
Reshaping the University

Rauna Kuokkanen

Reshaping the University:
Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes,
and the Logic of the Gift



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Contents

Acknowledgments / vii

Preface / ix

Introduction / 1

1 The Gift / 23

2 From Cultural Conflicts to Epistemic Ignorance / 49

3 The Question of Speaking and the Impossibility of the Gift / 74

4 Knowing the “Other” and “Learning to Learn” / 97

5 Hospitality and the Logic of the Gift in the Academy / 128

Conclusion / 156

Afterword / 162

Notes / 165

Bibliography / 195

Index / 212

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Preface

Like a silver ribbon the swift river winds through its deep yet spacious valley. Uninterrupted birch forest gives to the slope a luxuriant air, reminiscent of the South; the river is something like a Rhine of the North.¹

The Deatnu, often regarded as one of the best salmon rivers in Europe, is considered the border between Norway and Finland. For many of us along the river, however, the Deatnu is not a border but rather a bond that connects the families who live on its banks. The valley of the Deatnu is our home. Before roads were built along both its banks, the Deatnu was the main *johtolat* – a Sami word signifying passage, way, route, channel, connection – for people, news, provisions, mail, building materials, and so on. During the summer, people travelled by boat. In the winter, the river's thick ice served as a road for horses and oxen and later for cars. In short, everyone and everything moved along the river, except during short periods in the spring and fall when the ice was too thin to carry weight or too broken to allow boat traffic. Besides being a significant salmon river, the Deatnu has been a source of physical and spiritual sustenance for generations.²

I want to start by situating myself with the Deatnu – a river that runs through my home in Samiland. As it flows toward the sea, it meanders and digresses, changing its rhythm with the seasons. Its physical features change, and so do the human activities along it (which so far have been relatively minimal). As they swim upstream every spring, the salmon find their own rhythm, resting behind big rocks and in deep pools. Countless tributaries feed the Deatnu. Its unceasing movement seems linear, yet because of the various currents, rapids, and eddies, that movement is also circular. The Deatnu's fluid, shifting nature defies clear and fixed boundaries. This ambiguity is the river's strength, which cannot be reduced to binary oppositions. Literally, the river – both as a physical entity and as a concept-metaphor – demands that we look beneath the surface if we hope to glean its various contexts and circumstances.

Much of the thinking and research for this inquiry has been carried out at the University of British Columbia, on the estuary of another major salmon river, the Fraser:

The Pacific Coast is a lacework of streams, rivers and lakes flowing into the inlets, fjords and deltas along the ocean front of the mainland. The waters flow down from the mountains and plateaus to drain the interior spawning streams through rapid and icy cold rivers, on to the delta estuaries, in one of the richest salmon habitation sites of the world. Salmon have come home to these rivers for over an estimated one million years. All species of salmon – the Chinook which live longer, the red-fleshed sockeye, the coho, the silvery chum and the numerous small pinks – follow life cycles starting in the rivers, going out to the ocean and, finally, returning to the rivers to spawn.³

As metaphors for multiple, complicated identities, borders between worlds – be they geographical, physical, political and/or colonial, racial, cultural, or any of these in combination – have long been a theme of literature. Sometimes such borders are not mere metaphors but concrete, lived experiences. Thomas King tells a humorous yet poignant story about a Blackfoot woman who tries to cross the Canada–U.S. border with her son. She runs into trouble when the border guard wants to know her citizenship:

“Blackfoot,” my mother told him.

“Ma’am?”

“Blackfoot,” my mother repeated.

“Canadian?”

“Blackfoot.” ...

“Now, I know that we got Blackfeet on the American side and the Canadians got Blackfoot on their side. Just so we can keep our records straight, what side do you come from?” ... “Canadian side or American side?” asked the guard.

“Blackfoot side,” she said ...

Most of that day, we wandered around the duty-free store, which wasn’t very large. The manager had a name tag with a tiny American flag on one side and a tiny Canadian flag on the other. His name was Mel. Towards evening, he began suggesting that we should be on our way. I told him we had nowhere to go, that neither the Americans nor the Canadians would let us in.⁴

Today, Samiland is also divided, by the borders of four nation-states. While crossing these borders has been made relatively simple as a result of Nordic cooperation agreements, including the Nordic Passport Union,⁵ I always feel somewhat ill at ease when asked which country I come from. I feel that replying “Finland” is incorrect in the sense that it says nothing about my Sami background – it does not adequately reflect my reality. Moreover, I feel

the weight of that innocent question's absurdity. Had the vagaries of history, such as the drawing of the border between present-day Norway and Finland, taken place, say, ten or twenty years earlier or later, my family might have been living on the bank of the river that became Norway, and I might today be carrying a Norwegian passport rather than a Finnish one. I would then have to reply that I was from Norway, and feel equally uncomfortable. I am grateful in some ways to the Nordic Passport Union, since at least I am not subjected to the same kind of nonsensical and (what's more) hurtful questioning as was the Blackfoot woman in King's story, who was travelling in her own territory. Yet even though I am not stopped every time I cross a border in Samiland, those borders are made visible in many ways both implicit and explicit.

For Pueblo Laguna/Sioux author and scholar Paula Gunn Allen, living on the border refers not so much to physical and geographical boundaries as to "multiculturality, multilinguality, and dizzying class-crossing from the fields to the salons, from the factories to the academy, or from galleries and the groves of academe to the neighborhoods and reservations."⁶ She calls this kind of existence "boundary-busting," which is best illustrated in writing by people who belong to more than one community. This has generated a new "border literature," that is, a "literature that rides the borders of a variety of literary, cultural, and ideological realms."⁷

Living on both banks of the Deatnu has, for centuries, meant living on the border in the sense delineated by Allen. The people of the river have been multicultural and multilingual out of necessity – understanding other cultures and languages has been the key to daily survival. On the Finnish side of the Deatnu, the Sami lived in isolation from the rest of Finland until after the Second World War. Sami scholar Veli-Pekka Lehtola notes that some people even designated Finland's northernmost district as a separate republic.⁸ After the return from the evacuation to central Finland,⁹ the Sami restarted their lives mainly with the help of their links with Norway. Unlike in many other places, there was no lack of food along the Deatnu, because it was available from nearby towns on the Norwegian side. People also relied on the health services available in those towns. In the school at Vuovdaguoika, on the Finnish side of the river, there even was a Norwegian hospital for a while, which admitted patients from both sides of the river.

