



WHOSE KNOWLEDGE?: RE-IMAGINING AND RE-DESIGNING THE INTERNET TO BE FOR AND BY US ALL

“We cannot create what we cannot imagine”

— LUCILLE CLIFTON

We are the majority of the world: women, people of color, indigenous peoples, LGBTQIA and Global South communities. Our knowledge is the knowledge of most of the world. Yet what is considered “knowledge” and “scholarship” has been primarily defined by a white, male, cisgender, Global North perspective. This includes the knowledge we find online. The internet today replicates the marginalizations and exclusions we’ve experienced every day, even as it offers us opportunities to imagine it differently.

Whose Knowledge? is a global, multilingual campaign to design an internet based on knowledge justice and equity by centering the leadership of marginalized communities.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Historical and current structures of power and privilege continue to define what is considered knowledge, who creates it, and how. Systemic forces like capitalism, colonization, patriarchy, racism and homophobia have actively undermined, destroyed, or appropriated the knowledges of much of the world’s populations. This has led to severe knowledge (or “epistemic”) injustices. The internet - as a primary digital infrastructure for knowledge - further exacerbates these inequities, even as it promises to be emancipatory and democratic.

There are two critical ways in which knowledge injustice manifests:

Knowledge infrastructures: The design, architecture, and governance of the internet’s “global” platforms and tools rarely include women, people of color, and people from the Global South (Africa, Asia and the Pacific Islands, Latin America and the Caribbean).

- **Over 58% of the world’s population** accesses the internet today.
- **75% of those online** are from the Global South.
- **45% of all women** are online.

Yet the perspectives of primarily white, straight, North American men dictates how our knowledge infrastructures are created and managed. This means that the internet’s platforms, policies, and protocols are created for and decided by the “local” context of the United States, making the “local” of the United States the (far too often unquestioned) “global” of the rest of the world. For example, even as Twitter tries to “fact check” how indigenous communities are appropriately addressed, its **curation style guide** only describes populations in the US, Canada, and Australia, without any mention of the range and diversity of the **370 million indigenous peoples** across 70 countries worldwide. Similarly, so-called “**artificial**

"intelligence" or machine learning platforms notoriously replicate systemic biases as they use datasets that are primarily based on white men. By not having the majority of the world included in the creation of our knowledge infrastructures, examples such as these will continue to exist.

Knowledge creation and curation: The majority of knowledge available online is textual, in English, and created or curated by a select few.

- Of the 7000+ languages of the world, only 480 of them are represented in the [history of publishing](#) and [a few hundred](#) are represented on the internet.
- [English and Chinese](#) dominate general online content.
- Most scholarly (including digitally accessed) publications are in English. Approximately [80% of all scientific journals](#) and [90% of all social science journals](#) indexed on Scopus and JSTOR are published in English.
- Only a thin slice of the collective body of human knowledge is textual: knowledge is primarily [oral, visual, tactile or embodied](#). But while the internet has the potential to represent multiple forms of knowledge through multimedia, the hegemony of US and European institutions has led to text-dominant digital platforms and knowledge spaces.

Public, online knowledge looks as it does because the majority of the internet's users are not its producers. Take Wikipedia for example, the "world's" encyclopedia: only [20% of the world](#) (primarily white male editors from North America and Europe) edits 80% of Wikipedia currently, and only [1 in 10 of the editors is female](#). The result is that there are [more articles written about Antarctica](#) than about most countries in Africa. So just as everyone should have access to the internet, everyone should be able to consume and produce knowledge in the languages and forms that best express their human creativity, curiosity and experience.

HOW DO WE CHANGE THE STATUS QUO?

To challenge these inequities, we need a dramatic transformation in the nature and forms of knowledge that are accepted and shared, and in the backgrounds and identities of knowledge creators and curators.

Whose Knowledge? works at the forefront of this transformation by supporting the leadership of marginalized communities to share their own stories and knowledges online, safely and securely. This ensures that a particular version of white, straight, male, North American and European history and knowledge does not become the overarching history and knowledge of the world.

As a feminist, anti-colonial team, we partner with individuals, organizations, and movements working at the intersections of knowledge, culture, technology and social justice. We center marginalized voices when building campaigns or working with traditional academic/cultural institutions, in ways that are often nuanced and powerful in their impact. For instance, when we began work with scholars from the Kumeyaay Nation in 2016, the first Wikipedia article we improved together was not on the Kumeyaay, but on the genocide of indigenous peoples that resulted from the [California Gold Rush](#).

By working deeply with communities, we are able to not only amplify marginalized knowledges through our [media](#) work, but also create shared, openly licensed, remixable [resources](#) that can be used by other communities to begin their own knowledge justice journeys. In a COVID-19 world, we have an already [proven commitment and expertise](#) in supporting and expanding online communities of practice.

We believe that *Whose Knowledge?* has the passion and power to drive further systemic transformation over the next three years. In partnership with our communities and you, we can re-imagine and re-design an internet that truly reflects the rich and textured world we live in: full of the knowledges, histories and stories of 7.5 billion people, speaking over 7000 languages.

WHAT ARE WE DOING IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS?

Decolonizing the Internet

Framing and sharing practices to center marginalised knowledges online

The problem: Content online remains heavily skewed toward the rich and powerful in Western countries, and many marginalized communities (including those from the Global North such as people of color, immigrants, etc.) are underrepresented in tech spaces and conversations.

Our impact: We create the virtual and physical fora to bring together critical thinkers and doers that work at the intersections of online knowledge, social justice and digital technologies in order to amplify our decolonizing frames and collectively generate shared agendas for action. In 2018, we brought together community organizers, technologists, academics, artists, archivists and beyond for the first ever Decolonizing the Internet (DTI) [conference](#) at Wikimania Cape Town. In 2019, we organized a [convening](#) focused on languages, at MozFest London. Each event builds shared awareness, strategies, and future actions, dramatically transforming the ways in which the internet represents the majority of the world.

