

ENCOUNTERING INDIGENEITY: RE-IMAGINING AND DECOLONIZING GEOGRAPHY

by

Wendy S. Shaw, R.D.K. Herman and G. Rebecca Dobbs

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ABSTRACT. In an era of postcolonialism and postcolonization, Indigenous struggles continue. Within ‘settler societies’ issues of dispossession – particularly of lands – remain largely unresolved. As part of the discipline of geography’s active movement away from its colonizing project, this introduction to this special edition of *Geografiska Annaler B* seeks to (re)focus a disciplinary lens, and (re)open a dialogue – and potential research trajectory – about ‘indigenous geographies’. As the papers in this special issue demonstrate, new cultural geographies have begun a process of re-engagement with issues of indigeneity through careful, sensitive, inclusive, representative and emancipatory research projects.

Key words: Indigenous, Aboriginal, Native, Geographies, colonialism, methodologies

At the 2002 Association of American Geographers (AAG) annual meeting, a small group of scholars met and aired their concern about the apparent decreasing engagement with Indigenous within the discipline of geography. Low attendances at sessions for the Indigenous People’s Specialty Group (IPSG), and a general feeling of marginalization – of the group, and of Indigenous issues – led to a decision to call for an open discussion about what appeared to be a disciplinary reticence. For the 2003 AAG, the three guest editors of this special edition announced a call to ‘decolonize the discipline’ (see also Robinson, 2003), and asked for contributions for a series of special sessions, and a panel discussion, sponsored by the IPSG and the Socialist and Critical Geography Specialty Group of the AAG. The impetus for this special edition of *Geografiska Annaler B* occurred, in large part, due to the somewhat overwhelming response to the special IPSG sessions, which were titled ‘Rethinking and Reclaiming Power: De-colonizing (Geography’s) Relations with the Indigenous’. Such a response, reflected also in the healthy level of audience attendance, clarified for us the necessity for a forum on indigenous geographies. One member of the audience was an editor of *Geografiska Annaler B*, who suggested a welcome avenue for opening a set of discourses about geography’s engagement with Indigeneity.

Conceptualizations of indigeneity and Aboriginality, and notions of First Nations and Native, are contested¹ and highly context-specific, as reflected in the papers within this edition. These terminologies all carry a range of associated politics around their usage. One result is that a variety of experiences, somewhat awkwardly and, at times, unwillingly, falls under the banner of ‘Indigeneity’. ‘Indigenous geographies’ is therefore a somewhat vexed subdisciplinary descriptor, and much contemporary geographical research concerned with indigeneity occurs within the wider rubric of a somewhat post-disciplinary ‘new’ set of cultural geographies. Studies of indigenous experiences may be found within environmental geographies, planning geographies, urban geographies and even legal geographies (see e.g. Koshade and Peters, this volume). Although suffering this paradoxical status – of essentializing or categorizing very distinct groups of peoples into some kind of monolith dubbed ‘Indigeneity’ – we have followed this categorization with one eye fixed firmly on the discipline’s ever-evolving capacity for politics of ‘difference’, and for the more explicit political aim to recentre and ‘reclaim’ space within the discipline for distinctively indigenous concerns. At the same time we do not want to bind indigenous geographies into some arbitrary categorization – this is far from the goal of ‘opening out’ the debates, or even restating them to a wider geographical audience – nor do we want to indulge in romanticizing indigeneity (see Thomas, 1994), or appropriate cultural attributes to enhance the smorgasbord of globalized consumption choices (see Bonnett, 2000; Deloria, 1998). Rather we prefer to remain vigilant to the variety of issues associated with indigenous political struggles, as well as daily life.

