

When the Politics of Inclusivity Become Exploitative: A Reflective Commentary on Indigenous Peoples, Indigeneity, and the Academy

Margo Greenwood

University of Northern British Columbia

Sarah de Leeuw

University of Arizona

Tina Ngaroimata Fraser

University of Northern British Columbia

This article critically engages the politics of inclusivity by exploring the respective advantages and disadvantages faced by Indigenous peoples as (predominantly non-Indigenous) academic institutions come to recognize the merits of Indigenous knowledges and world views. Written in part from lived and personal experiences, we argue three specific points. First, there are certainly advantages for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that result from increased inclusion of Indigenous peoples, voices, perspectives, and knowledges in the contexts of universities and postsecondary academic institutions. Second, whereas the academy has much to gain from the politics of inclusivity, Aboriginal peoples at both individual and community levels often have much to lose (or indeed have already lost a great deal) in the contours of the burgeoning relationship. Third, and by way of a conclusion, we propose a variety of suggestions to rectify what we perceive as a power imbalance between the academy and Indigenous peoples and knowledges operating therein.

Introduction

Not so long ago, we found ourselves together at an academic conference. Over an evening meal we started talking about the politics of the academy. As these discussions tend to, ours quickly turned to retellings of personal stories and anecdotal updates on people we all knew in common: "Did you hear about ...?" "What happened to ...?" and "Isn't it a shame that ...?" We quickly discovered that a common theme of our stories and discussions was the exhaustion, alienation, and conflictedness felt by many Aboriginal peoples in the academy. These themes, we believe, are worthy of some further sustained attention, particularly in an issue of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education* dedicated to Aboriginal peoples and the academy. Indeed, by deploying a concept that we have named *exploitative inclusivity*, we offer a unique perspective on what are increasingly common discussions about Indigenous peoples and Indigeneity in

academia: How might multiple world views and stratified sociocultural powers coexist in postsecondary institutions?

It has become commonplace in the 21st century unquestioningly to understand diversity as a positive and beneficial state to which we should all aspire. Diversity, which is at least in definition premised on a practice of inclusivity, suggests on the surface a respect for difference, an embracing of multiple perspectives and peoples, and a recognition that homogeneity is both a perpetuation of power imbalances and unrepresentative of real life. In short, efforts toward diversification of peoples and ideas in spaces like the academy are usually understood as laudable attempts of "doing good" or "doing the right thing." We do not negate the intentions behind diversification and inclusivity. At the same time, we highlight the importance and added value of including Indigenous peoples and perspectives in all spaces of the academy. However, this must be done with caution and with an understanding that diversity can be addressed in multiple ways in the academy.

Our caution is located in personal experiences and observations, as well as in a growing literature on the decolonization of educational spaces and expectations of Indigenous peoples both in the academy and in organizations that have turned their interests toward Indigenous issues and ways of knowing and being (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Marker, 2004; Orr, Paul, & Paul, 2002; Spafford, Nygaard, Gregor, & Boyd, 2006; van der Wey, 2007; Wilson, 2007). We begin our discussion with some generalized observations about everyday challenges that unfold for Indigenous people in universities across Canada. The discussion is generalized so as not to focus on any one institution or any singular person's experience. We follow this with an exploration of what it means for multiple world views to collide (Little Bear, 2000) in the spatial and intellectual confines of the academy or in the confines of other institutions from which Indigenous people have long been excluded. Here we particularly focus on Euro-Western expectations about Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and world views, and how these expectations come to bear on the people and subjects they touch. We conclude our commentary with some suggestions for change in the future, change that we sincerely hope will benefit not only institutions and academic establishments, but perhaps most important, the increasing number of Indigenous scholars and students who comprise those institutions.

Making Space and Experiencing Space: Living Indigeneity in the Academy
Between the three of us, we know of at least a dozen Indigenous scholars who by virtue of being scholars in universities or colleges feel as if connections with their communities and families are compromised. They also feel as if they are compromising their success as individuals so that they can further the collective interests of Indigenous peoples and issues in the academy. Consider, for example, the number of Indigenous All-But-Dis-

sertation (ABD) scholars who seem never to finish their doctorates. Completion of the doctorate is something for which the academy would materially and financially reward them.