Our plans: We are expanding our expertise in virtual and physical convenings. In 2021, we will facilitate a convening in East Africa, hosted by the Kenyan organization, Femtech, focused on Africa-centered knowledge and technologies online. In 2022, we plan a convening that will look back on the 4 years since our first DTI in 2018, check our progress, and plan future collective actions.

ONGOING INITIATIVES

In the past three years, we have piloted different successful, [community-led](#), [award-winning](#) approaches. Over the next three years, we hope to expand our vision of online knowledge justice and transform the internet over the next decade.



State of the Internet's Languages

Building a truly multilingual internet

The problem: The internet we have today is not multilingual enough to reflect the full depth and breadth of humanity. When marginalized communities cannot create knowledge in their own languages on the internet, this reinforces and deepens inequalities that already exist offline.

Our impact: We're [partnering](#) with researchers at the Oxford Internet Institute and Centre for Internet and Society to develop an openly-licensed multilingual and multiformat "State of the Internet's Languages" Report in 2020. It uses quantitative data and qualitative stories from marginalized communities to demonstrate today's challenges and opportunities for diversifying languages online.

Our plans: The State of the Internet's Languages report will be used as a baseline to build awareness and an agenda for action with marginalized communities, open knowledge folks, and tech communities. Over the next three years, we will advocate for, and act upon, creating a more multilingual internet, and use our research for another assessment in 2022.


Decolonizing Wikipedia

Designing a more equitable online encyclopedia

The problem: Wikipedia has a well-known gender gap and lack of representation of marginalized communities and their knowledge. Black, brown, indigenous and queer women are more likely to be missing and their knowledges are more likely to be underrepresented or deleted due to Wikipedia's current policies.

Our impact: Each year, we run a global [#VisibleWikiWomen](#) campaign in partnership with cultural, educational and feminist organizations and women from around the world. The goal is to add more images of women - particularly black, brown, indigenous, and trans - to Wikipedia, and since 2018, over 11000 images of diverse women have been added to the commons, with over 50% of these images used across multiple language Wikipedias.

Our plans: For our future [#VisibleWikiWomen](#) campaigns, we will expand our partnerships with GLAM institutions like the Smithsonian and the British Library, as well as feminist, Wikimedia organizations and community archives to host online edit-a-thons and bring their archival images online. We will also expand our regional focus to include Africa and Asia in addition to Latin America. We're also working with Wikimedians and academic researchers on a deletion study that will help us make structural changes to Wikipedia's policies. The study examines how bias leads to higher deletion rates of biographies of women, LGBTQI folks, and other marginalized people, using samples of African-American, Dalit, and women-focused content.




Knowledge Justice Resources

Creating and curating community-led knowledge resources

The problem: What is currently considered knowledge or scholarship is "written" by a privileged, powerful minority of the world. Marginalized communities are excluded from knowledge production, including accessing and understanding the policies and practices that govern knowledge spaces.

Our impact: We support the creation and curation of community archives, including digitally, so that non-textual, oral, visual and embodied forms of knowledge can be shared more widely. With Native American, Dalit and queer Bosnian scholars and activists, we created a set of [knowledge justice resources](#) through a process we call a "knowledge sprint".

Our plans: In similar "knowledge sprints", we intend to bring together marginalized community archivists and archival institutions from the US and beyond, to create a set of resources that will document and expand the practices of marginalized communities leading their own knowledge curation and archival processes, including in collaboration with established institutions.



EMERGING INITIATIVES

Over the next three years, apart from expanding our current initiatives, we intend to “explore our origins” and “honour our guardians” through two new efforts that tie in racial and climate justice with knowledge justice. We believe strongly that we cannot imagine our digital futures without reflecting on our analog pasts. Most critically, we cannot re-imagine knowledge and re-design a just and equitable internet or planet without drawing from the wisdoms of our ancestors and indigenous peoples.

Exploring Our Origins

What kind of ancestors do we want to be?

The problem: According to [2019 polls](#), a majority of Americans across [races agree](#) that race relations are generally bad and getting worse. At the same time, there are few safe spaces in which inter- or cross-racial conversations can happen at the level of individuals or communities, and lead to transformative racial justice.

Our methodology and plans: We will develop and pilot an interracial methodology for locating ourselves in the histories of colonization, slavery and migration in the United States. This is based on using intimate shared experiences like friendship or the death of loved ones, to explore with honesty the differences across racial histories and create practices of trust that can build solidarity. The final outcomes of this work will include an [online platform](#) to create and amplify examples of these practices in action, along with a freely-licensed kit containing stories, questions, and concrete practices. We will also host an online and travelling art exhibition about this work, similar to our [Decolonizing the Internet art exhibition](#) in 2018.

Honoring Our Guardians

Whose knowledge will save our planet?

The problem: To create sustainable solutions and mitigation strategies for the climate crises we are experiencing, we need to honor and center the knowledge and expertise of indigenous communities across the world, and support their ongoing leadership and guardianship in the climate justice movement.

Our methodology and plans: We have been invited by indigenous policy makers, activists and scholars to join the urgent climate justice conversations, and share our decolonizing frames and methodologies. We will explore a series of conversations and convenings with indigenous leaders and mainstream activists in the US/Canada, Pacific Islands, the Amazon and other parts of Latin America to listen and learn from the knowledges and expertise of indigenous communities. We hope this will lead to a set of collectively created resources that can be used to drive a sustainable, and community-led set of climate justice solutions.