Geography is not politically neutral, and the projects of imperialism/colonialism are far from redressed,² as the trajectory and wealth of globalization research, and much of the research in indigenous geographies generally – and within this special edition – will attest. Our task here is to suggest that the discipline of geography should engage

more actively with the post- and neocolonial/imperial experiences of indigeneity, regardless of the potential fraughtness of such a pursuit. Some geographers have stepped forward and faced up to such challenges. For example, in this volume, Gibson examines the experience of working, as a geographer and a musician, with Australian Aboriginal musicians. He ponders the trials and tribulations of publishing such experiences, and critically examines the politics of the production of academic knowledges, and objects – in particular, academic texts. Gibson details some of the ways that he, and the co-author of the book he discusses, sought to situate their own musical and geographical knowledges within what he identifies as a ‘a problematic, and inherently political, research context’ (Gibson, this volume). Within the highly charged terrain of identification, Nah (this volume) details the ‘construction, deployment, and consequent rupturing of definitions of “indigeneity”’, in postcolonial Malaysia. This contribution details the historical geography of the Malaysian Peninsula, and shifting identifications of indigeneity for the Orang Asli, or Aboriginal Malaysians. Contestations over the designation of indigeneity do occur, particularly in post- and neocolonial contexts.

At this point it is necessary to address the term ‘indigenous’ that we have been using so freely, and also the various synonymous terms which are often region-specific. Needless to say, terms such as these are often contested and are subject to changing preferences on the part of the peoples so indicated. An example of this is the problem of ‘Native American’ versus ‘Indian’ in the United States. The obvious error Europeans made in applying the term *Indian* to the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas was one factor in the rise of ‘Native American’ as the preferred alternative in the late twentieth century – a term which, despite slow acceptance, is now in common use by many Americans. Yet many of those to whom it applies quite simply identify as ‘Indians’, and prefer that term. In Australia, Indigenous peoples have universally rejected the term ‘Aborigine’ in favor of specific kin or language group identifications, and the use of ‘Native’ is considered highly offensive – it is used to describe indigenous plant species only. Sometimes regional, but mostly language-based identifiers, such as Koori³ and Murri, are also used in the Australian context. The term ‘Aboriginal people’ is widely used for larger group identification, as is the Aboriginal flag.

As an umbrella term to encompass a huge vari-

ety of peoples, ‘indigenous’ is not without problems. One meaning of the word, for instance, is the people who are born in a place. By that definition all people who have not migrated are indigenous. While we recognize the range of definitions of the word ‘I/indigenous’, the indigenous peoples referred to in this volume are generally groups with ancestral and often spiritual ties to particular land, and whose ancestors held that land prior to colonization by outside powers, and whose nations remain submerged within the states created by those powers. Most works in this subfield concern states established by settlers from those powers, which we collectively refer to as ‘settler societies’. Examples from the ‘West’ include the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (and their variously colonized territories). We use the term ‘indigenous’ as the best choice available to us, despite an awareness of the unwillingness of some peoples so described to be included under this banner. We do, however, remain alert to the broad range of peoples this includes, and the huge capacity for difference it encompasses. We have no desire to impute monolithic qualities to indigenous peoples by using an umbrella term. In advance, we apologize for any offence taken for such labelling (and would welcome a decolonized, de-essentialized and yet universally acceptable alternative).

Similarly problematic is a tendency to think of distinct epistemological difference between approaches loosely identified as ‘Western’ and ‘indigenous’, without recognizing that these are both polyvalent and polyvocal realms of discourse. The basis for this distinction, besides mere ‘cultural difference’, generally lies in the argument that ‘Western’ thought is based on the Cartesian split between mind and body, and therefore between consciousness and matter. This split, which inheres in modernity and modern geography in many ways, is characteristic neither of pre-modern thinking in the ‘West’ (see Livingstone, 1992; Unwin, 1992) nor in many indigenous cultures.

At the same time, many indigenous peoples exist within the framework of globalizing ‘Western’ cultures, and encompass realms of existence for many peoples going about the business of living their lives – in urban and non-urban settings, and increasingly where identity is multiple and fluid.⁴ The ongoing evolution of ‘tradition’, and consequent transformations through modernity, has resulted in negotiations, resistances and selective appropriations. For those living around inner Sydney, Australia, for instance, this may include a

game of Koori golf, or an evening spent engaged in Koori-aoke,⁵ or just making ends meet within an increasingly complex and competitive globalizing world. Bifurcating 'indigenous' from 'Western' is misleading and problematic, and we make such a distinction as a purely heuristic device. As the articles in this volume show, no such simple dichotomy can be made, even while juxtaposing epistemologies along these lines can remain a useful starting point for exploring negotiations of new positions, as illustrated by Koschade and Peters (this volume).

