director of a diamond open access press in the United States, I am constantly made aware of how relationships are key to the sustainability of our small and—at least in the US context—unique publishing model. Amherst College Press is not alone in this. As a community of publishers within the academy, we have at least begun the hard work of starting to grapple with long-standing power inequities in our field in order to work towards more equitable relational practices. One area we have yet to grapple with in any sort of systematic way is what constitutes ethical practices when publishing work by and about Native and Indigenous communities. We need to think more critically about those relationships in order to make them sustainable. Good work is being done in pockets of our field, but there hasn't been a forum for people to contemplate, discuss, and share on this topic.

In the past few years Amherst College Press has published important volumes in the field of Native and Indigenous studies, such as *Abi-ayalan Pluriverses: Bridging Indigenous Studies and Hispanic Studies* and *Boundless: Native American Abundance in Art and Literature*. Throughout the processes for these books, I have become increasingly interested in the great potential of making Native and Indigenous knowledge available digitally and in print, including centring and celebrating Indigenous sovereignty, agency, and expression. Yet it remains true that open access and publishing in general are not necessarily monolithic goods, especially given their brutal histories of

intellectual dispossession. Even terms such as “acquiring editor” and “acquisitions” speak to troubling imbalances inherent in conventional publishing. I believe we need to move beyond what my colleague Brian Halley at the University of Massachusetts Press calls “extractive publishing” and find alternative models that prioritize ethics, justice, and mutuality.

Unlike in the areas of librarianship and museum studies, there is almost nothing written on the topic of working with Native and Indigenous authors, communities, and knowledge in the area of scholarly publishing—nor has a dialogue really begun in any organized way on an industry level. In order to try to start that conversation, I planned a panel for the June 2024 meeting of the Association of University Presses (AUPresses) called *Prioritizing Ethics and Community-Based Practices: Publishing Models for Native and Indigenous Studies*. Participants discussed ways in which they have reconceived publishing work as a set of relational and community-based practices. The topics ranged from linguistic sovereignty to compensation to technological tools that might enable this work. This panel served as a call to action and my hope is that those reading this will also feel compelled to get involved.

It was heartening that the panel was well attended, but we need to convene more people who are interested in coming up with guidelines on better practices. I am imagining something in the vein of what one of the AUPresses panelists, Geneviève Sioui, co-authored with Amanda Shawayahamish: *Dewemaagannag/My Relations Indigenous Engagement Guide: Key Principles and Values to Decolonize Engagement with Indigenous Communities*, but specifically on the topic of publishing. In the guide, Sioui and her collaborators encourage deep listening and also the contemplation of motives in order to avoid using Native and Indigenous individuals, groups, history, and knowledge for our own cultural capital. The guide maintains that this process should produce pathways from reflection to action.

What would that action look like for scholarly publishing? As the guide suggests, it needs to start with honest self-reflection on positionality. We need to make space at our individual institutions and as

a publishing community to grapple with power imbalances. Ethical publishing under these principles is slower, more collaborative, and community driven. It treats books not just as products, but as relationships in print. The difficulty here is that a market-based economy does not place the same value on this attention to relational processes. Some publishers may have the will to do this but not the bandwidth given financial pressures and constraints.

As the contribution to this collection “Reimagining Academic Publishing: Community, Knowledge, and the Future Beyond Academia” notes, in some ways the academic institutions that house us and provide legitimacy are also the ones that can hinder our efforts and the vitality of the community. In this case, that has looked like the defunding of publishing initiatives, which has resulted in more reliance on the market than in the past and less time for reflection. This is why diamond open access publishers have a pivotal role to play in this conversation and can set an example for what may be possible. Even so, we will only move towards more relational models if publishers of all kinds are involved.

WORKS CITED

Sioui, Geneviève, and Amanda Shawayahamish. *Dewemaagannag / My Relations: Key Principles and Values to Decolonize Engagement with Indigenous Communities*. Office of Community Engagement, Concordia University, 2023. PDF file.