From our perspectives, such a scenario generally plays out as follows. An academic institution or department agrees that the recruitment of an Indigenous person would be of benefit to the institution, and they thus set out to attract such a candidate. However, decades of Eurocolonial political, and subsequent educational, marginalization of Indigenous people has predictably resulted in only a small number of Indigenous peoples entering graduate studies across the country (Berkowitz, 2006). This makes the recruitment process much more intensive. Let us assume, though, that an institution or department is successful in finding a "suitable" individual. Sometimes the person is in the final stages of his or her PhD. Unfortunately, the fate that too often befalls the successfully recruited candidate is that he or she enters a position and is quickly thrown into the fray of a system that demands a great deal because he or she is Indigenous. Requests for input on departmental, graduate, and professional committees are intensified given the demand to have Indigenous perspectives in these arenas and the corresponding lack of individuals able to offer such perspectives. Many Indigenous scholars entering the academy as faculty are in many cases the first members of their families to have achieved postsecondary education (Berkowitz). Thus despite rejuvenating networks and supports outside the academy, many Indigenous scholars do not find formal or informal networks and supports to turn to for academy-related advice when they are feeling overwhelmed and overworked. In addition, there is an all-encompassing sense of obligation to represent all Indigenous peoples and views, making it particularly difficult to set aside time for completion of a doctorate. The result is that we know of many Indigenous scholars who are of great benefit to the academy, but for whom the benefits of the academy are few.

Research institutes, professional bodies, or private and public organizations looking for scholarly Indigenous input on a wide array of issues also come knocking at the newly recruited scholars' doors. All too often we have heard the sense of urgency felt by these scholars, a feeling of being unable to say No to requests for their participation because to do so would be either to not live up to academic service expectations, or more important, to forfeit the opportunity of arguing and promoting the worth of Indigenous perspectives in environments that for so long have not sought such input. There is, then, a feeling of not being able to say No, because this would have effects beyond the individual, with ramifications to entire communities. In other words, and often tied to Indigenous world views that focus on the collective to a greater degree than the individual (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000), Indigenous scholars struggle with a deep sense of responsibility to represent and advance the interests

of Indigenous peoples and communities far beyond their own individual interests. This sense of obligation, though, is at odds with an institutional framework (the academy) that continues to privilege and reward the individual for individualized activities (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Tien, 2007).

The tension between individuality and collectivity manifests in other ways for Indigenous peoples living and working in the contours of the academy. When we thought about it, we were able to come up with a plethora of examples in which—usually because of their commitment to community—Indigenous scholars faced setbacks in promotion and tenure. One such situation involves Indigenous peoples not "measuring up" to the criteria by which academic institutions evaluate what constitutes meaningful research contributions. The so-called gold standard of publication, as all academics quickly learn as they are acculturated into the university system, involves dissemination of one's (preferably single-authored) research in high-ranking, peer-reviewed journals. It is best, we learn, if these journals are national or international in scope. In such an evaluative environment, two conundrums arise immediately for Indigenous scholars. First, it is a fallacy that the research of Indigenous scholars is being judged by peers: too few Indigenous peoples operate as reviewers or as journal editors for this to be the case. Consequently, work by Indigenous scholars in the academy is often judged (and sometimes found wanting) by reviewers who may be evaluating the work from other world views and paradigms. The collective force of Euro-Western paradigms, it might be said, comes to rest on individual Indigenous scholars and their research.

The second conundrum stems from what might be called "the principal affinity" of Indigenous scholars. Here we are thinking of the deep sense of commitment and responsibility toward community that so many Indigenous scholars feel. Consider the types of choices Indigenous scholars are often asked to make between, for example, (a) assisting in writing a grant proposal for their community child care center or lending their unique research status in order to undertake a much-needed community assessment of Aboriginal youth in schools; and (b) producing an article for journal submission that assesses the effect of federal legislation on a reserve community. Despite the latter choice being what academic evaluations would value more highly, thus resulting in more accolades for the researcher and the academic institution, Indigenous scholars often choose the former. In our experience, the choice to privilege community arises from a sense of needing to give back to the community: in many Indigenous world views the collective community is privileged before the individual, and people are inseparable from the social and natural world in which they were reared. To choose an individualized endeavor, then, is

antithetical to cultural protocol. To privilege the cultural protocols of Indigeneity, however, is often to be compromised in the academy.