Overall, we regard the production of this volume as a strategy for bringing international disciplinary attention to indigenous geographies/*geographies*. We want also to reiterate our call from the 2003 AAG to decolonize the discipline. In solidarity with others working in this arena, we would like to make mention of other efforts that are proceeding apace in this regard. For example, Jay Johnson's work, as the IPSG co-chair, to institutionalize indigenous issues within the International Geographical Union, and the heightened visibility of the IPSG at the 2005 and 2006 AAG Annual Meetings. Organizations such as the 'Native Canadians Specialty Group' (Canadian Association of Geographers) and the 'Indigenous Issues Study Group' (Institute of Australian Geographers) are active Anglophone hubs for research on indigenous issues. However, while there are the benefits of political pro-activity that smaller, or marginal networks enable, the peripheral status of indigenous geographies has incurred a cost. Its perceived remoteness to geography's scholarly heart⁶ has meant that indigenous geographies are somewhat removed from the rigours of disciplinary debate and remain *out there*, on the post/neocolonial edges of the disciplinary orbit. To illustrate, a crude content analysis of publications registering the term 'indigen(ous/eity)' equalled only 1.67% (91 of 5418) from 1997 to July 2004, and 3.5% (32 of 913) articles registering the term 'Aborigin(al/ality/es)' found their way into journals with 'geograph(ical/y/ies)' in their titles.⁷

Indeed, this special edition has provided a specific avenue for mainstream publication of research that is sometimes marginalized – because of its context and content, rather than its scholarship. Research in indigenous geographies – as some of the submissions received for this special journal edition demonstrated – is often reported in a style that, although appropriate in other more specific contexts, is not always appropriate for publication in

scholarly journals, regardless of the importance of the work. We hope to address this particular impasse by contributing to a dialogue about indigenous geographies that will pave the way for the publication of other works, with merits that are less bound by the strictures of the academy. One characteristic of indigenous discourses is a largely oral, or story-telling mode, and Huggins *et al.*, (1995) have provided a methodological exemplar for the inclusion of orally presented knowledges. Although the dominance of the *written* over the oral persisted for reasons of publication, the various contributions – both oral and written – were carefully included within the text. This kind of publication – published in a history journal – has the capacity to open the way for more of this kind of contribution to (indigenous) geographies.

In the remainder of this introduction, we hope to highlight some of the key issues regarding indigenous geographies, and its relationship to the discipline as a whole. The perspectives we present below draw not only on the wealth of papers submitted for this volume (many more than are presented here⁸), but on the presentations and panel discussions we have experienced in various conference venues over recent years as well as published work from many time periods and disciplines.

All our relatives

For those authors – both indigenous and non-indigenous – who distinguish between 'indigenous' and 'Western' worldviews, this difference is especially apparent in regard to the discipline of geography. Wildcat (1994, p.v), for instance, has spoken of what has been called 'the Indian sense of thinking in space,' and pointed out that 'sacred sites, sovereignty issues, land issues, water rights, [and] a whole host of natural-resource issues...are tied to our native sense of place'.

Uniquely 'indigenous' geographies – as worldviews – accord with what Cosgrove (1984) calls an 'analogic' context. Such worldviews often included a fluidity between cultures and environments, and the absence of land 'ownership' per se. Within them, individuals have understood their position in the world in terms of relationships to larger processes. This differs from what Cosgrove calls an 'atomistic' context, in which individuals understand themselves as distinct entities. In the atomistic context, which aptly describes modern rationalist thought, the environment is secularized and 'atomized' – existing as a 'resource' rather than as part of an interrelated

system of being. Within this atomistic context, land has been all too easily commodified.

