Decolonizing the Discipline? Questions and Methods in Indigenous Geography

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Indigenizing the academy is not a matter of simply inserting Indigenous content into existing curriculum or programs; it requires challenging and changing institutional and systemic orders that continue to support hegemony. The value of linking geography with Indigenous scholarship and scholars is undeniable for the decolonizing process within the discipline of geography. While there are genuine attempts to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the body of knowledge in geography, these are not framed from an Indigenous theoretical or epistemological standpoint, thus perpetuating epistemic dominance. The purpose of this paper is to engage with the literature, themes, goals, and problems of Indigenous geography to explore ways of decolonizing the discipline of geography, as part of the larger project of Indigenizing and decolonizing spaces of the academy on an international scale. The paper outlines the links between decolonization, ontology, and epistemology in research. Five specific themes related to the decolonization of geographical research are examined: (1) the concept of community and the undertaking of community-based research; (2) the role of different approaches to learning in research and the academy; (3) considerations in mapping Indigenous knowledge; (4) forms of knowledge sharing in Indigenous research; and (5) the concept of place itself with respect to the academy and Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. Decolonizing the academy requires making space for multiple ontologies and epistemologies, and not just as subjects of research. Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies must be accorded the same validation, respect, and academic weight as other perspectives on truth and forms of knowledge.

Learning from Indigenous Scholarship: Indigenizing the Academy

Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen (2007) observes that, "the academy is one of the main sites for reproducing hegemony ... Indigenous scholarship remains invisible and not reflected in most academic discourses, including that of the most progressive intellectuals" (p. 156). Indigenizing the academy has formed an integral part of decolonizing projects in the academy for a number of decades, in part through the establishment of Indigenous studies programs in Canada and elsewhere. In North America, the creation of such programs began in the 1960s, as part of larger civil rights movements where Indigenous and other marginalized groups made calls for justice (Taner, 1999; Andersen, 2009). Indigenous peoples were also dissatisfied with the types of educational opportunities that bore no relevance

to their realities. Furthermore, Indigenous leaders, activists, and communities, weary of having others speak for them, demanded to speak for themselves. Indigenous studies programs have continued to evolve over the past four decades; however, at the centre of the discipline remain the goals and aspirations of Indigenous communities (Andersen, 2009). Indigenizing the academy has focused on decolonization and the realization of Indigenous political, intellectual, economic, and cultural self-determination. This is a fraught process, a challenging process that seeks to avoid the traps of recolonization that reproduce "colonial relations, structures and discourses" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 146). Kuokkanen adds, "decolonization has meant reclaiming and validating Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and research questions. Decolonizing research is also about centring Indigenous peoples' concerns and needs and establishing guidelines for ethical research" (2007, p. 143). Kuokkanen argues that Indigenizing the academy is not simply a matter of inserting Indigenous content into existing curriculum or programs, but that it requires challenging and changing institutional and systemic orders that continue to support hegemony.

The value of linking geography with Indigenous scholarship and scholars is undeniable for the decolonizing process in the discipline of geography. Indigenous studies as a discipline has been negotiating an "ethical space" for Indigenous peoples and their intellectual traditions between the academy and Indigenous communities for decades (Ermine, 2007). While there are genuine attempts to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the body of knowledge in geography, these are not framed from an Indigenous theoretical or epistemological standpoint, thus perpetuating epistemic dominance. Inroads have been made over the past decade to delineate an alternative approach to Indigenous studies in geography. In recent years, special issues in various journals have been devoted to the topic of Indigenous geography, including an internationally-themed edited volume focused on research called *A Deeper Sense of Place: Stories and Journeys of Indigenous-Academic Collaboration* (Johnson & Larson, 2013). Indigenizing the academy calls for a renewed research approach that does not further perpetuate colonial, imperial, and neoliberal agendas on the lives and lands of Indigenous peoples (Smith, 1999). There is much that can be learned within the discipline of geography from the experience of Indigenous studies programs, particularly in terms of how research is situated and enacted. First, the discipline of geography must acknowledge its role in the historical (and continued) dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands and territories. Decolonizing research calls for all disciplines to examine their own historical and current relationships with

Indigenous peoples, and to seek ways to move toward a relationship of mutual respect and reconciliation (Louis, 2007). Indigenous peoples need to be recognized for their role in knowledge production, not just as research participants and sources of data.