We are aware of another significant challenge faced by Indigenous scholars in universities, also related to culture, but in this case related more to the (mis)perceptions of some Non-Aboriginal scholars about Indigenous academics. To be an Indigenous scholar in a university is often to be marked as someone focused solely on Indigenous issues. As with Indigenous artists, there can be an expectation by non-Aboriginal people that because of one's Indigenous cultural and genealogical linkages, one will focus solely on Indigenous issues. As Winnipeg-based artist Kale Bonham has observed, "My 'Aboriginal-ness' is not [always] the focus of who I am as an artist" (Mattes, 2007). In other words, although it is certainly the case that many Indigenous scholars research and teach issues that might be broadly characterized as Indigenous in nature, this should not result in Indigenous scholars being confined to teaching only courses in Indigenous studies or on Indigenous issues. Such practices constitute marginalization, albeit under the rubric of diversification and inclusivity of Indigeneity. Indigenous scholars can and do study all issues, be it carbon dating of lake sediment in the high Arctic or Shakespearean sonnets. Too often we hear comments from non-Indigenous academics like, "Oh, are you in a First Nations Studies department?" or "We are really looking for Indigenous representation in this area": such comments essentialize Indigenous scholars in the academy and perpetuate ideas of pan-Indigeneity. Such assumptions also serve to make many Indigenous scholars we know question branching out into new areas of research, once again confining Indigenous peoples to circumscribed and externally defined spaces in the academy.

In our experience, and from listening for years to the many stories that Indigenous scholars tell about their time in academic institutions, we believe the academy still has a long way to go before it becomes a livable and workable place for Indigenous peoples and perspectives. It is our sense that the academy is benefiting greatly by increasing diversity and incorporating Indigenous peoples and world views into academic environments. We worry, however, that the individual Indigenous scholars who are on the front lines of providing benefit to the institution are not experiencing a corresponding benefit. We worry in fact that these scholars are experiencing burnout, exhaustion, and lack of recognition. We also worry that institutions and organizations, in their albeit well-intentioned efforts at inclusivity and increased diversification, might be marginalizing Indigenous scholars as first, only able to undertake research on Indigenous issues and peoples, and second, being able to speak universally on all things Indigenous. We would argue that such practices risk being exploitative. We would also argue that some of these tensions arise from

often conflicting expectations, perspectives, and world views coexisting in closely confined spaces. It is to this that we turn our attention below.

From the Outside In: The Academy and Indigenous Peoples and Perspectives
Ideas about diversification and inclusivity rest on an assumption that certain peoples and perspectives need to be brought into an existing space that has historically excluded them. This idea in turn rests on an assumption that such people and perspectives are identifiable. We do not suggest that Indigenous peoples and perspectives are not identifiable; however, we do point out that clear or hard-and-fast definitions of Indigenous personhood and Indigeneity are problematic in that they lack nuance about the complex and shifting nature of Indigenous identity and Indigeneity. In other words, we suggest that Indigenous peoples and their world views should not be essentialized for the purposes of an institution fulfilling its expectations of inclusivity and diversification.

Being asked to identify and defend Indigeness as a place of being is difficult: Indigenous people are often asked to self-define and express clarity about identity whereas non-Indigenous people, in our experience, are rarely asked to do so or to articulate their identity based on non-Indigeneity. Nevertheless, and often of necessity, Indigenous peoples around the world have made every effort to articulate what it means to be an Indigenous person, what tenets comprise Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, and what Indigeneity means. First, it is vital to note that Indigenous identity does not mean the same to all people, nor is it consistent across geographies (Retzlaff, 2005; United Nations, 2006). Along with this is a caution that most Indigenous peoples offer regarding tendencies for particularly non-Indigenous peoples to generalize characteristics about Indigenous peoples, a practice known as *pan-Indigenizing*. At a practical level in the academy, the practice of pan-Indigenizing can result in a social-institutional climate where single Indigenous peoples are constructed as representing a larger Indigenous voice, for example, there can be assumptions that Indigenous peoples and perspectives have been consulted when in fact the voices and perspective of only one or two individuals have been presented (Cardinal, 1969).

This is not to say that Indigenous peoples do not share commonalities, one of the most powerful of which is the lack of another homeland to return to (Smith, 1999). Closely related to this is a common experience of being colonized peoples: although colonialism operated varying across varied times and spaces, colonization is inherently preoccupied with dislocating Indigenous peoples from land and resources, often through the active subordination of their cultures, communities, and senses of selves (Said, 1994). Globally, colonialism continues to play out in the lives of Indigenous peoples, the result of which is consistent sociocultural disenfranchisement, marginalization, and sustained colonial efforts at main-

taining control over the voices and needs of Indigenous peoples (Greymorning, 2004; Maaka & Gleras, 2005).