Although indigenous perspectives can be widely diverse, they are often rooted in a common epistemological standpoint. Tewa scholar (from North America) Cajete (2000, pp. 75, 79) has referred to this common understanding as 'native science':

Everything is considered to be 'alive' or animated and imbued with 'spirit' or energy. A stone has its own form of animation and unique energy. Everything is related, that is, connected in dynamic, interactive, and mutually reciprocal relationships. All things, events, and forms of energy unfold and infold themselves in a contextual field of the micro and macro universe. ... Native science reflects a celebration of renewal. The ultimate aim is not explaining an objectified universe, but rather learning about and understanding responsibilities and relationships and celebrating those that humans establish with the world. ... Native science is also about mutual reciprocity, and which presupposes a responsibility to care for, sustain, and respect the rights of other living things, plants, animals, and the place in which one lives.

This sense that humans have a kinship relationship with their environments is frequently expressed by indigenous speakers. Sioux author Lane Deer (1972), for example, explained how the ceremonial use of the term 'all my relatives' linked the speaker not only to the others in the ceremony, but also to everyone and everything else. Given this web of relationships and responsibilities, indigenous *geographies* – in the broader sense – have long been characterized by an overarching emphasis on place – the specific, the meaningful and the interrelated – an emphasis that contemporary geography has recently come to recognize as important.

Geographic encounters with indigenous peoples

The meaning of land is perhaps *the* core value for indigenous peoples globally, and the key point on which 'Western' and indigenous worldviews have historically diverged. Geographers, with their, at times, somewhat ambivalent relationship with issues involving land and its meaning, are in a useful position to contribute to more enlightened understandings in indigenous geographies.

The obvious corollary is that work in the subdiscipline of indigenous geographies requires that geographers recognize the essentially different meaning that land, landscape, place and environment can hold for different peoples. In actuality, geographers have only begun to do this in the relatively recent past. Works published up and into the 1960s tended to be merely descriptive (Dobbs, 1995). Such works displayed a perspective that was all too common among writers of European descent, who carried a sense of their own 'racial' superiority and a belief that indigenous groups were already extinct or soon would be. Paralleling broader shifts in the discipline, work with indigenous peoples in the 1960s began to engage in more rigorous explanatory thinking. In an example from North America, McIntire (1967) applied central place theory to patterns of services and settlement on the Navajo reservation, with some surprising results that challenged the assumptions behind this Europe-based model. The shift in social consciousness and political awareness exhibited by several authors in this period is likewise significant, prefiguring structuralist analyses which began to appear a few years later. Indeed, it is perhaps only from this point (the mid- to late 1960s) that we might consider a subdiscipline of indigenous geographies to have actually existed.

Indigenous geographies continued to develop in the 1970s as structuralist work became more common. Much of this was published in the then-new radical journal *Antipode*. By the 1990s, however, viewpoints which had been 'radical' only a decade or two before had become generally accepted, and many authors began to publish solid scholarly reappraisals of long-accepted 'truths' regarding indigenous peoples. Several prominent examples of the latter, that challenged accepted ideas about the pre-Columbian landscapes of the Americas, were published together in a special issue of the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* in 1992, with Karl Butzer (1992) as guest editor. The early 1990s also saw the first attempts to apply GIS technologies to indigenous issues, a trend which is now in full swing with mapping, counter-mapping and debates on validity occurring across much physical and intellectual terrain. Perhaps most of all, the 1990s saw increasing complexity, increasing theoretical engagement, and a renewed tendency for works in the subdiscipline to display relevance to contemporary issues, even when focused on the past, demonstrating that new understandings of past events are relevant to the 'new' project.

Since the 'cultural turn' and the associated move away from essentialism, geographical concerns about representation of 'the other' (cf. Said, 1978) have coincided with a shift away from the study of those identified as 'minority' groups, such as indigenous peoples. One outcome of this shift has meant a useful turn to the study of 'majority' groups. This has enabled a critical engagement with geographies of racialization (Blaut, 1992; Jackson, 1987; Leitner, (1992) for review), including – to a lesser extent – the racialization of indigenous peoples (Anderson, 1993; Howitt *et al.*, 1996; Jacobs, 1996; Peters, 1998), and indigenous encounters with whiteness (Shaw, 2000).

