Native and Indigenous scholars are currently in an era of analyzing the many pathways and mechanisms of colonialism. Broadly, colonization—the verb, or enactment, of colonialism—is based on four overlapping mechanisms: (1) the classification of diverse Indigenous peoples as a single lesser-class of sub-humans deserving of social subjugation at best and extermination at worst; (2) the theft and settlement of Indigenous lands and social spaces by an elite Settler class; (3) the articulation of institutions to support this class system and the elite control of the environment; and (4) the disciplining of elite forms of knowledge through the marginalization of Indigenous languages, philosophies, spiritualities, and modes of self-government.[7] Colonialism is subtle, insidious, and nearly invisible to privileged citizens of a Settler state. It is most visible to those who suffer the worst of its inner workings. While knowledge organization researchers and practitioners may not be able to overhaul generations of social inequalities, adopting and including terms that reflect the experiences and perspectives of the marginalized is a step toward the redress of colonial power.

WHAT CATALOGERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COLONIALISM

When we are cognizant of the ways colonialism works through techniques of naming, describing, collocating, classifying, and standardizing, we can better appreciate, formulate, imagine, and support Indigenous approaches to knowledge organization. However, before we can create spaces for Indigenous ontologies—that is, alternative information structures guided by Indigenous concepts of realities—we have to understand when and how cataloging and classification practices become techniques of colonization.

The Supremacy of the Book and the Colonial Record

In the Americas, scholars have traced the Enlightenment-era supremacy of the book and the written word all the way back to the first encounters between Franciscan mendicants and Mexica *tlamatine*, or spiritual leaders.[8] With the Bible inscribed with the word of a universal God, Spanish colonizers entered Anahuac, present-day Mexico, and surrounding regions intent on converting many Indigenous peoples to at least three belief systems. One of these was toward the Spanish Empire, a political and spatial conversion. Another was toward the Catholic faith, a spiritual conversion. A third was toward Spanish language literacy, an epistemological, and in many ways, spatial, conversion. Wrought together, these conflated, elided, and devalued Indigenous political, social, spiritual, and linguistic plurality, leading to the Spanish rule of Anahuac by occupation, and ultimately, over centuries, the foundations of a Spanish-speaking, text-based, modern Mexican nation-state.

This is not to say that creativity and self-governance in Indigenous spiritualities, philosophies, and ways of knowing were eradicated. Indeed, the vividness of modern nation-state imaginaries is very much founded on productive use and domination over Indigenous bodies of knowledge.[9] But what makes Western text-based systems so visible and, therefore, apparently superior to oral, kinesthetic, aesthetic, and communal Indigenous ways of knowing—quipu, ceremonies, dances, songs, oral histories, oratory, stories, hunting and growing practices, healing arts, weaving, painting, pottery, carving, dreaming, and vision work—are the institutions through which Western text-based systems are legitimated. These institutions include crown- and state-funded libraries, museums, archives, and databases.[10] From an Indigenous perspective, or even from a perspective that appreciates the multiplicity of knowledges, the desire to imagine the Bible as a book proscribing universal law is not unrelated to the desire to make the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (LCSH) a system for describing the world's knowledge. At this point in history, libraries, museums, and archives, and the cataloging and classification systems promulgated therein, are designed around a Western European orientation to texts, reading, and the categorical particularization of knowledge.[11] Indigenous peoples are not the only ones who can see or who experience this pervasive colonial subjugation. In consideration of the effect of the Western European colonization of Africa and the resulting African and Black diaspora, Northwestern University librarian Kathleen Bethel once wrote: "How comforting it must be, not to mention empowering, for some white men to enter each and every library in the Western world and find solid validation of their existence."[12] From the perspective of the systemically oppressed, library catalogs read like a great mirror of the modern Western consciousness, post-Conquest, post-Settlement, and through the rise of industrialization, 1898–beyond.

Vanishing Indians of North America: The Blindness of Text-Based Colonialism

Of course there have been serious efforts by librarians, catalogers, archivists, classificationists, and curators to amend the glaring absence of marginalized voices in all kinds of catalogs. Some of these have been through appeals to change standard practices, adopt new terms, create new classes, and invest in linking technologies. Scholars and practitioners have identified common ways the works by, for, and about marginalized peoples are repeatedly segregated and "ghettoized" through institutional cataloging and classification practices.[13] Most commonly, these practices consist of (1) misnaming, or using Western-centric terms to describe Indigenous phenomena; (2) using parts to describe a more holistic phenomena, or the reduction, removal, and de-linking of a piece of a knowledge system from a greater ontology; (3)

emphasis on modern nationalist periodization, inclusive of the notion that history as it is written by the colonizers cannot be changed; and (4) emphasis on prohibiting changes to practices that would upset the efficiency of the existing standardized schema. The overall effect is continual subjugation of Native systems of knowledge in favor of a centralized modern Western system of knowledge, to which all other ontologies that have the potential for describing the world must cohere.