Despite significant efforts across the globe to expunge Indigenous peoples and Indigeneity from the land base, Indigenous peoples have survived and in some cases thrived. Such survival illustrates the immense strength, resilience, social capacity, and resolve that many Indigenous peoples share, each of which highlights the imperative of neither pathologizing Indigenous peoples nor of understanding Indigeneity through a deficit-based approach (Ermine, Sinclair, & Jeffery, 2004; Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2006). Finally, many Indigenous peoples share broad world views and ways of relating to the world, the most consistent of which is a sense of interconnectivity between genealogy and ecology. In essence a fundamental tenet of Indigeneity is a world view in which people are born of and through the land and in which there exists a deep sense of spiritual and material connection to the natural environment (Baso, 1996; Cajete, 1999). From this, according to many Indigenous peoples and philosophers, stems a deep conviction of interconnectivity between all beings and an associated privileging of the whole, or the collective, over the individual.

In the last decade or so, many institutions that historically excluded Indigenous peoples, including postsecondary academies, private-sector organizations, and government and nongovernment agencies, are developing interests in the broad-scale tenets of Indigeneity. These institutions are now increasingly turning to Indigenous peoples in efforts to have Indigeneity reflected in spaces that have for the most part privileged non-Indigenous peoples and Euro-Western ways of knowing and being. There is a growing realization that philosophies of holisms, collectivity, and connections with the natural environment are values that have purchase and relevance for many in the 21st century and consequently values that the academy wishes to incorporate. Efforts to include Indigenous peoples and Indigeneity, however, can sometimes for Indigenous people (and scholars) feel somewhat disingenuous: as Taiaike Alfred and Dana Lowe (2006) have noted, too often romanticized versions of Indigeneity are sought from Indigenous peoples, including cultural performance or spiritual wisdom, while efforts toward self-determinations/self-determining, claims over land and resources, or demands for equal accesses to services are ignored or written off as militant or offensive. In other words, Indigenous peoples and world views in the academy are viewed instrumentally. They are asked to partake, but only as long as they conform to certain expectations; they are invited in, but once inside are expected to behave according to certain (non-Indigenous) expectations and powers; Indigenous world views and Indigeneity are applauded and sought, but often only in confines that do not aggravate or conflict too troublingly with institutional norms and expectations. Such practices ultimately are reenactments of colonialism's tendencies toward subordinating In-

digeneity, something that in the future we all hope might disappear, thereby strengthening the potential roles of Indigenous peoples and bettering the institutions to which they contribute.

A View to Tomorrow: Our Thoughts on Non-Exploitative Inclusivity of Indigenous Peoples and Indigeneity in the Academy

We do not wish to paint an overly bleak picture, either in terms of institutional intent regarding Indigenous peoples and their world views or in terms of what Indigenous peoples experience and live in the spaces of academic institutions. We hope the explorations thus far serve to illustrate that more work needs to be done so that all parties can achieve optimum success. In part we suspect that some of the challenges faced right now are a function of the relatively new nature of relationships between Indigenous scholars, Indigenous scholarship, and academic institutions. However, if these relationships are to stand the test of time, some actions by academic institutions do need to take place.

We believe that in any relationship comprising stakeholders who occupy differing positions of sociocultural power, it is incumbent on those with more power to behave carefully, cautiously, and always in a self-reflexive way that questions any and all inherent assumptions including those that fall into a category of *best intentions*. On an applied and everyday level, then, this would include a continual destabilization of assumptions made by non-Indigenous scholars about their Indigenous colleagues. We hope that at precisely the moment any scholars reach a position where they feel a sense of certainty about Indigenous peoples and Indigeneity, they take the time to reflect on and question their position. After all, Indigenous peoples and Indigeneity are certainly not fixed or homogeneous. Rather, they are vibrant and continually shifting and deserve perspectives and relationships that are never certain or fixed, but equally vibrant, shifting, and contemporary.

We also believe that, should academic institutions genuinely be interested in accounting for Indigenous peoples and Indigeneity, every effort should be made to account for and value the varied ontologies and epistemologies embodied by Indigenous peoples and Indigeneity. In other words, it is not sufficient for an institution to recruit (and superficially support) Indigeneity while simultaneously maintaining expectations that Indigenous peoples conform to the demands and traditional contours of academic institutions. To do this in our estimation is to render the efforts of inclusivity exploitative. Consequently, we look toward a time when, for example, collective and collaborative research is valued equally with individuated research; a time when work that gives back to community is valued equally with research that contributes to academic discourse; a time when the multiple social and cultural protocols of Indigenous peoples are as seamlessly accounted for as Euro-Western norms are today normalized in all aspects of the academy. In short, we look forward to a

time when there will no longer be dinner conversations about the ongoing upset and marginalization felt by Indigenous scholars in the academy. We look forward to a time when inclusivity becomes truly liberating and beneficial for all involved.