The rise of postcolonial theories and perspectives has emphasized the need to consider the trajectories of colonialism experienced by indigenous peoples that reach into the present rather than remain fixed on the more conventional study of 'traditional' indigeneity in bygone non-urban settings. Thus the late 1990s saw the beginnings of engagement with indigenous issues 'in earnest' by critical geographers (Castree, 2004). In Canada, for example, Peters (1998, p. 667) has identified 'complex geographies of identity and resistance ... in relation to First Nations women' that unsettled some of the deeply racialized cultural meanings of urban living. Indigenous issues became subject, also, to the rigours of postcolonial critique, as with King's (1992, p. 343) study of indigenous resistance 'to different forms and sites of colonial domination'.

Beyond postcoloniality

The contributions of postcolonial perspectives, that have given rise to the field of postcolonial studies (Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1985, 1987, 1990), have the potential to reshape the political positioning of studying indigeneity. For many settler societies, the complexities and issues of post- and neocolonialism remain integral to understanding the juxtapositioning of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. For example, processes of 'racial' segregation and racialization have framed the lives of many urban indigenous communities. The principles of postcolonial critique can enable greater understandings of the neocolonial tendencies that continually manifest through the discourses and practices of dominant groups in these settler societies.

Research in geography has to a limited extent embraced postcolonial theory, and it is here that indigenous geography research can be too easily located.

Although it is clear that most Indigenous peoples have experienced some form of colonization, postcolonial theory has emerged largely from the European experience of losing colonies in the wake of the Second World War. Postcolonial literatures are most proliferate in the English language, though French and (often overlooked) Latin American literatures do exist. Bahri (1996, p. 137) has stated that while 'postcolonial' literally refers to that which follows colonization, the term has come to be used more loosely to refer to 'the chapter of history following World War II, whether or not such a period accommodates the still colonized, the neocolonized, or the always colonized'. However, the postcolonial condition for decolonized states is different to the circumstances of indigenous nations existing within settler states, which are often the setting for indigenous geographical studies. Thus the application of the term 'postcolonial' to these situations is problematic. Postcolonial criticism is aimed at 'reason' and 'progress' as the twin pillars of colonialism. One of the aims of postcolonial work is to decentre 'Western' authority over knowledge, requiring 'Western' theory and scholarship not only to listen to 'the other', but acknowledge and fully incorporate differences to the broader body of intellectual theory.

For geography, Clayton (2003, p. 354) has identified four movements within what he calls 'critical imperial and colonial geographies', which have some resonance with indigenous geographies. These include attempts to show that the discipline, and a broader set of geographical discourses and practices, played a critical or even vital role in empire-building (see e.g. Godlewska and Smith, 1995). From there follow critiques of these imperial geographies, and attempts to move the discipline beyond their binds and conventions. Treatments of the links between geography and empire – as symptomatic of the relations of power inherent in the production of geographical knowledge – form a third theme. Finally, there are attempts to give geography a niche in wider debates about colonialism, postcolonialism and 'Western' dominance. Thus the geographic literature on postcolonialism, as well as indigenous geographies, has voices both from the (former) imperial powers – dealing with postcolonial angst and coming to grips with a plural, postmodern world – and 'the colonized', exerting themselves against ongoing cultural and economic hegemony.

While it is frequently noted that 'colonialism' is 'post' only in a political sense for former colonies,

often even this is not the case for indigenous peoples who exist as marginalized groups, and frequently lack sovereignty on what were once their own lands. The Anglophone-dominated states of Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand (and, some may argue, the United Kingdom) have dominion over internal nations that nonetheless retain their identities, and to varying degrees, their languages, their lands, and (limited) autonomy. They are internal 'colonies' for which the prefix 'post' does not apply. The term 'postcolonial' must therefore be used with caution when applied to many indigenous situations.

Indigenous politics call for a fuller epistemological decolonization. Such politics demand the recognition of indigenous geographic understandings that are very different, and at times contrary to, the 'geography of reason' produced during the so-called Enlightenment. This call is a politics that embraces indigenous concepts of landownership and land management that can often be understood only within indigenous geographic frameworks.

