

Editorial

Special Issue “Writing Genealogy: Auto/Biographical Research, Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry”: An Introduction

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Writing about genealogy within the ‘academy’ has been hindered by the perception that researching family history and genealogy belongs in the realm of hobbyists as something you might peruse in retirement. Often regarded somewhat scornfully, many works of genealogy were viewed as unscholarly and uncritical, sitting outside of any defined discipline. Yet, scholars who are researching and writing genealogy are highly skilled academics, trained in archival and textual research and a range of methodologies, research, and analytical methods. As a field of study, genealogical research has the potential to significantly contribute to the humanities and social sciences in disciplines such as cultural geography, sociology, ethnicity, diversity studies, philosophy, history, and gender studies. In *Genealogy*, an international, scholarly, peer-reviewed journal, genealogical theory and methodologies have found a home. It has been my privilege to edit this special issue for *Genealogy* to further augment their stellar reputation for genealogical scholarship.

The six articles published in this Special Issue cover various aspects of writing genealogy as a form of cultural and literary production giving voice to the subject(s) and substantiating and validating the narratives of both the deceased and the living. Each of the articles draw on methodologies and methods that contest the notion that only hobbyists engage in genealogical research. Capturing both the personal and the political, the historical and the contemporary, the secular and divine, these articles demonstrate the visible faces of genealogy scholars and the growth of genealogy as a discipline in its own right.

In my article, (Connor 2021). ‘Ko te Rākau Hei Tohu Mō te Rangahau Me te Tuhi Whakapapa: Tree Symbolism as a Method for Researching and Writing Genealogy’, I discuss a method for researching and writing Māori whakapapa (genealogy) based on the symbolism of the tree. Utilizing tree symbolism as a method for researching and writing genealogy is conceived as a literary device for documenting both individual and collective life histories. It is an approach that was developed as being distinctively Māori, but at the same time able to be adapted by other ethnic groups and communities. The method consists of the following aspects of tree symbolism: the roots (family heritage); the trunk (what sustains and gives purpose to one’s life); the branches (the different paths our lives follow); the fruits (what we bring to our maturity); and the forest (connections with others). Tree symbolism can be adapted for any ethnic group by utilizing the metaphor of a tree that has relevance to the particular group. It can also be adapted for community groups and organizations.

Frances Hancock’s article, ‘Becoming and Being Irish-Pākehā: Crafting a Narrative of Belonging That Inspires Indigenous–Settler Relationships’ is also contextualized with Aotearoa New Zealand (Hancock 2020). Hancock has genealogical ties to Ireland and positions herself as an Irish-Pākehā (a European New Zealander of Irish descent). Her article writes from a location of having a settler identity that embodies ancestral relations with forebears and homelands as well as a relationship with Māori, the Indigenous Peoples of Aotearoa, New Zealand. Hancock argues that being of Irish descent carries multiple meanings that can nourish a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, and significant relationships. She poses the question, ‘how have my Irish ancestral relations and places of belonging



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cultivated in me those relational qualities and ethical–political commitments that inspire the Indigenous–settler engagements that are part of my personal and professional life?’ She explores the complexities of becoming and being Irish–Pākehā in response to that question. Travelling across generations and two countries, she utilizes a series of guiding questions to help construct an Irish–Pākehā diasporic identity through a narrative of belonging. She also explores geographies of relatedness and the effects of identity-making through kinship as a way to understand why being Irish–Pākehā matters in her work with Indigenous Māori. This is a compelling and beautifully crafted article which will resonate with those who can trace their ancestry back to Ireland.