In Canada, the work to decolonize dominant research agendas in relation to Indigenous peoples began with a paradigm shift to replace research *on* Aboriginal communities with research *with* and *by* Aboriginal peoples (McNaughton & Rock, 2003). Furthermore, to effectively decolonize such firmly entrenched approaches of study, there needs to be active engagement with Indigenous scholars, scholarship, and communities (see Coombes, Johnson, & Howitt, 2014; Coombes, 2012). Such paradigm(s) of research ideally use Indigenous research theories, approaches, and methods (or at the very least, acknowledge and respect them). The aim is to move toward self-determination in research (Brant Castellano, 2004). This means that Indigenous geography must be attentive and responsive to broader political goals external to the academy or discipline, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples or, more recently, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) (Pimbert, 2012), that calls for Indigenous control over Indigenous intellectual property.

The purpose of this paper is to engage with the literature, themes, goals, and problems of Indigenous geography to explore ways of decolonizing the discipline of geography, as part of the larger project of Indigenizing and decolonizing spaces of the academy. The work of the scholars of Indigenous geography reviewed in this paper displays engagement and deep concerns with the practical and theoretical problems of attempting to decolonize research. These deep concerns have the potential to unite otherwise disparate areas of research, both within and across academic disciplines. The paper begins with an outline of the broad concerns within the work of Indigenous geographers, regarding the links between decolonization, ontology, and epistemology in research. Five specific themes related to the decolonization of geographical research are examined: (1) the concept of community and the undertaking of community-based research; (2) the role of different approaches to learning in research and the academy; (3) considerations in mapping Indigenous knowledge; (4) forms of knowledge sharing in Indigenous research; and (5) the concept of *place* itself with respect to the academy and Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies.

As the first author, Sarah Nelson, and as a non-Indigenous researcher, it is important to think critically about the processes involved in doing research, in particular with Indigenous communities, and the effects that this research can have on the relationships between Indige-

nous communities and the academy. As a researcher with a diverse disciplinary background, I find it useful to focus on the contributions of Indigenous geography to an understanding of colonialism and decolonization, in order to illuminate how work within this specific sub-discipline connects with work both within and beyond the discipline of geography. I did my undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto, with a major in human biology and minors in English and African studies, followed by a Master's degree in First Nations Studies at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) in Prince George. The central research question of my Master's thesis, asked of Elders, health care providers, and Aboriginal clients of an Aboriginal-focused health clinic in Prince George, was "What is mental health?" (Nelson, 2012). When I graduated from UNBC, I started my PhD in human geography at the University of Toronto. My PhD research will continue to ask this vast and underexplored question—"What is mental health?"—but in new ways and within the spaces of a new discipline.

As the second author, Deborah McGregor, and as an Indigenous (Anishinaabe) geographer, I am committed to exploring innovative research approaches, practices, and methods in collaboration with Indigenous peoples and, in so doing, contributing to building positive relationships between the university and Indigenous communities (see McGregor, 2013). I remain primarily concerned with the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their territories and the work that needs to take place to ensure environmental and social justice. I conduct both scholarly and community-based research and seek to actively address priority concerns expressed by Indigenous communities. Theoretically, my orientation lies in the strengthening of Indigenous voice in academia with the goal of reconciling Indigenous forms of knowledge with other intellectual traditions (see McGregor, Bayha, & Simmons, 2014).