For geography, as a discipline, to advance politically, it needs to resign its role in the service of 'Western' imperialism (Godlewska and Smith, 1995; Gregory, 1996; Livingstone, 1992; Unwin, 1992). Part of the project of overt indigenous politics has been to resist the application of 'rationalism' when it conflicts fundamentally with indigenous understandings of, for example, the structuring of society, culture and economy that are based on more spiritual connections to land. The actual *meaning* of land colonization of the Americas and Oceania has involved the deployment of spatial practices and representations that have rendered indigenous territories unclaimed, or un(der)utilized, or, in the case of *terra nullius*, empty wildernesses. In this volume, Larsen shows how the Dakelh nation in British Columbia, Canada, has used memory as a strategic tool to reconstitute the meaning of land. He elucidates the embodied nature of Canada's indigenous *geographies*, in which 'territory' is defined by walking and usage, rather than by boundaries and titles. He argues that struggles have been waged via the inscription of history through the landscape. In the context of post-Fordist globalization and the competition of multiple interests to define indigenous land, what emerges is the construction of flexible, fluid spaces where a range of unexpected political alliances, cultural productions and resource management strategies can arise.

Howitt and Suchet-Pearson (this volume) consider the ways that Eurocentric ontologies, and em-

bedded strategies of 'deep colonization', have been unsettled and disrupted within conflicts over wildlife management in northern Australia. They engage the possibility of 'allowing unruly pluralism to take root in wider Australian society' that retains 'space for indigenous ways of being-in-place' for the purposes of economic, social and environmental justice, within contemporary Australia. And Koschade and Peters (this volume) present a case study that challenges the framework of non-indigenous control over indigenous landscapes using the concept of 'jurisdiction'. Their article details the different understandings and applications of 'law' by Canadian legal bodies, and by an Algonquin community, who have attempted to influence the outcome of an environmental review process. The Algonquin group, for whom jurisdiction involves both knowledge and responsibility in a framework of relationships between humans and the land, were ultimately thwarted by the power relations inherent in the Canadian legal uses of jurisdiction. Koschade and Peters (this volume) provide an important alternative perspective on legal geographies while also introducing an insightful analysis of the strategies used by the Algonquin participants in the environmental review.

Another way to frame indigenous geographies – and the geographies of indigenous struggles – within the overall field of geography is as the 'resource peripheries' of global capital. Challenging geography's preoccupation with cores, Hayter *et al.*, (2003; see also Barnes and Hayter, 2005) point to resource peripheries as crucial areas for global capital, and argue that studying these peripheries adds insights to global capital that cannot be derived from studying the cores.

Because indigenous peoples often occupy remote resource regions, particularly in poorer parts of the world, development of resource peripheries can threaten ways of life as well as livelihood. Hayter *et al.*, (2003, p. 20) have used the term 'aboriginalism'⁹ to refer to the 'complex range of sometimes contradictory requests by Aboriginal Peoples to maintain their way of life, maintain identity and self-control, and achieve economic development'. For example, indigenous communities are utilizing aspects of globalization, including access to markets and mobilization of consumer sympathies, to gain leverage in their struggles. Indigenous opposition to resource development, the authors remark, are increasingly being taken to world forums. At the same time, indigenous control over resource exploitation can result in forms of cultural renewal. Re-

source peripheries are also often marked by environmental concerns, resulting in the involvement of non-government organizations (NGOs) as forward guards against the excesses of global capital. As Larson's study (this volume) shows, indigenous struggles may now involve collaborations with environmental NGOs and other non-indigenous groups whose interests lie more in line with their own.

If we are to truly decolonize geography, the discipline needs a broadened understanding of indigenous perspectives and epistemologies. Engaging with indigenous *geographies* thus allows us to remove the epistemological blinders which perpetuate residual, static and uniform forms of 'truth' to reveal instead a cornucopia of worldviews that open up new vistas to understanding the world and humanity's place within it.