After the war, however, the border between Finland and Norway was patrolled more closely, mainly because the two countries were considered to belong to different "camps." Northern Norway had been liberated from the German occupation by the Russians; in contrast, Finland had been a German ally at the end of the war. The first Finnish border post was established in the region in 1945; after that, formal connections with the other side of the Deatnu gradually weakened.¹⁰ After the war, people were required to

settle down more permanently on one side of the Deatnu or the other, even though many families owned land on each side. New laws were passed to regulate land ownership. According to Norwegian law, “Finnish citizens” – that is, the Sami who happened to live on the Finnish side of the river when the border was first drawn (in 1752) – were no longer allowed to own land on the Norwegian side. My great-grandmother, though, who had married from one side of the river to the other, was permitted to keep her land on the Norwegian side. After she retired, she moved back there with her husband. Her situation was by no means unique, as illustrated by Sami poet Rauni Magga Lukkari:

I row across my river
 Father’s river
 Grandfather’s river
 Row first to the Norwegian side
 then to the Finnish side
 I row across my river
 to Mother’s side
 Father’s side
 Wondering
 where homeless children belong¹¹

The river is like a genealogy – in fact, it *is* a genealogy in a very concrete way, considering how many members of my family live on both sides of the river. It is like a genealogy also in that at the specific place I consider my home, there is always both an upstream, the river that comes before, and a downstream, the river that comes after.

Besides being a small-scale farmer who raised cattle and sheep, my great-grandfather was a trader who often journeyed to the ports of northern Norway. My grandfather, in turn, occasionally worked as a fisherman – again in northern Norway yet still in Sápmi. Cultural and linguistic mingling has a long history along the Deatnu and is still taken for granted by many local people. Our place – the birthplace of my mother and her siblings – continues to reflect this reality, especially in the summer, when various family members come to holiday by the river. Communication along the river takes place in various languages, and there are always people who do not understand all of the languages spoken. This is entirely normal, yet I paid attention to it only after my mother told me a story about a visitor from a completely monolingual part of Finland who expressed his uneasiness with languages he did not know. He had been resting upstairs when he realized that people downstairs were speaking at least a couple of different languages and that none of them was Finnish. *Imagine*, he thought, *all of these “foreign” languages and so little Finnish even though this is Finland!*¹²

In her discussion of national borders, Pueblo Laguna author Leslie Marmon Silko maintains that “borders haven’t worked, and they won’t work, not now, as the indigenous people of the Americas reassert their kinship and solidarity with one another.”¹³ She points out that in Mexico and the American Southwest, indigenous peoples have always traded and shared cosmologies and oral narratives. In her view, these exchanges and human migrations cannot be stopped, because, like rivers and winds, human beings are also natural forces of the earth.

It is easy for me to relate to Silko’s words and to her critique of the colonial borders, which have long threatened to shatter older communities and kinships. This is precisely why I find it difficult to fully embrace the notion of living on the border. In my case, to truly celebrate in-betweenness, I would have to accept the colonial borders of the nation-states that have split my family and divided my people among four different countries. I would have to recognize the borders that were established long after my ancestors settled along the Deatnu. For me, and for many other Sami, the Deatnu is a “borderless” river that even so must be treated as if it were a border.

Besides sustaining us physically, the river nourishes us spiritually and mentally by linking us to a specific location as well as to our ancestors who lived along the river before us. Our activities and practices on and along the Deatnu connect us to the local stories and provide us with a sense of continuity and collectivity. For the Sami who live on its banks, the Deatnu is simultaneously an exterior landscape and an interior one. It shapes both our activities and our thoughts. It affects our daily lives as well as the stories that tell us who we are.¹⁴ Moreover, the constant motion reminds us that nothing is static. Every summer, for instance, we find that the riverbed has shifted slightly and that the main channel has moved since the previous year – never mind the seasonal changes, which in the Arctic are literally like day and night. Yet in spite of the constant change, the river never loses its basic features. Its constant motion is what Gerald Vizenor calls “transmotion” – a sense of native motion, active presence, native memories, and sovereignty. In his poetic rendering, he argues that “the sovereignty of motion is mythic, material, and visionary, not mere territoriality, in the sense of colonialism and nationalism. Native transmotion is an original natural union in the stories of emergence and migration that relate humans to an environment and to the spiritual and political significance of animals and other creations. Monotheism is dominance over nature; transmotion is natural reason, and native creation with other creatures.”¹⁵

The transmotion of the Deatnu alerts me to dualistic structures and helps me notice and sidestep the oppositions that characterize some scholarship relating to indigenous issues. One of the most common dichotomies is that of the colonizer/colonized, which remains largely unexamined. I am not

suggesting that the relationship does not exist or that its legacy does not affect our lives today in many ways. However, we need to pay more attention to the shifting nature of this relationship and to the differences within the categories by recognizing our privileges and participations – albeit often marginal or minimal – in various colonial processes. I concur with Gayatri Spivak, who maintains that “our work cannot succeed if we always have a scapegoat.”¹⁶ At the same time, though, we must continue to critique the ever-changing encounters – historical, geographic, and gendered – between colonizer and colonized that we witness even today. In employing a deconstructive approach that reflects the fluidity of the Deatnu, I will try to remain cautious and vigilant with regard to the various tributaries, depths, and currents. This is, Spivak suggests, “all that responsible academic criticism can aspire to.”¹⁷

Deconstruction has proven helpful in its insistence that we pay attention to the exclusions and silences in narratives. It also impels us to recognize how we all participate in what we criticize. This “critical intimacy” – in contrast to the scholarly distance that is so often highly valued – does not allow me to conveniently forget that as I engage in this current critique of the academy, I nevertheless remain part of it, privileged and complicit in many ways. Critical intimacy also reminds me of Jacques Derrida’s insistence that we not speak in a language that is extraneous to what it seeks to contest.¹⁸ Even the logic of the gift – an alternative approach to considering epistemic relations and conventions in the academy – that I articulate in this book does not stand completely outside the form and logic of the market exchange paradigm it seeks to undermine. As far as I am concerned, recognizing this deconstructive principle of inevitable participation is the necessary first step in elaborating viable alternatives.