A good example of how colonization works through classification and cataloging practices is found in the Thomas Yen-Ran Yeh proposals.[14] In 1971, in the wake of the Civil Rights movements, concerned Central Washington State College Librarian Thomas Yen-Ran Yeh wrote to Library of Congress Principle Subject Cataloger Eugene Frosio, proposing adjustments to the LCSH E–F class treatment of "Indians of North America." Associating unjust societal treatment of American Indians with the awkward and erroneous description and placement of "Indians of North America," Yeh suggested revising classes and creating new headings and classes that would collocate the histories of American Indians within modern U.S. eras, rather than within pre-Columbian eras. Yeh also suggested collocating "Indian Wars" as a part of modern U.S. history, prefatory to the U.S. wars of expansion, as well as including new classes for new headings "American Indians—20th century history" and "American Indians—21st century history." Yeh reasoned, American Indians were granted full US citizenship in 1924, so there should be a class for this US minority group within modern twentieth-century U.S. history. He also reasoned, if we as catalogers more accurately represent American Indians, reducing our colonial bias to structure them bibliographically as prehistoric war-like savages, then perhaps this would also change present conditions for American Indians. Insightfully, Yeh identified the simulacra of cataloging and classification structures: how we structure our knowledge shapes who, what, and how we can know.

Frosio's response was disappointing, but also in accord with the internal logic of colonial classification systems. A hallmark of these systems is that they work to reify the hegemonic epistemological order of the dominant class—in this case, Western-centric U.S. history. Frosio responded that it was not logical to include "Indians of North America" within the stream of modern, post-twentieth-century U.S. history, because to do so would no longer signify their existence as "historical remnants."[15] This is a common logic within Settler imaginaries; the Settler state is built on the righteous subjugation of a permanently dead, dying, or otherwise vanishing Indigenous race and world order. Frosio added that, at any rate, to adjust the historical classification of "Indians of North America" would violate the adherence to literary warrant, which, at that point in U.S. history, largely consisted of, so to speak, the history of the conquerors. Frosio also added that any such changes would also prove inefficient, and so could not be managed. Appealing to efficiency, a value associated with a pragmatic approach to industrialization,

we see Frosio prioritizing the speedy pace of modern U.S. advance over the conscientious duty to correct misrepresentation of peoples intentionally marginalized through U.S. social policies.

Yet there is a greater colonial logic at play in the Yeh proposals that has to do with the blindness about the full depth and range of Native ways of knowing. While Frosio dismissed Yeh's recommendations out of, presumably, a duty to retain the internal logic, stability, and authority over the LC bibliographic universe, Yeh, in submitting these proposed changes, was also abiding by a colonial logic: the logic of eventual assimilation. Yeh presumed, as many Settlers do, that the many Indigenous peoples residing within U.S. political borders would assimilate to become Americans. Presumably, their ways of knowing—their distinctly non-Western ontologies—would eventually align with the standard ontology designed through literary warrant and described by the LCSH in combination with the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules.*

This is the blind spot of text-based literacy-based colonial societies. Although it is possible to colonize facets of the landscape through re-mapping territories, re-writing histories, re-inscribing institutions, re-classifying sovereign peoples as citizen subjects, and re-naming individuals and phenomena to cohere within dominating epistemologies, it is not possible to completely subdue peoples whose ways of knowing are not primarily text-based, but oral, communal, aesthetic, kinesthetic, and emergent from living landscapes. In spite of early Spanish efforts to colonize the Americas through the spread of literacy, "the Spanish never understood that, if the Amerindians lacked letters, they themselves by the same token lacked quipus and *amoxtli*. And while the Spanish had men of letters, the Incas had *quipucamayac* and Mexicas *tlacuilo*."[16] Further, "it was the speech of those who knew how to 'look at the stars and the sky' and to 'unfold the *pinturas*' that the Mexicas referred as authoritative, not to writing and the book."[17] "Indians of North America" is a wholly inaccurate term for describing the ways the myriad distinct Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, Anahuac, and Tawantinsuyu know themselves. Furthermore, embedded in the names they call themselves are whole networks of semiotic interactions that are very likely often incommensurable with Anglo-American lists of terms and knowledge structures.