A second article drawing on indigenous methods is an article, by Diné (Navajo) scholar, Sandra Yellowhorse (2020). For Yellowhorse, indigenous story is about place and orientation to the place(s) indigenous peoples live through and in. Her article explores Diné (Navajo) identity and its entanglements with the authority of words and the politics of voice within the academy. Yellowhorse argues that voice or narrative are political acts that ground Indigenous peoples in land and territory. In Diné communities, there are ongoing discussions regarding the politics of authority and representation with regard to the erasure of Indigenous voices in academic spaces. She argues that academic erasure has ripple effects into the ongoing contestation of land and belonging. These ripple effects have fuelled identity politics among Diné people on the community level. She argues that Diné people themselves are erased and the everyday narrations of about Diné (Navajo) realities and experiences through these normalized academic processes. In addressing those academic processes, she draws attention to another framework for identity politics that encourages and supports not only the voices of Diné people but upholds the intellectual sovereignty and claims to land. This article offers a powerful insider lens into indigenous stories about language, place, and belonging.

In the tradition of family histories, Lincoln Dam (2021) explores the harrowing narrative of the ‘killing fields. ‘Learning to Live with the Killing Fields: Ethics, Politics, Relationality’ is not for the faint-hearted. Yet, Dam, transcends the tragedies of his family’s genealogical narrative and offers glimmers of hope for the future. This article is both philosophical and historical. He calls into question his very being and queries; ‘How are we to live in and with the aftermath of an estimated 1.7 million people perishing? How are we, the survivors of this calamity, to discern our family (hi)stories and ourselves in the face of these irreparable genealogical fractures?’ This paper begins with stories—co-constructed with his father—about the Killing Fields, a genocide orchestrated by the Khmer Rouge and from which humanity appears to suffer a collective amnesia. The latter half of this paper turns to his engagements with ethical-political philosophy as a means to comprehend and make meaning of the atrocities described by his father. Drawing principally on the Yin-Yang philosophy and Thai considerations of the face, he responds to keystone Khmer Rouge ideas and strategies that “justified” the murder of over one million people. Dam argues that philosophy has taught him to learn from and how to live with the Killing Fields. He argues that it offered him routes to make sense of his roots in the absence of treasure troves that would typically inform the writing of genealogies and family (hi)stories. This article gives testimony to a tragedy of the past that is inscribed in the present and in the yearning for a better tomorrow.

Diane Wolf’s (2020) article, ‘Family and Trauma: The Autobiography of Scholarship’ is a deeply personal narrative which speaks to the harrowing trauma of the Holocaust and its legacy to members of her own family. Wolf also offers a counter narrative to her family story, that of building a scholarly life. The autobiography of scholarship provided Wolf with another lens through which to view the courage and resolution of those who have faced trauma and who have been traumatized. Unpeeling what is usually concealed by professional language, Wolf’s article explores the interactive relationship between her research, on the one hand, and her personal and family history, on the other. These connections are not simply uni-directional, but dynamic and interactive, evolving over time. Although some of her research questions may have paralleled to her personal challenges,

the Holocaust survivors she has researched also deeply affected her emotional life and personal trajectory at different times. This article makes for compelling and powerful reading.

In ‘The Genealogy of No-Self: Marguerite Yourcenar’s Koan of the Labyrinth’ Joyce Janca-Aji (2020) offers an incisive critique to the function of genealogical inquiry. The article examines 20th-century French author, Marguerite Yourcenar’s preface to the first volume of her autobiographical/genealogical trilogy. In *Dear Departed* with a 13th-century Zen koan, Yourcenar asks: “What is your original face before your parents were born?” In the context of the meticulously researched family history of her maternal line, Yourcenar examines the foundations and major resources of individual and collective self-writing in light of Buddhist discourses on the nature of self. Janca-Aji argues this positioning can be read as an alternative to the function of genealogical inquiry. This article is both philosophical and spiritual and offers a unique perspective on genealogical theory and method.

All the articles in this special issue offer insights and perspectives into writing genealogy. If there is one major theme, it is this: stories and narratives and the legacies of our past connect us and help us to recognize our unique genealogical legacies and family histories. Researching and writing genealogy contributes to our understandings of not only our own family histories but the social and cultural histories of the places we inhabit.

“We need to haunt the house of history and listen anew to the ancestors’ wisdom.”

Maya Angelou

(<http://genealogyliteracy.com/> accessed on 7 April 2022).

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