References

- Acker, S., & Armenti, C. (2004). Sleepless in academe. *Gender and Education*, 16(1), 3-24.
- Alfred, T., & Lowe, L. (2006). Warrior societies in contemporary Indigenous communities. *Upping the Anti: A Journal of Theory and Action*, 2. Retrieved December 2006 from: http://auto_sol.tao.ca/node/view/1853
- Baso, K. (1996). *Wisdom sits in place: Landscape and language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Battiste, M., Bell, L., & Findlay, L.M. (2002). Decolonizing education in Canadian university. An interdisciplinary, international, Indigenous research project. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26, 82-201.
- Battiste, M., & (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson, J. (2000). Part 1: The lodge of Indigenous knowledge in modern thought. In *Protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage: A global challenge*. Saskatoon, SK: Purich.
- Berkowitz, P. (2006). New resource lists programs and services for Aboriginal students. *University Affairs*. Retrieved September 2007 from: http://www.universityaffairs.ca/issues/2006/augsept/aboriginal_students_01.html
- Cajete, G. (1999). (Ed.). *Look to the mountain: An ecology of Indigenous education. A people's ecology*. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light.
- Cardinal, H. (1969). *The unjust society: The tragedy of Canada's Indians*. Edmonton, AB: Hurtig.
- Ermine, W., Sinclair, R., & Jeffery, B. (2004). *The ethics of research involving Indigenous peoples: Report of the Indigenous People's Health Research Centre to the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics*. Saskatoon, SK: Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre.
- Greymorning, S. (Ed.). (2004). *A will to survive: Indigenous essays on the politics of culture, language, and identity*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Greenwood, M., & de Leeuw, S. (2006). Fostering Indigeneity: The role of Aboriginal mothers and Aboriginal early child care in response to colonial foster-care interventions. In Jeanette Corbiere Lavell & Dawn Meme (Eds.), *Until our hearts are on the ground: Aboriginal mothering, oppression, resistance, and rebirth* (pp. 163-173). Lavell-Harvard: Demeter Press. Retrieved April 2007 from: <http://www.iphrc.ca/text/Ethics%20Review%20IPHRC.pdf>
- Little Bear, L. (2000). Jagged world views colliding. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous voices and visions* (pp. 77-85). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Maaka, R., & Gleras, A. (2005). *The politics of Indigeneity: Challenging the state in Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand*. Dunedin, NZ: University of Otago Press.
- Mattes, C. (2007). Aboriginal artists defying expectations. *Canadian Dimension*, 41(1). Retrieved October 17, 2007, from: <http://canadiandimension.com/articles/2007/01/12/851/>
- Marker, M. (2004). Theories and disciplines as sites of struggle: The reproduction of colonial dominance through the controlling of knowledge in the academy. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 28, 102-110.
- Orr, J., Jerome Paul, J. (San Salom), & Paul, S. (Kelusilew). (2002). Decolonizing Mi'kmaw education through cultural practical knowledge. *McGill Journal of Education*, 37, 331-354.
- Retzlaff, S. (2005). What's in a name? The politics of labeling and Native identity constructions. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 25(2), 609-626.
- Said, E. (1994). *Culture and imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Smith, L.T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. New York: Zed Books.
- Spafford, M.M., Nygaard, V.L., Gregor, F., & Boyd, M.A. (2006). "Navigating the different spaces": Experiences of inclusion and isolation among racially minoritized faculty in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 36(1), 1-27.
- Tien, F. (2007). To what degree does the promotion system reward faculty research productivity? *British Journal of Sociology*, 28(1), 105-123.
- United Nations. (2006). *United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples*. Retrieved October 2006 from: http://inuit.org/UserFiles/File/un/2006-10-un_declaration_rights_indigenous_peoples.pdf
- van der Wey, D. (2007). Coalescing in cohorts: Coalitions in First Nations education. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 30, 989-1014.
- Wilson, S. (2007). Guest editorial: What is an Indigenist research paradigm? *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 30, 193-195.