Ontology, Epistemology, Decolonization, and Research

Research is a problematic term in Indigenous communities around the world. Indigenous communities are constantly asked to participate in research, much of it based in colonial ideas, priorities, epistemologies, and ontologies (McGregor, 2013; Smith, 1999). Knowledge often is extracted from individuals or communities and used for the surveillance and control of Indigenous bodies, lands, and resources or for the advancement—academically, economically, or otherwise—of scholars unconnected to the people from whom the knowledge came (Assembly of First Nations, 2007). Communities involved in research often do not see any benefits from the research or do not even see the results, and information can be misused and misin-

terpreted once taken out of context (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2005; Smith, 1999). In response, Indigenous scholars, communities, and organizations are developing critical Indigenous methodologies that have their foundations in Indigenous communities themselves and that have a consciously decolonizing aim (Coombes et al., 2014; Johnson, 2012; Louis, 2007).

Decolonization

According to Sundberg (2014), decolonization has two parallel projects: one lies in "exposing the ontological violence authorized by Eurocentric epistemologies both in scholarship and everyday life" (p. 34) and the other "involves fostering 'multiepistemic literacy,' a term proposed by Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen to indicate learning and dialogue between epistemic worlds" (p. 34). In other words, decolonization involves both bringing to light the ways that colonialism is perpetuated through the structures of everyday life, and creating spaces for realities and ways of knowing the world that differ from those that perpetuate, and are perpetuated through, colonialism.

Decolonization, then, seems to be centred on the concepts of ontology and epistemology. What do Indigenous geographers mean when they write about ontology and epistemology, and what are the implications of these concepts in Indigenous research?

Ontology

Ontology answers the question: "What is real?" Sarah Hunt makes an important distinction between "Indigenous ontologies" and "western ontologies of Indigeneity" (2014, p. 27). Western ontologies of Indigeneity refer to representations of Indigeneity grounded in Western, colonial ontologies; looking at Indigeneity from these perspectives positions Indigenous peoples as the subjects of research rather than as producers of knowledge (Hunt, 2014; McGregor et al., 2010; McGregor, 2013). Indigenous ontologies are those that originate in Indigenous communities and from Indigenous perspectives; a focus on Indigenous ontologies allows for Indigenous knowledge to be "seen as legitimate on its own terms," rather than "negotiated in relation to pre-established modes of inquiry" (Hunt, 2014, p. 29; see also McGregor, 2013).

For example, Howitt and Suchet-Pearson (2006) deconstruct concepts such as *management* and *capacity building*, which are often used in co-management or joint management agreements. They argue that a term such as *management* carries with it the weight of a specifically Western ontological approach to environmental preservation. It implies a hierarchy where human beings are responsible for the well-being of the natural world; this,

in turn, places them both above and separates them from other animate and inanimate beings in the world (Howitt & Suchet-Pearson, 2006). The concept of *wildlife management*, for example, does not make sense in an Indigenous ontology that sees humans as an integral part of nature (rather than *civilized* and in opposition to that which is *wild*) and on an equal footing with other members of the natural world (and therefore not in a position to *manage* them) (Howitt & Suchet-Pearson, 2006). The use of such terms, grounded in specific ontologies and structures, limits the possibilities for action and interaction by partners in a co-management agreement. Any negotiation of such an agreement will be biased from the start in favour of Western ontologies, thus marginalizing Indigenous forms of knowledge (Howitt & Suchet-Pearson, 2006).