To varying degrees, I am both an insider and an outsider to all of the discourses employed in this book – Sami, indigenous, and Western (if I may lump, however tentatively, vast and contested traditions into such homogeneous categories). This makes the project at hand unavoidably a process of constant negotiation. A great appeal of deconstructive practice is that it refuses to be “pure” and to accept binary oppositions and totalizations; in fact, it acknowledges and openly embraces ambiguity. Thus, instead of being deeply concerned about the possible impossibilities that my work may present, I am more interested in Spivak’s notions of productive crisis and interruption: the idea of bringing various, even opposing discourses together in such a way that they critically interrupt one another. With this approach, we aren’t required to keep one discourse and throw out the others. It is at the confluence of these various shifting streams – discourses and intellectual conventions – that I seek to locate myself. In that place, I am both curious and vigilant.

Whether we recognize it or not (or want to do so or not), our lives are enmeshed in patriarchal global capitalism. As indigenous people, we can challenge this circumstance by critiquing it and by fostering alternatives within it such as different ways of expressing and living in our societies. Spivak has repeatedly paid attention to the complicity of academics, even those she considers sympathetic and well-meaning as well as marginalized themselves. She sees a need for us to look at the structure of complicity through a deconstructive investigation that will allow us to see especially those of our complicities which we least want to acknowledge and which we most strongly oppose.¹⁹ We academics are not a monolithic group; but we all participate, in one way or another, in the “business of ideological production.” Speaking of the role of academics within the institution, Spivak maintains that “so long as we are interested, and we *must* be interested, in hiring and firing, in grants, in allocations, in budgets, in funding new job descriptions, in publishing radical texts, in fighting for tenure and recommending for jobs, we are *in* capitalism and we cannot avoid competition and individuation. Under these circumstances, essentializing difference, however sophisticated we might be at it, may lead to unproductive conflict among ourselves.”²⁰

When we ignore the ways in which we are implicated in academic structures, and when we assume that we can remain uncontaminated by outside influences despite our daily interactions with the academy, we are only contributing to our own marginalization and to the construction of a monolithic understanding of our projects. Tsimshian/Haida art critic Marcia Crosby rightly asks, “Isn’t pretending that any of our pasts survived untouched by colonialism itself a dangerous thing?”²¹ Crosby recognizes the enormous importance of recording indigenous oral traditions, histories, and languages; even so, she criticizes those who would in effect erase the inevitable gaps in historical memory in their efforts to produce coherent histories and traditions.

Instead of buttressing ahistorical purist positions or ideas about unadulterated indigenous theory, we must recognize that even as marginal participants in the academy, we as indigenous scholars cannot avoid negotiating with the structures of cultural and economic imperialism. We cannot remain ignorant of our own roles, positions, and implications if we hope to convincingly analyze the ignorance of dominant epistemic conventions. When we lock ourselves into positions of binary opposition, we only freeze ourselves, in the same way that certain disciplines and research projects have frozen us into limited, stereotypical representations and modes of analysis. Instead of sharpening our analysis, we constrain and self-censor it. During this critical time of intensifying neoliberal ideologies and academic capitalism, we need to conduct incisive analyses and put forward equally

incisive alternatives. If we can free ourselves from dichotomous thinking, new possibilities will emerge, including a notion of sovereignty that does not require the eradication of all outside influences (an impossible task anyway) but that does claim the right and responsibility to make choices, both individual and collective, regarding issues that pertain to us.

Natives are the run of seasons, the rush of rivers, and tricky creation stories, but natives are not analogies by surveillance, by cultural substitution, by social science remissions, or simulations of an ethnic originary.²²

The river encourages me to develop an epistemology that is grounded in concepts and metaphors derived from Sami cultural practices and circumstances but that also allows me to move into other “waters.” My roots in Sami discourse open an opportunity for me even while they set a challenge. They allow (and force) me to exist in several different discourses and to recognize their tensions, challenges, and possibilities. From this necessarily unstable position,

I am able to look in various directions and at diverse intellectual traditions without being compelled to choose only one of them.

The confluence of discourses presents us with new possibilities and challenges. The river Deatnu has been a site of confluences and epistemic transmotion for many generations, and this is perhaps why I share Spivak’s disinterest in being “pure,” theoretically or otherwise. What is more interesting and perhaps more constructive is finding ways to negotiate with dominant academic discourses – the goal here being to interrupt and intervene – since it is something indigenous scholars, as a marginalized group, cannot avoid doing anyway.

Indigenous scholarship, with its multiple discourses, may not be constituted by modernity or by Western liberalism; that said, it does at least partly exist within the dominant academic discourses and is influenced by them. It follows that indigenous discourses and theories can never be free of “contamination.” Even approaches that claim to draw from and be entirely embedded in specific indigenous oral traditions or social practices cannot avoid negotiating with the structures of cultural imperialism. This, of course, does not deny the validity or possibility of indigenous theories and approaches. In fact, recognizing the constant and unrelenting process of negotiation can only reinforce indigenous discourses by rendering them more tenacious.

According to Spivak, negotiation seeks to change something that we are already a part of, to change from within something in our location. Negotiation recognizes the impossibility of “a neutral communication situation of free dialogue” – a position suggested by Jürgen Habermas. A dialogue can never be neutral; it always occurs in specific historical circumstances and within certain structures in which each subject has a specific position. Just as indigenous discourses have no choice but to negotiate with dominant

academic discourses, mainstream discourses cannot escape negotiating with indigenous discourses, even if this is not always acknowledged or if it takes place in the form of appropriation. This sort of “negative negotiation” occurs when the dominant forecloses the marginal and in doing so denies its significance – as, for example, in phallogentrism.²³ For indigenous people, negative negotiation is manifested in Eurocentrism, which denies the contributions and knowledge of indigenous peoples, or appropriates their knowledge, or imposes its authority over them.