Being aware of the context of names and the colonial practice of re-naming helps us understand the frustration Indigenous peoples experience when attempting to research Indigenous histories through Western-oriented classification and cataloging systems. It also helps us to appreciate the depth of the hegemonic rules of order that, through the disciplining of knowledge and power, makes it challenging for groups of concerned individuals requesting revisions in cataloging and classification systems to see those changes through. As we note above, daily awareness of colonialism cycles can produce in individuals its own suite of affective, psychological, social,

and political responses. Working for revisions in a focused way with groups such as the Subject Analysis Committee of the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services or the American Association of Law Libraries requires the development of yet another skillset very much built on patience and an appreciation for long-term strategic incremental change.

Meanwhile, the current impulse by more agile nongovernmental organizations, universities, and economic development groups is to create databases for storing Indigenous knowledge. Often these databases are designed to capture the medicinal properties of plants, characteristics of Indigenous (non-Western) communal societies, fragments of language, photographs, and other artifacts. Of these kinds of projects, Indigenous peoples often remark, you cannot separate the part from the whole. The reductive work—the particularization—inherent to cataloging and classification can elide the many networks of associations—worlds of meaning—that make these artifacts sources of knowledge. As Oglala Lakota activist Russell Means warned attendees at the 2009 Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums, "You cannot put my grandmother in a box."[18]

The question for us now, as researchers and practitioners in the field of knowledge organization is not, how do we fit more vanishing "Indians of North America" into the boxes we made for them, but rather, how do we create new spaces for Indigenous ontologies to emerge? What can we learn from their emergence?

IMAGINING: CREATING SPACES FOR INDIGENOUS ONTOLOGIES

Indigenous peoples reclaim ways of knowing by documenting and preserving knowledge artifacts through library, museum, and archival practices, and through consistent interaction within tribal communities. Thus Indigenous peoples create multiple formal and informal spaces for *learning and knowing*. In those spaces Indigenous peoples create new tools and adapt existing ones for their own benefit. Because such activity is so unexpected, many information professionals are unable to perceive these spaces and tools as innovative methods for connecting with, assembling, describing, organizing, and accessing Indigenous knowledge. Meanwhile, as non-Indigenous knowledge organization practitioners begin to be aware of the value of organizing Indigenous knowledge and making it accessible for the general public, they may start building systems, but without including Indigenous intellectual leaders in the design process. We join other Indigenous scholars asking, "What if we assumed, for a moment, that the practitioners of Indigenous knowledge could somehow get into the design room for software, not as sources to be mined, but as epistemic partners?"[19]

In this section, we position ourselves as those Indigenous epistemic partners, imagining ways to support a vision of a bibliographic/indexing

multiverse that incorporates the realities of Indigenous peoples' approaches to knowledge, memory work, and ways of knowing. In addition to an attentiveness to cycles of colonialism, we carry a respect for the ways tribal peoples relate with their knowledge within their homelands, as well as a respect for how long and under what political and social conditions this process of relating takes place. To that end, we have defined imagining as a technique for others to consider.

Imagining consists of creating figurative and literal spaces for the work of building, analyzing, and experimenting with Indigenous knowledge organization. As a methodology, imagining is based on two decolonizing methodologies: envisioning, and discovering the beauty of our knowledge. Envisioning is a strategy that "Indigenous peoples have employed effectively to bind people together politically ask[ing] that people imagine a future, that they rise above present-day situations which are generally depressing, dream a new dream and set a new vision."[20] Discovering the beauty of our knowledge refers to the processes in which Indigenous peoples focus on "making our knowledge systems work" for the benefit of their communities.[21] This involves sharing, as Indigenous peoples, what we know, understanding how we know, and how our knowing shapes our relationships within our environments and through the categories we create. At present, many Indigenous peoples of North America are experiencing a resurgence of languages, cultural practices and artistic traditions, providing strong visions and hope for the resiliency of their communities. This work is in that vein.

As a technique, there is an order to imagining. First we have to open our awareness to how colonization works through subjugation of Indigenous documents and knowledge artifacts. Second, we have to identify and conceptualize the tools, techniques, values, institutions and processes that shape decolonization. Third, we have to build partnerships to spread awareness and acquire formal acknowledgment of the epistemic value of Indigenous knowledge in context. Fourth, we have to identify our Indigenous epistemic partners, those community members with deep domain knowledge essential to the design of useful Indigenous ontologies. Finally, we have to free ourselves to create, as Indigenous thinkers, experimental designs and pilot systems, building our theoretical awareness of work in this area, so that we guide each other through the pitfalls of decolonizing knowledge organization efforts. Figure 1 depicts these stages as they relate to one another.

The goal of imagining is to contribute to the groundwork of others who continue to build Indigenous knowledge systems toward decolonization. Make no mistake: imagining is a specific, difficult, laborious task. It requires seeing with fresh eyes, and thinking with a new mindset. It requires imagining Indigenous futures. The examples in the following sections reflect the second, third, fourth, and fifth stages, and help us learn about conditions shaping Indigenous knowledge organization work.