Decolonizing geography therefore entails deconstructing the discursive edifice that has resulted from the confluence of 'Western' knowledge-building and empire-building, and an undermining of the hegemonic forces that keep it in place. This requires coming to terms with the cultural politics of 'knowledge', its production, and the recognition that knowledge is a cultural artefact which reinforces social, political and economic norms.

Dangers and pitfalls

As postcolonial criticism and indigenous activism work to redress the presumed authority of 'Western' research, and researchers, many indigenous scholars and organizations have set standards for appropriate methodology in conducting research with Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities have repeatedly seen anthropologists and other scholars arrive, take and leave, building their careers on the contributions of indigenous knowledges while giving nothing in return. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999) has exemplified the need to follow protocols in the conduct of research involving indigenous peoples. Most importantly, she has identified that such protocols are not uniform, varying instead by both culture and experiences of colonialism. It is now well recognized that doing work within indigenous communities requires a high level of responsibility in order to avoid exploitative or damaging outcomes for the people involved.

Methodological approaches for working with indigenous communities are in line with those

identified by Fitzgerald (2004, p. 236) who identified parallels between feminist and Indigenous methodologies. Feminist geographies have made some of the most profound contributions to situating the politics of geographical research and researchers (e.g. McDowell, 1992; Miles and Crush, 1993; Momsen, 1993; Rose, 1993). Katz (1994) and Kobayashi (1994), in particular, have stressed the need to maintain non-essentialized or unfixed views of the research position, and to recognize that as researchers, we speak from multiple positionalities – as geographers, and for some of us positioned as the feminized and/or indigenous 'other' of the academy – but also as researchers who need to be alert to the politics of our positionalities in the fieldwork process. Because researchers need to be always cognizant of the power of their political positioning (Jackson, 1991), factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, social location/class and so on must remain at the forefront of the research and interpretation process. Kobayashi (1994) has also acknowledged that fieldwork should be recognized for its pro-active potential. The sheer doing of fieldwork, especially ethnographic fieldwork, performs functions other than those ascribed by the researcher. As Fitzgerald (2004, p. 236) remarked, self-reflexive research is 'not about the search for the truth, authority or objectivity; its goal is to challenge, contest and resist the production and control of knowledge by the powerful'.

But the pitfalls of such research go beyond the intention of the researchers and their methodologies. We must be mindful of how research can be used, and by whom. We must always ask, 'Who does this serve?' and be leery of engaging in research that not only does not serve indigenous communities, but is also antithetical to projects of, for example, self-determination. This is not easy, for meaning easily escapes the intention, and what may appear innocuous can become damaging in the hands of others.

This has been noted particularly in the case of mapping. Cartography is already a method that reifies a particular spatial view of land that is rooted in colonially imposed understandings of land, and revolves around boundary-based mapping. Indigenous environmental understandings are dismembered when integrated wholes become 'sites' translated into points on a map. But perhaps more immediately important is how those maps are then used, and they are easily used to show the 'emptiness' that lies between these disintegrated points. And emptiness – from the colonizers' perspective

– means un(der)utilized, which means ripe for exploitation. Thus indigenous communities using mapping and GIS to inventory their lands are leaving themselves open to perhaps unwanted interventions by capital. When state funds are involved, indigenous mapping projects, such as those that identify the location of cultural sites, often become public property. The result may be a loss of control over information, which may also leave such sites open to vandalism. Overall, indigenous peoples face challenges over the control of their intellectual property, as much as they do over their lands.

Conclusions

There has been a patchy history to the way the discipline of geography has – and has not – related to indigeneity, but it is the contemporary issues, the debates, and more importantly the non-debates or *silences* that are cause for concern. These are due mainly, we contend, to the issue of the representation of indigenous peoples. If the issue of representation is not dealt with very carefully, then colonial/imperial projects overall (and not just in geography) remain unchecked. There is an impasse of sorts between the tendency to not doing anything at all (either out of fear of misrepresenting, and/or offending), and of carrying out research that has not fully considered issues of identity and ‘world-views’, representation, and the production of knowledge within contemporary post/neocolonial settler and other repressive contexts. It is our hope that this volume of work on indigenous geographies is a step towards opening up a disciplinary space for productive discussion of the issues, and thereby perhaps moving contemporary geography beyond the impasse.