The river Deatnu starts at the confluence of two smaller rivers, the Anárjohka and the Kárásjohka. It is intriguing to place oneself in such a flow of various currents, to feel the pull of approaching questions, and to attempt to deal with issues that seem utterly incommensurable. Intriguing but also challenging. One such challenge relates to the question of experience. In indigenous epistemologies, knowledge is derived mainly from, and is rooted in, individual and collective experience. In contrast, in much of academic discourse, it is considered suspect to regard such experience as knowledge. The general view is that to treat experience as knowledge can only lead to solipsism and reactionary self-referentiality. Poststructural theories in particular have been quick to point out that the notion of knowledge grounded in experience assumes a unified subject that has a direct access to “reality.” Even feminist theories, which have arisen largely from women’s experiences of marginalization, treat experience as a starting point for inquiry, not as knowledge as such.²⁴ At the same time, ideas about experiential knowledge have been used to discriminate against marginalized groups in the academy. bell hooks contends that associating blackness with experience and assuming it is oppositional to or lacking in abstract thinking or theory merely reproduces racism.

Yet the power of individual and collective experiences to inform and construct theory and analysis cannot be denied. Personal narratives and testimonies can give voice to painful personal and collective histories, and the power of this must not be underestimated. Many indigenous authors, among other marginalized groups in society, cite personal experience as one of the main reasons why they write. When they share their experiences – of, say, residential schooling – on the written page, many readers can better understand their own often unexpressed feelings and realize that they are not alone.

It may appear at first that indigenous epistemologies, which emphasize personal and collective experience, may find it hard to defend themselves against charges like those above. But we must differentiate between having a system of knowledge rooted in experiences and practices that have accumulated over generations, and limiting one’s inquiry to personal experience and expressive self-referentiality. Indigenous epistemologies are not

based on the experiences of one individual; rather, they are based on “a collective cognitive experience” established by combining personal experiences and sharing the results within a community.²⁵ The intergenerational accumulation and communication of knowledge is central to indigenous epistemologies. Within an indigenous system of knowledge, final decisions as to the validity and usefulness of knowledge are made jointly, based on the diverse experiences of the community members. Also, indigenous knowledge is constituted in response to past circumstances and is shared with other members of the community through language, oral traditions, and ceremonies.

My personal experiences were what prompted me to consider questions about the relationship between indigenous people and the academy, about hospitality, about the academy’s responsibility to the “other,” and about the legacy of indigenous epistemes. My experiences in the academy first seemed to be isolated incidents; but when I considered them more carefully, I began to understand that they pointed the way to broader questions about decolonization, and about methodologies; furthermore, they reflected criticisms now being voiced by indigenous scholars and students. As a graduate student at the University of British Columbia, I found myself repeatedly facing this question: What is it in indigenous epistemes that does not seem to fit dominant perceptions of academic knowledge and of the world generally? It became apparent to me that indigenous discourses are allowed to exist in the university, but only in marginal spaces or within clearly defined parameters established by the dominant discourse, which is grounded in certain assumptions, values, conceptions of knowledge, and views of the world. Furthermore, in conversations with other indigenous students, I learned that many of us found it difficult to truly express ourselves in the classroom except in indigenous studies courses. Many students expressed the same frustration that I, too, was experiencing more and more often: that it was so difficult to speak from a position of indigenous episteme/epistemology, and even more importantly, to be understood by others in the classroom.

Indigenous students (myself included) are often left with two unsatisfactory options when dealing with these situations: either become a teacher of indigenous perspectives for the others in the classroom, or (worse) check those perspectives and understandings at the door and replace them, temporarily or permanently, with views informed by perspectives embedded in the intellectual traditions of the West (i.e., the assumed *neutral* framework through which I was also told to undertake literary criticism). The first of these alternatives is probably more noble, but it can easily become a burden and as a worst case can hinder the student’s studies. The second is easier but often leaves students feeling ashamed of themselves, as they consider it a sign of capitulation to prevailing paradigms.

The Deatnu contextualizes the arguments I present in this book by giving

readers a sense of where I come from, not only physically and culturally but also intellectually. It is not, however, the topic of my inquiry. Rather, it is a concept-metaphor the purpose of which is to assist my thinking and analysis, allowing me to move in and out of multiple discourses and intellectual traditions. It erases the borders of binary dualisms, reflecting the Sami worldview in which boundaries between nature and culture, human and non-human, are in constant flux. In short, the river allows fluidity or “transmotion,” which is absolutely necessary in my attempt here to bring multiple discourses and intellectual traditions together, even if only tentatively and temporarily. The river also allows me to fuse various theories and critical approaches without getting stuck in rigid categorizations or dichotomies.

The river also allows an ongoing navigation – particularly in the sense of negotiation as discussed above – between and around discourses and theories. Reading Spivak has helped me understand that I can see the value of any theory only once I recognize its limitations and stop asking it “to do everything for me.”²⁶ I have learned to focus on what various theories may have to offer and to use them as stepping stones – like rocks surfacing from a river I must cross. This approach has enabled me to combine aspects and insights from various fields of theory and criticism such as indigenous discourse, deconstruction, and – to some extent – critical theory.

Both deconstruction and critical theory offer valuable insights and tools for analyzing indigenous issues and contexts; both, though, also contain problematic arguments and assumptions. Critical theory emphasizes the notion of emancipation and recognizes the need for change; it also acknowledges the value of visions, and even of utopias as goals. It also regards incremental victories as important to achieving goals. In education in particular, critical theory has emphasized the need to analyze inequalities and to develop strategies for addressing those inequalities. In this inquiry, I also acknowledge the serious need to pay attention to social and structural inequalities. Moreover, as with any research within the framework of indigenous scholarship, this consideration emanates from and is rooted in the recognition of the urgent need for transformation. While not necessarily explicitly deriving from critical theory, these aspects form an integral part of my inquiry.