Blaser (2014) and Sundberg (2014) refer to the difference between conceiving of the world as a *universe*, assumed to be one reality (or ontology) and with differing ways of perceiving it, and as a *pluriverse*, with multiple ontologies. In the universe view, differences in the way people perceive this singular reality tend to be portrayed as cultural differences, which can, in turn, be contained within Eurocentric categorizations of what *really* exists in the world (Sundberg, 2014). The pluriverse, on the other hand, is not so much an overarching ontology that dictates what reality *is* (thus falling into the same traps as the universe), but an acknowledgement of ongoing, ever-shifting "performative enactment[s] of multiple, distinct ontologies or worlds" (Sundberg, 2014, p. 38; see also Blaser, 2014). According to Blaser (2014), the act of storytelling has been described by Indigenous scholars and philosophers as a means of enacting reality. That is, stories do not just represent or refer to reality; rather, "they partake in the variably successful performance of that which they narrate" (p. 54). Different stories actively bring into being different ontologies, different realities, and different worlds. Storytelling, as Kovach (2009) and others have noted, can be an important strategy in aligning with Indigenous ontologies when undertaking Indigenous research.

Epistemology

Kovach (2009) explains that within the research context, epistemology "means a system of knowledge that references within it the social relations of knowledge production" (p. 21). Epistemology is concerned with the theory and nature of knowledge, its sources, and how we come to know. Drawing upon Willie Ermine's (1995) influential work on Aboriginal epistemology, Kovach (2009) explains that in an Indigenous research context, one must consider him or herself in relation to place and person. All of

existence is connected. In this research framework, more counts as knowledge and relationships become the primary focus. Ermine writes that Aboriginal epistemology "also recognizes that other life forms manifest the creative force in the context of the knower. It is an experience in context, a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge in itself. The experience is the knowledge" (Ermine, 1995, p. 104). More specifically, Herman Michell (2005) writes of Woodlands Cree epistemology as: "participatory, experiential, process-oriented, and ultimately spiritual. Woodlands Cree ways of knowing require participation with the natural world with all of one's senses, emotions, body, mind and spirit" (p. 36). Relationships in an Indigenous epistemology are not limited to relationships among people.

How does one go about considering Indigenous epistemologies in research? Kovach (2009) offers suggestions, including deciding what and whose knowledge will be privileged in research. Furthermore, she and other scholars have emphasized the importance of Indigenous languages in such research frameworks. Language, Kovach observes, "is central to the construction of knowledge" (2009, p. 61). Practically speaking, epistemology—whether or not researchers are consciously aware of how it comes into play—gives rise to how we conduct ourselves in research. Anishinaabe scholar Cindy Peltier reflects upon her engagement with epistemological foundations of Anishinaabe thought in her health research. Her research is guided by the "Seven Directions of the Kendaaswin" which ensures the researcher is responsible and "accountable to your relations" (Peltier, 2013, p. 37). In her example, relationship includes all relatives (including animals and plants), as well as "those relationships we had with those that came before us, those who are still in this realm and those generations to come" (Peltier, 2013, p. 37).

Academic settings are not often accepting of Indigenous epistemological approaches to the generation, production, and transmission of knowledge. The situation is slowly changing as more researchers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, broaden their conception of what counts as knowledge and genuinely embrace other ways of coming to know. Geography as a discipline can draw upon Indigenous epistemological research frameworks emerging in Canada and internationally as a strategy to indigenize the field; however, this must occur within a broader context of *good relationships*.

The remaining themes from Indigenous geography to be addressed in this paper are all related to our discussion of decolonization, ontology, and epistemology. We discuss each of these in turn.

"Community" and Community-Based Research

Larsen and Johnson (2012) write about the implications of on-the-ground experience in Indigenous research (which they argue has a strong impact on the way such research is theorized and written, but is rarely explicitly referred to in the literature) and note that "the challenges and difficulties commonly reported on as part of Indigenous research are part of much 'deeper' (i.e., ontological) differences in the way human communities construct and engage their lifeworlds" (p. 11). In other words, the difficulties that researchers, who are doing community-based research with Indigenous communities, tend to report on are not inherent in the research methods; rather, they reflect a more basic difference in outlook between university-based research and Indigenous communities. Thus, such difficulties will not be properly resolved simply by adjusting individual methodologies; a more fundamental shift in institutional approaches to research is required.