By definition, current debates tend to emanate from the ‘centre’ or heart of the discipline, and even though such debates may not always serve the imperial project – many actively disrupt it – fringe geographies, such as indigenous geographies, do remain somewhat marginalized. The result is that neither the fringes, nor the centre, benefit from broader intellectual contributions. Although research practices, methodologies and theorizings of the core have not yet fully realized the benefits of engagement with peripheral developments in contemporary thinking, contemporary geography has the potential to offer more nuanced, de-essentialized, and located studies of processes that impact upon indigenous peoples.

The aforementioned disciplinary reticence to

engage with indigenous issues may stem, in part, from a fear of misrepresenting ‘the other’, but we suspect that a politics of indifference may also be in operation with vestiges of the imperial project of *terra nullius*, which rendered indigenous peoples (in Australia, at least) as non-existent, or ‘out of sight, out of mind.’ We would like to encourage a stronger positioning of indigenous geographies as a subdiscipline, from where it could reap the benefits of a more thorough engagement with contemporary geographical debates. At the same time more ‘mainstream’ geographies may find that they too could well be enhanced by a more productive engagement with some of the highly alternative pathways of (indigenous) knowledge production.

Notes

1. Recently, a British colleague ‘playfully’ claimed indigeneity after a recent call for papers on indigenous geographies, as did a group who identified themselves as Deaf, claiming that their experiences of dispossession were akin to those who identified differently as indigenous (personal communications).
2. On this we apologize for the focus on North America and Australia throughout much of this discussion. This is purely a reflection of the locations of the authors of this introduction. It is not, in any way, meant as the focus of indigenous geographies.
3. ‘Koori’ is a unifying term for Aboriginal Australians who hark from the eastern parts of the country.
4. This includes questions about defining indigeneity. In Australia, for example, identifications of ‘indigeneity’ have shifted, over time. The current protocol is based largely on an overall agreement among those who identify as indigenous. This has not always been the case with various phases of imposed and ultimately malevolent government categorizations that assisted in the process of the removal of children who were ‘light-skinned’, which resulted in the ‘stolen generations’. More recently, many who have not identified as indigenous have found out about indigenous ancestry, which has added another layer of complicated identity formations involving indigeneity in Australia.
5. Koori-aoke is Aboriginal Karaoke.
6. We are referring to the disciplinary hierarchy of geographical thinking and its dissemination rather than a disciplinary epistemology as such. For example, international conferences rarely prioritize the theme of indigeneity, and in publishing locality based studies with ‘international appeal’ often refer to European and/or North American markets.
7. We used articles listed in a global online database (Ingenta) using ‘I/indigenous’ and ‘A/aboriginal’ as keywords. Other keywords ‘native’ and ‘first nations’ also revealed low percentages but were less reliable due to the generality of the terms.
8. The decision-making process was particularly difficult for this volume and rested, finally, on the usual cache of scholarly indicators. We dutifully steered the conventional course – rigour does need to be maintained – but we were cognizant of the impacts of marginality, and the need for engagement with the politics of knowledge production (see Gibson, and Howitt and Suchett-Pearson, this volume).

9. 'Aboriginalism' was previously used by Attwood and Arnold (1992, p. iii) who, following Said's notion of 'Orientalism' (1978), stated that 'Aboriginalisms produce the reality ... imagined by influencing government policies and practice which have, in turn, determined Aborigines' terms of existence – racialising the Aboriginal social body and so making Aborigines of the indigenous population' (see also Shaw, 2003).

Wendy S. Shaw
School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences,
University of New South Wales
Sydney 2052
Australia
E-mail: w.shaw@unsw.edu.au

R.D.K. Herman
Department of Geography
Towson University
Maryland
USA
E-mail: DHerman@towson.edu

G. Rebecca Dobbs
Department of Social Sciences
Emporia State University
Kansas
USA
E-mail: grdobbs@email.unc.edu

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