Deconstruction, for its part, tends to question the possibility of emancipation as well the notion of false consciousness, both of which have been central to much indigenous scholarship. A deconstructive impulse, however, is necessary for an inquiry dealing with questions of hospitality, simply because deconstruction *is* hospitality. Argues Derrida: “Hospitality – this is a name or an example of deconstruction ... *deconstruction is hospitality to the other*, to the other than oneself, the other than ‘its other,’ to an other who is beyond any ‘its other.’”²⁷ At least for Derrida, deconstruction is a form of hospitality, a practice of welcoming the “other,” a “philosophy of

‘the responsibility to the other.’”²⁸ Not surprisingly, then, much of my treatment of hospitality in this book draws from Derrida’s arguments. In considering the institution of the university and its responsibilities, Derrida asserts the necessity of deconstruction:

Precisely because deconstruction has never been concerned with the contents alone of meaning, it must not be separable from this politico-institutional problematic, and has to require a new questioning about responsibility, an inquiry that should no longer necessarily rely on codes inherited from politics or ethics. Which is why, though too political in the eyes of some, deconstruction can seem demobilizing in the eyes of those who recognize the political only with the help of prewar road signs. Deconstruction is limited neither to a methodological reform that would reassure the given organization, nor, inversely, to a parade of irresponsible or irresponsibilizing destruction, whose surest effect would be to leave everything as is, consolidating the most immobile forces of the university.²⁹

This lengthy quote weaves together several strands that are central to this inquiry. First, it suggests that deconstruction may offer a new way of challenging conventional understandings of responsibility by seeking to move beyond traditional interpretations of politics and ethics. Second, Derrida calls for subtlety and responsibility in the process of transforming the university, arguing that proceeding in any other way would eventually backfire and merely too tight reinforce existing structures and discourses. In a way, these points amount to guidelines both for the reader, by giving them a sense of the way I wish to employ deconstruction, and for myself, by reminding me in particular of responsibility – of the need to avoid “irresponsibilizing destruction.”

My relationship with deconstruction, however, is somewhat different from the one embraced in some of the more orthodox approaches. In this inquiry, my theorizing could be described as a confluence of various separate streams or tributaries, all of them flowing into the same river and forming an irregular, unsettled current. Injecting the work of critics who are (relatively) well known – especially within dominant discourses and scholarly circles – into an inquiry dealing with the gift of indigenous epistemes and the academic responsibility of hospitality, is a way for me to bring closer the two sometimes separate worlds of indigenous and non-indigenous scholarship.³⁰ My method has resulted in a confluence of voices; but it has also resulted in a practice of reading – or even misreading – that has allowed me to be carried away by the ideas that various theories and approaches represent³¹ instead of seeking orthodox interpretations of them. In this way, it is possible for me to demonstrate the relevance of the two discourses to each other. It is also a strategy for summoning the attention of those scholarly

circles which otherwise might dismiss considerations on indigenous issues as either irrelevant to their own fields or, worse, unscholarly.

Instead of seeking the most correct interpretation or the ultimate meaning of the critics' words, I have used their approaches and considerations as a source of inspiration, as intellectual and theoretical tools with which I can further elaborate and augment my analyses. In my view, this is the very essence of theory's beauty, and links my project to the idea of the river: it allows me to be carried away by various streams and currents. The river, as an element that defies containment and control, also unfetters me when it comes to "correctly" interpreting philosophers' theories and works. By relying on the river, I will be able to treat various approaches and critical practices as springboards for reflection, instead of limiting myself to speculations on the "real meaning" of particular theories or thoughts.

My analyses and theoretical arguments are complemented by and interspersed with literary excerpts – especially poetry – from indigenous writers. These literary reflections serve a number of purposes. Most analyses of the experiences of indigenous people in the academy have to do with emotions. Often, poetry reveals these emotions more succinctly and more effectively than conventional scholarly explanations. This resort to the literary also reminds us that poetry is a theoretical discourse for many people, including countless indigenous people, whose cultures have always theorized through various forms of oral traditions. I leave the poems unanalyzed, allowing them to have whatever effect they may on the reader. The inclusion of poetry does not, however, imply a straightforward model of representation – I do not assume that I am allowing the "subalterns" to speak for themselves through the excerpts I have selected. Such an assumption would conceal my role as an "absent non-representer."³² My use of literary excerpts is undoubtedly selective, strategic, and irretrievably mediated. I do not assume that these excerpts represent "authentic" voices of the native informant; I do hope that they offer a mode of theorizing on epistemic ignorance that engages the reader at levels that conventional, hegemonic academic discourses cannot reach.

I started this preface with a discussion of borders and of how the Deatnu is perceived, depending on one's perspective, either as a border river between the nation-states of Finland and Norway or as a "mother of all rivers" that unites and sustains the families living on its two banks. While for many Sami, the ideology embedded in state borders remains problematic and uneasy,³³ these and other borders have nevertheless increasingly influenced our thinking and ways of life. Derrida has defined three types of border limits: "first, those that separate territories, countries, nations, States, languages, and cultures (and the politico-anthropological disciplines that correspond to them); second, the separations and sharings between domains of discourse ... [and] third, ... the lines of separation, demarcation, or opposition

between conceptual determinations, the forms of the border that separates that are called concepts or terms.”³⁴

As an analysis of borders – particularly of the second and third types – this inquiry is determined to reach beyond them. The ambivalent nature of the Deatnu – not only with regard to state borders but also as an element of transmotion – may help us cross all three types of borders, not least because the river is a gift to all of us. It keeps us in constant motion, reminding us of both fluidity and equilibrium – of our views and perspectives, of our arguments and interpretations, or of life in general. It also opens up the possibility of multiple perspectives – whether in the water like the salmon, or on a boat looking down, or farther away on the river’s banks. Even on the surface, the river is never the same.

Reshaping the University

Introduction

As an institution, the academy supports and reproduces certain systems of thought and knowledge, and certain structures and conventions, that rarely reflect or represent indigenous worldviews. In this way, it silences and makes invisible the reality of many indigenous students. To a large extent, the academy remains founded on epistemological practices and traditions that are selective and exclusionary and that are reflective of and reinscribed by the Enlightenment, colonialism, modernity, and, in particular, liberalism. These traditions, discourses, and practices have very little awareness of other epistemologies and ontologies, and offer them heavily restricted space at best. Even in the academic spaces that consider themselves most open to “changing the paradigm,” individuals are often unwilling to examine their own blind spots. Nor are they willing to acknowledge either their privilege or their participation in academic structures and the various colonial processes of society in general.

Today, there are many special educational initiatives aimed at creating culturally appropriate education for indigenous students; these include Native/First Nations/Aboriginal/Indigenous Studies faculties and Native education and teacher training programs. Culturally based educational initiatives can do much to make the academic world more hospitable and relevant for many indigenous students; however, these efforts do not reach indigenous people outside specific programs. Even more significantly, they do not address the core issue, which is the sanctioned ignorance of the academy at large. Various programs and services for indigenous students have been established on the premise that indigenous people require special assistance if they are to adapt to the world of the academy.