This is not to say that individual methodologies should not also be adjusted, however. Adapting individual researchers' research orientations to accommodate Indigenous research paradigms can contribute to decolonizing the academy as a whole. One approach to decolonizing research that is frequently proposed is the use of community-based or participatory research techniques, whereby members of the community where the research is taking place have an active role in the research process, as negotiated between community members and researcher(s) (see Tobias, Richmond, & Luginaah, 2013; Coombes, 2012; de Leeuw, Cameron, & Greenwood, 2012).

The concept of community is a central and sometimes taken-for-granted unit of analysis in Indigenous research (Coombes et al., 2012). Community-based researchers and those engaging with the principles of Indigenous research are often reminded to prioritize "communal needs" and design research that will meet these needs (Louis, 2007, p. 130). The very concept of "community-based research" presupposes the existence of a community with which to engage. Coombes, Johnson, and Howitt (2012) assert that analysis at the community level, and an acknowledgement that something called a "community" exists, cannot be considered "false consciousness" (p. 812) as some have implied. However, they caution against the uncritical use of the term "community," stating that, "'Indigenous communities are never the intimate and cohesive social units we anticipate'" (Pratt, 2011, p. 2; cited in Coombes et al., 2012).

Thus, the question of who constitutes a community is raised. In my [first author, Sarah Nelson] master's degree research (Nelson, 2012), I was working with one organization and, for practical purposes, I treated this

organization as the community I was working with. Yet, even this community extended far beyond the walls of the organization to include other organizations, Elders from within or outside of the city, clients of various organizations, the hospital, the university, and so on. It was hard to define who was and was not part of this particular community, a difficulty that extends to most communities.

This makes attention to communal needs somewhat problematic. Should community needs be placed above individual needs with regard to the outcomes of research, for example? Can a researcher truly balance all the differing needs of a community or does she or he have to pick and choose? Macauley, Delormier, McComber, Cross, Potvin, Paradis, Kirby, Saad-Haddad, and Desrosiers (1998) present their approach to addressing this problem. In their code of research ethics, developed for the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project, they ensure that any community member, whether involved in the research or not, has the chance to voice and to publish a dissenting opinion on the research process, results, or analysis at the same time or prior to any publication by the research team. However, the code of ethics also stipulates that no one person can veto the results or analysis of the research (Macauley et al., 1998). Thus, there is a process in place for everyone to express an opinion (although perhaps biased towards those familiar with academic writing and publishing procedures) while, at the same time, preserving the right of the research team to carry out the research even in the presence of a dissenting individual. The researchers developed this process in dialogue with one another and with members of the community (Macauley, 1998). It is a good example of researchers endeavouring to ensure that individual needs and community needs are balanced, and demonstrates one research group's attempt to leave space for everyone's opinions and ideas.

This brings up another important point about the conduct of research. Macauley and colleagues (Macauley et al., 1998) made these stipulations about research ethics in a written, community-vetted document in advance of the research itself taking place. Fletcher (2003) also recommends setting out a research agreement in advance when conducting community-based research with Indigenous communities (see also Canadian Institutes of Health Research, National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010); however, there are difficulties involved in this process. Having a written research agreement protects everyone and makes it clear what everyone's roles and obligations are with respect to the research. It also provides a document that everyone

has agreed upon in advance, and that everyone involved in the research can refer to, to be reminded of what the most important principles of the research are (Fletcher, 2003; Macauley et al., 1998). But there are potential reasons not to have a written agreement. In some ways, writing everything down could actually lead to problems if there were differences in interpretation of what was written, for example. It could also be seen as a demonstration of a lack of trust—a quality that is ultimately important in forming healthy research relationships (Kovach, 2009). Further, Indigenous scholars and organizations have developed principles for ethical research with Indigenous communities: the principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) (Schnarch, 2004) that clearly delineate methods of achieving self-determination for Indigenous peoples in research: or the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) (Pimbert, 2012; Swiderska, Milligan, Kohli, Shrumm, Jonas, Hiemstra, & Oliva, 2012) that place the right to decide whether or not research should proceed in the hands of communities. Having a written research agreement does not ensure that research adheres to these principles. Having a written agreement may be one aspect of developing research relationships between people from the academy and people within Indigenous communities, but having a written research agreement should not replace developing relations of trust and mutual understanding and support; nor should it compromise community control over the research.

