

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Space Culture – Public Engagement in Space through Culture (9)

Author: Ms. Prathima Muniyappa
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), United States, prathima@media.mit.edu

Dr. Danielle Wood
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), United States, drwood@media.mit.edu

Ms. Ariel Ekblaw
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), United States, aekblaw@mit.edu

Ms. Nicole H'uillier
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), United States, nicolelh@media.mit.edu

MYTHS OF THE COSMOS: ALTERNATIVE INDIGENOUS NARRATIVES FOR SPACE
EXPLORATION**Abstract**

Well before Quintus Ennius, in 169 BC said, ‘No one regards what is before his feet; we all gaze at the stars’, civilizations scattered across the earth had their eyes turned skyward, inscribing the journey of wandering comets on clay tablets, scripting shadows through stone calendars to transcribe the passage of sun, invoking a cultural cosmology by mapping the heavens and negotiating the surface of earth with celestial navigation. The blanket expanse of deep space has enchanted the cultural imaginaries of nearly every civilization on earth, its vast scale becoming the fountainhead of creation mythology for sky-bound minds inhabiting earthbound cultures. Indeed, it is the notion of shared provenance that legitimizes every culture’s equal right over to the exploration of space.

The history of astronomy is a history of receding horizons but the horizon is no monolithic constant. It remains a jagged line as it wrestles with issues of democratization of space exploration and access. For some countries and corporations the frontier of space is a territory familiar with significant resources and infrastructure to have become veteran voyagers, others take nascent steps developing strategies to strengthen their space programs and yet others remain feet planted firmly, gazing at the horizon that never moved, exploring the deep expanse of the cosmos through myth, language, ritual and dreamscape. Indigenous people across the globe remain explorers of the incredible mystery that animate our skies through rich cultural cosmologies evolved over millennia of observation. Their knowledge represents diverse ontologies that offer insight into radically different relationships that humans have evolved about space and its exploration and is an fount of intangible heritage that rarely makes an appearance in the mainstream discourses on space exploration.

As humans become prominent actors in extraterrestrial realms, it stirs in its wake complex questions of identity politics. Whose identity becomes a blueprint for ‘humanity’? What cultures are represented? What others are silenced by deliberate obscuration or worse by ignorance and apathy? To suggest a response to the issue presented by monolithic identities and monocultures of mind, this paper explores the storied cultural heritage preserved in Indigenous Communities, to present alternative cultural ontologies relating to the stars, the cosmos and other dimensions, and extended voyages that can shape the discourse for a more inclusive and diverse mythology of future space exploration.