The difficulties experienced by indigenous students in the academy are often framed in terms of differences between indigenous cultures and the mainstream cultures of the West. For example, knowledge in the Western universities is generally fragmented and compartmentalized, in contrast to

the more holistic frames of reference in indigenous cultures. Also, Western conventions of thought typically emphasize individual status and competition; in contrast, indigenous cultures place more value on consensus, cooperation, and collective identity. When seeking solutions to challenges commonly referred to as “cultural conflicts,” the representatives of educational institutions usually focus on indigenous students; rarely do they examine themselves or the structures, discourses, practices, and assumptions that operate in the academy.

The institutional response to the “problem” of cultural discontinuity usually involves accommodating indigenous students or “mainstreaming” them into the conventions of the university. Most often this is done by establishing support and counselling services as well as access programs. The intent of these is to bridge the gulf between the cultures of indigenous students and that of the institution – a gulf that is presumed to exist. Such services are also often intended to help students make the transition from their cultures to the academic culture with all its assumptions, expectations, and values. Generally speaking, the academy does not recognize the ontologies and epistemologies held by its indigenous students. Instead, it expects students to leave their ontological and epistemological assumptions and perceptions at the gates of the university and “assume the trappings of a new form of reality, a reality which is often substantially different from their own.”¹

In this book, I set out to expose the ignorance and benevolent imperialism of the academy and to show how the academy is based fundamentally on a very narrow understanding of the world and human relationships. I will be focusing on the university itself rather than on the assumed problems of indigenous people. More specifically, I will be focusing on the academy’s role as a storehouse of knowledge and on its failure to fulfil its mandate in relation to indigenous people. I will be suggesting a new paradigm based on the logic of the gift as it is understood in indigenous thought. By applying this concept, I will be envisioning new ways of perceiving and relating to marginalized epistemes in the academy. I will be describing a logic that, if accepted, will make the academy more responsive and open in its pursuit of knowledge. The logic of the gift foregrounds a new relationship – one that is characterized by reciprocity and by a call for responsibility toward the “other.”

As a criticism of narrow, selective epistemic and intellectual traditions of the academy, this book will argue that it serves little purpose to “mainstream” indigenous students to the academic culture and environment. What needs to be mainstreamed, if anything, is indigenous philosophies and worldviews. Mainstreaming in this context implies inviting indigenous philosophies and epistemes in from the fringes, so that they can be *heard*.²

In other words, this book will be calling for the indigenizing of the academy, and arguing that it is up to the academy to do its homework and address its own ignorance so that it will be able to recognize and give an

unconditional welcome to indigenous peoples' worldviews and philosophies. But before the academy can recognize the gift of indigenous epistemes, it will have to profoundly transform itself; it will not be enough merely to include indigenous epistemologies (i.e., indigenous systems of knowledge or ways of knowing) in pedagogies and curricula. First and foremost, the academy will have to acknowledge that it is founded on very limited conceptions of knowledge and the world. Because of this constrained perception, the academy cannot grasp or even hear views that are grounded in other epistemic conventions.

To be a good host implies not only a commitment to responsibility but also infinite openness toward the "other." It is to welcome all guests, including those whom the hosts may not know or whose language they may not speak. Many indigenous people contend that notwithstanding its rhetoric of welcome and hospitality, the academy is not a good host. Their experiences attest to the ways in which the academy is an inhospitable and sometimes even hostile host with only a weak commitment to indigenous people. Access and bridging programs have opened the doors to many indigenous students, but these are inadequate solutions to the central problem, which is that indigenous people are inevitably treated as outsiders.

In the academy, indigenous epistemes need to be recognized as a gift according to the principles of responsibility and reciprocity that foreground the logic of the gift. But the recognition called for here is of a specific kind. It is not limited to the often fleeting moment of recognizing diversity in terms of "other" identities and cultures associated with multiculturalism. It also requires knowledge as well as commitment, action, and reciprocity – one must take action according to certain responsibilities. For example, in the same way that the various gifts of the land cannot be taken for granted – if they are, the balance of the world on which life depends will be disrupted – the gift of indigenous epistemes cannot be neglected. If it is, the university will have failed in its purposes.

The gifts of the land must be actively recognized through expressions of gratitude and giving back; in the same way, the gift of indigenous epistemes must be acknowledged through reciprocation. Yet this reciprocation will never come about until those who are doing the reciprocating are able to understand the logic of the gift. So far, the academy has extended only a limited, often reluctant welcome to indigenous people; at the same time, it has ignored, overlooked, and dismissed their ontologies – in fact, the academy's structures and discourses are built on the assumption that there only is one episteme, one ontology, one intellectual tradition on which to rely and from which to draw. At one time, colonial racial ideology postulated that indigenous peoples were intellectually inferior; now it is indigenous *epistemes* that are considered inferior, not worthy of serious intellectual consideration.

This book is about *epistemic* dispossession, exclusion, and marginalization in higher education. I will be emphasizing conceptual analysis because I strongly believe, as does Luce Irigaray, that a change in the “real” is impossible without a simultaneous change in the “imaginary.” In other words, it is not enough to critique oppressive, discriminatory structures and practices; one must also envision alternatives. In the academy, there tends to be a lot of finger pointing, but very little discussion of future visions of the sort that would require entire institutions to participate (rather than random individuals or small groups, which can always be found). As a conceptual analysis, my project is less prescriptive and “concrete” than perhaps many would prefer. Another trend of the times is to expect readily available answers and simple solutions. I hope to illustrate, however, that such an approach goes against the very principles of the logic of the gift: there can be no ready-made to-do lists for those who write policies and curricula.

The gift is not a model but a process. It is a participatory paradigm that requires long-term commitment. For some, this may seem hopelessly utopian or idealistic – too abstract and theoretical – in times characterized by problems in need of urgent attention. Many seasoned academics seem especially cynical toward utopias and visions of change. Reason – often white male reason – tends to sneer at discussions about alternatives and to argue that the only worthwhile intellectual project for our times is to analyze and dissect the New World Order. Only misguided “others” who do not know better – typically women, indigenous people, and those who live in the Third World – avoid the “real” issues and entertain wild-eyed dreams about alternatives to the present world. Yet it is worth remembering that today’s cynicism/fatalism is very much a product and manifestation of neoliberal ideology, which insists that there are no alternatives and that nothing can be done to change the world’s present course. As Paulo Freire argues, neoliberalism not only makes us lose our place in history but also “humiliates and denies our humanity.”³ Cynicism is a potent mechanism of control that reflects the logic of imperial rationalism. It can be employed as a weapon for dismissing entire worldviews, knowledge systems, and practices as unworthy of serious consideration – as primitive, archaic, simplistic, and gullible.