Indigenous geographer Renee Pualani Louis (2007) notes that "all research is appropriation (Rundstrom & Deur, 1999, p. 239) and requires adequate benefits for both the Indigenous people and the researcher" (p. 133). In discussions of Indigenous research and community-based research, it is often easy for a researcher to be convinced that one has circumvented the pitfalls of extractive research and avoided reproducing colonial relations because of the involvement of community members in the research (see de Leeuw et al., 2012; Coombes, 2012 for a discussion of this tendency). It is important to remember that even the most ethical and participatory forms of research involve taking information from one place and making it accessible to other people, which is always a form of appropriation. Being aware of this is important even in research that follows the principles of OCAP and FPIC. It does not mean that research should not proceed; it means, rather, that participants should be adequately and appropriately compensated and that the form of appropriation should be considered and controlled. People must remain in control of their own knowledges, and consent must be given in such a way that all participants know exactly what they are consenting to.

Approaches to Learning: Experts versus Engagement

Johnson, Louis, and Pramono (2006) point to Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy: the education of oppressed peoples with their liberation in mind. The authors (Johnson, Louis, & Pramono, 2006) point out that everyone involved in research, including (or perhaps, especially) the researcher, needs to first acknowledge and address their own *colonial mentality* before research is begun. They advocate for a critical cartography in Indigenous communities that would counter the tendency by outside researchers to equip their community partners with only the most basic skills and encourage, instead, a deeper, more critical understanding of cartography and its role in Western thought and colonial enterprise (Johnson et al., 2006). This is a point that the first author, Sarah Nelson could perhaps expand in future research endeavours. During the course of her master's thesis research (Nelson, 2012), there was a great deal of mutual sharing of information throughout the process of conducting the research; however, there was very little formal information sharing on her part as a researcher as to how to do university-based research; this, perhaps, was an oversight.

On the other hand, it is important to be careful in situations where the education of Indigenous community members by non-Indigenous outsiders is being encouraged. As a researcher, sharing a deeper understanding of what you are doing with the people you are working with is respectful; however, becoming the non-Indigenous *expert* who has to educate the local people in ways of thinking that are perceived to be superior to their own becomes a perpetuation of colonial processes. As Freire (1970) puts it:

We can legitimately say that in the process of oppression someone oppresses someone else; we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human beings in communion liberate each other. (p. 133)

Freire (1970) is arguing for a shared consciousness-raising through the simultaneous education of both teacher and student, where everyone, oppressor and oppressed alike, can break free from a colonial mentality. Keeping in mind that no one person can alone be responsible for another person's liberation may, perhaps, be a way of respecting the balance between meaningful collaboration and *expert*-based instruction.

Similarly, Kuokkanen (2007) points to the difference between "knowing" and "engaging with" the "other" (p. 117, cited in Sundberg, 2014). She writes that the endeavour to know someone implies a relationship of domination rooted in colonialism—in effect, reinforcing the concept of a singular "truth" or reality reflected in the "universe" view of ontology

(Blaser, 2014; Sundberg, 2014). On the other hand, learning as engagement means not just learning to know, but also learning from the other in a reciprocal manner (Sundberg, 2014; Kuokkanen, 2007). As part of decolonizing the academy, it is important to pay critical attention to the role that universities play in teaching people how to learn, especially with regard to the distinction between knowing and learning with, or learning from, one another. Researchers must consider whether they are truly authorized to tell someone else's story.