In this book, I will start by exposing the sanctioned ignorance that prevails in today’s academy, which is unable and unwilling to *recognize* and *hear* other than dominant Western or mainstream epistemes. I will then call for the academy to accept its responsibility toward the “other” and to do its homework with regard to indigenous epistemes by engaging in the logic of the gift. This is not simply a call to end systemic racism, to support Indigenous Studies programs, and to create space for indigenous knowledge in the academy, although my argument touches on all three. As I will discuss

in Chapter 2, the key issue I am raising is discrimination against indigenous ontologies and philosophies. There have been many excellent studies about marginalization, institutional racism, and indifference toward indigenous peoples and their epistemologies, histories, and concerns in the academy. There has also been research that demonstrates how academic practices and discourses are hegemonic, racist, patriarchal, and (neo)colonial. Yet intellectual discrimination is rarely addressed as an indication that the academy has failed drastically at its main objective, which is to produce knowledge. What is behind this ignorance and arrogance, besides the apparent desire to uphold a status quo that serves the interests of those in power and of society at large? And how does this indifference affect the objectives of higher learning? Is it acceptable for “a site of learning” to be so ignorant?

Systemic indifference is built into the very structures of the academy, just as it is into the discourses of (sometimes) well-meaning academics. Before we can address this indifference, we need to examine the academy’s responsibility toward “other” epistemes. In doing so, we cannot simply act as critics, and we cannot simply play “blame the victim.” Rather, we must focus on showing the academy what it can do to confront its own indifference. As one approach, this book calls for a paradigm shift in the academy’s epistemic and intellectual relations. Based on the notion of the gift – a notion embedded in indigenous ontologies – it redefines and revalorizes the common concepts of responsibility and recognition in the hope of establishing new relations between epistemic and intellectual conventions.

To take epistemic ignorance seriously is more than an ethical imperative in relation to “traditionally marginalized groups.” It is a way to draw everyone in the academy into the process of creating new knowledge. As long as the academy remains ignorant or dismissive of epistemes that differ from dominant Western ones, indigenous people will be voiceless – in the sense that their words will be misunderstood or ignored – and furthermore, the epistemological foundations of the academy will continue to be constrained as well as exclusionary. As long as the academy sanctions epistemic ignorance, it will be unable to profess its multiple truths.⁴ Thus, the issue I am investigating here is not simply what the academy can do for indigenous peoples; it is also what the academy needs to do for itself. To the degree that the academy is unable or unwilling to “profess multiple truths” notwithstanding its rhetoric, its double standards must be exposed and investigated. As long as it continues to ignore and shunt aside indigenous epistemes, individual academics and the academy as a whole will be continuing to support the imperialist project. They will also have failed in their objective of exposing students to a range of knowledges, perspectives, and experiences. By failing to open themselves to the “other,” they will have failed in their project of charting a path into the future.

The prevailing ignorance in the academy has barely been examined in indigenous scholarship or in more general research on higher education. My concept of epistemic ignorance, which is informed by Spivak's discussion of "sanctioned ignorance," refers to academic practices and discourses that enable the ongoing exclusion of other than dominant Western epistemic and intellectual traditions. I use the term "episteme," in the sense of "worldview" or "discursive practice," because it is a broader and less restrictive concept than "culture." Many different inequalities – including institutional, structural, power, economic, and epistemic – have helped construct and reinforce disparate relations in the academy. Although all of them overlap and are mutually reinforcing, I am especially interested in epistemic inequalities and exclusions. By examining epistemic ignorance, I will be able to elaborate on past discussions of racism and Eurocentrism in the academy. I will be able to advance indigenous scholarship on knowledge construction so that it becomes an analysis of how the academy's exclusionary and limited discursive practices lead to situations where indigenous peoples are not "heard" even when they are welcomed to the institution and given the opportunity to express their views. William G. Tierney suggests that "one arrives at a picture of institutions and individuals that are not hostile to minorities, but indifferent. Officially students are encouraged; institutionally they find discouragement. Responsibility is partitioned and goals are elusive ... Overt acts of racist behavior may not be readily apparent, but the lack of understanding of minority issues is a constant theme."⁵

Antiracist discourse has taught us that racism is not limited to individual or overt acts; it also operates – and much more effectively – at the level of structures, and to the extent this is so, it becomes naturalized. Indifference and lack of understanding are indications that systemic racism exists. Furthermore, systemic racism is much more difficult to observe and to argue against than is overt racism. Systemic racism hides behind the language of "cultural conflicts" and thus can be very difficult to detect. It is rooted in underlying power structures, and it manifests itself in mechanisms that enable and foster marginalization. Moreover, it ignores the question of who actually benefits from "benign" forms of discrimination.⁶ Yet antiracist discourse has not adequately addressed the issue of epistemic exclusion. Antiracism focuses on racial oppression and on the racialization of "non-white bodies." Its main concern is race, not knowledge or intellectual conventions, which are the two main subjects of analyses of epistemic ignorance. I am not suggesting that systemic racism is no longer an issue in the academy or in society at large, nor am I suggesting that we "move beyond race" (a position taken by in some populist, conservative circles, which seek to replace issues of racism with those of pluralism and diversity).⁷ Rather, I

believe the problem is that single-issue movements⁸ tend to isolate and fragment those complex, heterogeneous, and overlapping issues that weave through every sphere and stratum of society. This too often prevents us from observing the intricate ties between various forms of oppression.

The main argument in this book is that indigenous epistemes remain an impossible gift due to the prevailing epistemic ignorance in the academy. There are several reasons that indigenous epistemes should be seen as a gift. The concept of the gift is integral to many indigenous worldviews and philosophies, which emphasize individual and collective responsibility for preserving the balance of the socio-cosmic order. I recognize that indigenous peoples are not homogeneous even internally and that their cultures, histories, and socio-economic circumstances are not the same. Having said that, I point out that underpinning these apparent differences is a set of shared perceptions of the world – perceptions relating to cultural and social practices and discourses that are driven by an intimate relationship with the natural environment. Indigenous people also share a number of experiences related to being colonized and marginalized by dominant societies.