Map-Making and Indigenous Knowledges

Johnson, Louis, and Pramono (2006) write about the impact of translating Indigenous knowledges through mapping and cartography. They assert that to situate Indigenous knowledges on a map created using Western cartographic principles, some aspects of these knowledges are necessarily lost in translation (Johnson et al., 2006). The act of making maps always involves leaving out certain information that does not fit with cartographic conventions (Bryan, 2009); this process of selection is even more pronounced when the information that is being mapped also crosses cultural boundaries. As Johnson, Louis, and Pramono state, the loss of Indigenous place names in Indigenous languages involves more than the loss of language. Place names are often connected with stories and so losing the names can also mean losing a part of Indigenous knowledge (Johnson et al., 2006).

Bryan (2009), in a similar vein, questions the use of Western maps and cartographic practices in the assertion of Indigenous political and land rights. Noting that mapping provided pivotal support for colonial powers attempting to rule "at a distance" (Bryan, 2009, p. 26), thus firmly rooting the practice in early colonial activity, the author asserts that mapping retains its close connection to colonialism. Even in Indigenous mapping projects that support Indigenous peoples' claims to territory, "the authenticity of claims to indigenous identity lies with their ability to demonstrate a historical continuity with a pre-colonial past shored up through claims of a particular relationship to nature" (p. 28). To be seen as credible enough to advance a political aim, maps need to conform to a colonial perspective of the world. Thus, the implicit assumptions hidden within the act of mapping (based on Western cartographic conventions) can serve to perpetuate, rather than dissolve, colonial relationships (Bryan, 2009).

Forms of Knowledge Sharing in Indigenous Research

Kovach (2009) notes that one way to preserve Indigenous knowledges in research is to use Indigenous forms of presenting the knowledge. For example, in addressing "the matter of language, epistemology, and knowl-

edge exchange within Indigenous inquiry," Kovach argues that "given the philosophical basis of a complementary, non-binary Indigenous thought pattern, it makes sense that narrative encased in the form of oral history would be the natural means to transmit knowledges" (Kovach, 2009, p. 60). Achieving a presentation of Indigenous knowledge in any form, let alone a specifically Indigenous form, can be difficult within an academic setting. However, there are examples of ways that scholars have adapted the form that research is presented so as to be more suitable to the Indigenous communities involved in the research. Anishinabe researcher Chantelle Richmond headed a project in partnership with university researchers, Elders, youth, community members from two First Nations communities, and an award-winning filmmaker to investigate concerns over industrialization, environmental dispossession, and health (Tobias, Richmond, & Luginaah, 2013; Gifts from the Elders, n.d.). The research questions, impetus for the project, benefits to the community, and ongoing forms of dissemination of results were informed and directed by community members. A total of five youth from the two communities were given intensive training in qualitative research methods (including interviewing skills and developing an analytical framework to apply to the results), and their learning processes in conversation with Elders in their communities were documented in a one-hour documentary film showcasing Elders' views on environmental change over time and its impact on peoples' health (Gifts from the Elders, n.d.).

Sarah Hunt (2014) also points out that the traditional academic forms of knowledge sharing—through the written word—are not adequate as a means of understanding Indigenous forms of knowledge. As she puts it, "even though I have since read many books and articles about the potlatch, none of them have captured what I know the potlatch to be" (Hunt, 2014, p. 30). Hunt instead outlines that the way she learned about the potlatch, by observing what her relatives were doing, was "productively confusing" (2014, p. 31), forcing her to learn through being confused and making mistakes, which ultimately brought her to a far deeper understanding of the potlatch than simple instruction could have achieved. Perhaps, then, if there is confusion in the translation of knowledge, it can be used productively as a way of pointing to, and attempting to come to, an understanding of ontological differences (Hunt, 2014).

Places of Research: Locating the Researcher

The concept of *place* is a theme that surfaces in the work of Indigenous geographers. Larsen and Johnson (2012) describe three sites where transformations occur for researchers who participate in Indigenous research:

(1) "existential place" or physical, geographical place as experienced by an individual; (2) "social place" or position in relation to occupational, family, class, or ethnic groups; and (3) "conceptual place", which refers to the intellectual meaning ascribed to places and the understanding of how places take shape (Larsen & Johnson, 2012, p. 5). These authors describe an essential feature of Indigenous research as its "taking place" in each of these three meanings of *place*; that is, the act of doing Indigenous research forces a researcher to engage with concepts of place in a variety of ways, often with a transformative result (Larsen & Johnson, 2012, p. 2).

One reason that doing Indigenous research may transform a researcher's understanding of place stems from the "distinctive spatiality for academic work" that has its origins in "Plato's grove of olive trees on the outskirts of Athens" (Larsen & Johnson, 2012, p. 6). Western academic research has traditionally been understood as occurring in a specific type of place, conceived of as separate from the rest of the world: a privileged place where thinkers are given the time and space to grapple with their thoughts, removed from the physical cares and chores of everyday life. However, as Sundberg (2014) points out, "silence about location is a significant performance that enacts Eurocentric theory as universal, the only body of knowledge that matters" (p. 36). Indigenous research does not allow for the removal of a researcher to such a distinctive space: it requires the researcher to be physically present in the places of research (Smith, 1999) as well as critically aware of their own social and conceptual places with regard to the research they are undertaking and the people they are working with (Larsen & Johnson, 2012). The concerns of the community must remain at the forefront of Indigenous research and the pursuit of a research topic only for the sake of interest or curiosity on the part of the researcher is not appropriate (Kovach, 2009; Louis, 2007). Indigenizing geography and the academy requires attention to place as the location—socially, ethically, conceptually, and physically—of the researcher. One of the most difficult challenges for the academy is the ability to transcend the ideology that assumes "western ways of knowing as a given for all academic knowledge" (Kovach, 2009, p. 55).

Concluding Thoughts

The principles of Indigenous research have an important role to play in decolonizing the academy and making space for Indigenous researchers and Indigenous knowledges (Johnson, Cant, Howitt, & Peters, 2007; Louis, 2007). Linking the principles and knowledges of Indigenous studies with research in geography helps researchers to participate in and engage with the principles of Indigenous research. Non-Indigenous

researchers may be perpetuating colonial distinctions between non-Indigenous *experts* and Indigenous *subjects* when they take on a primary role in research related to Indigenous communities (Coombes, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Johnson, 2008). The exposure of non-Indigenous academics, across all of the varying disciplines, to Indigenous methods of inquiry and ways of knowing will help to decolonize the academy. Opening up the academy to Indigenous research also provides ways to link academic research with communities and to give voice to Indigenous peoples, both within and outside of the university.

It is important to interrogate continually such concepts as ontology and epistemology, and even the idea of *research* itself, to be aware of the effects of language, labelling, naming, and translation, and how this impacts the way we see knowledge itself. Indigenous geographers have important and unique contributions to make to the decolonization of academic research, by bringing attention to the discipline's ongoing complicity in colonization and by promoting ways of being and knowing that may help to push geographers outside the realm of colonial logics. Researchers must resist the desire to be the *voice of the people*. The process of doing research with Indigenous communities requires the researcher to be equal part learner and educator, and to temper the desire for *expert* status with an acknowledgement that learning is a lifelong endeavour that should always be reciprocal. The process of doing Indigenous research can indeed be transformative and such transformations, rather than forming an invisible backdrop to research, should be brought to the forefront so that they can inform transformations within the academy itself. Indigenous knowledge must be treated as intellectually "'equal to that of Western science' without subsuming its spiritual and ethical dimensions" (Sundberg, p. 40). In this way, more effective and respectful research, and research relationships among academic researchers and Indigenous communities, can be a stepping stone for decolonizing and Indigenizing the academy, in Canada and around the world.

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