For indigenous people, the world's stability, its social order, is established and maintained mainly through giving gifts and recognizing the gifts of others, including the land. The gift constitutes a specific logic that not only is different from that of the increasingly consumerist and careerist academy but also represents a radical critique of the logic of exchange. The gift logic articulated here is grounded in an understanding of the world that is rooted in intricate relationships that extend to everyone and everything. Because of these relationships, this logic emphasizes reciprocity with and responsibility toward all others.

The current academy has embraced discourses and practices that sanction ignorance toward other ways of perceiving the world and constructing knowledge. It does not recognize its responsibility toward the "other," nor does it recognize the gift (except when it comes in the form of corporate or philanthropic donations).⁹ Yet, as I will be arguing, the future of the academy, the "institution of knowing," is going to depend on a recognition of the gift of indigenous epistemes.

The recognition of the gift is also vital to the well-being of indigenous people in the academy, including those outside programs established specifically for them. Importantly, questions of the academy's responsibility and calls for the recognition of the gift extend beyond matters of pedagogic practices and culturally inclusive curricula (which are, of course, also important), or cultivating a liberal understanding of Otherness. As Derrida suggests, the "politics or ethics of the university ... implies something more than knowledge, something more than a constative statement."¹⁰ Moreover, recognition in this context implies more than a fleeting acknowledgment of the

existence of indigenous knowledge; it requires active participation and ongoing engagement with intellectual and epistemic conventions other than one's own.

The questions this book asks include these: If indigenous ontologies and philosophies represent a radical epistemic challenge to the academy, how can we expect the academy to welcome them? What are the responsibilities of the participants of the established discourse individually – and of the academy as a collective – when it comes to listening to, responding to, and (most significantly) recognizing these epistemes? How can the academy, at the individual and institutional levels, prepare itself to respond to and reciprocate with these worldviews?

When I call for the academy to recognize indigenous epistemes as a gift, I am not assuming naively that we will magically change things simply by adding indigenous epistemes to the academic rhetoric. As this book illustrates, neither “recognition” nor “gift” ought to be taken lightly. The gift foregrounds a value system that is radically different from the system within which the academy now operates. The logic of the gift requires a complete overhaul of the ways in which knowledge and relationships between epistemes are perceived. I will be reconceptualizing the notion of recognition according to the understanding embedded in this logic.

The core concepts of this inquiry – the gift and responsibility – are known to indigenous and Western societies alike. The gift in particular has been extensively studied in anthropology, and increasingly in sociology and philosophy as well. As this book will show, the gift can also serve as a critique of the present day's neoliberal, capitalist, and patriarchal structures, and as such can form the basis for an alternative paradigm. Moreover, as a concept, it is grounded in certain indigenous practices and worldviews. It represents a logic in which politico-economic and epistemic ethics come together in an inseparable whole. As such, it offers a compelling framework for envisioning alternative approaches to structuring and producing knowledge.

The worldviews and practices of indigenous people form the foundation of my work. However, I will also be theorizing on the concepts of the gift and responsibility in terms of postcolonial readings and deconstructive practices. In picking up the tools of deconstruction, I will be using “the master's own tools” to examine the “master's house” (or perhaps more germane here, perhaps, the master's ivory tower). Audre Lorde's famous declaration that “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house” is undoubtedly valid much of the time, but at other times it needs to be revisited. The same tools with which the house was built may well help undermine it (if not deconstruct it). As Spivak insists, “sometimes it is best to sabotage what is inexorably to hand, than to invent a tool that no one will test, while mouthing varieties of liberal pluralism.”¹¹

In applying deconstruction – often defined as a critique of Western metaphysics from within – I will be demonstrating to the Western university that it has still a long path to follow if it is ever to live up to its self-proclaimed ideals and, ultimately, its future. There is a need for rigorous analyses that will deepen our understanding of the more hidden dimensions of the hegemonic relations at play in the university. These relations are fuelled by the new forces of control and domination introduced by the globalization project, forces that affect everything and everyone in universities, not just indigenous people and their epistemes.

This book also challenges some old assumptions made about indigenous scholarship. One of them is that the only way you can do indigenous research is to focus on your own community, or to write your work as a story, or to conduct empirical studies (as opposed to engaging in theoretical and conceptual discussions). Indigenous scholarship has advanced to the point where we can, need to, and want to take our work into new territories, both literally and figuratively. Intellectual autonomy must mean that indigenous scholars are entitled to do theory, engage with abstract ideas and other theories, and analyze concepts that are not related to “indigenous experience” (whatever that is).

Similarly, questions about relevance need to be questioned. In my case, the yoke of relevance would steer me toward focusing my research solely on Sami issues. Yet I cannot arrogantly assume that I know what is relevant to the entire Sami people. Here, I am not ignoring questions of relevance – after all, ethics requires me to “give back.” I do, however, question careless arguments of the sort that too quickly assume that indigenous communities are static, homogeneous, and uncomplicated entities.

The Concept of Indigenous Peoples and the Problem of Generalizations

For some, the term “indigenous peoples” is highly problematic. More than once, academics from various disciplines have told me that the term is essentializing. A well-known American ethnographer has declared that “indigenous” is too vague and too universalizing a word to have any intellectual value. The ease with which some scholars dismiss another group’s collective identity is perplexing. It seems to be accepted and normal practice for mainstream scholars and academics to refer to themselves as “Western” – the scholarly literature offers countless examples of this – yet indigenous people are denied this collective self-identification.

The term “international indigenism”¹² refers to the global phenomenon of indigenous activism. An internationally recognized identity for indigenous peoples emerged in the mid-1970s and has had a strong impact on world politics and human rights. For several decades, international bodies

such as the UN have been the focal point for indigenous rights, drawing indigenous representatives from every part of the world and generating various initiatives and investigations relating to indigenous peoples and their issues. The persistent work by indigenous representatives within a body established to represent nation-states – not peoples – culminated in the forming of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2002.

Obviously, there cannot be a single, fixed definition of “indigenous peoples”; that said, various working definitions have come to be broadly accepted by the indigenous community. According to the International Labour Organization’s Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, a person is “regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.”¹³ It follows from this that indigenous peoples are not merely ethnic minorities; they remain in a colonial situation within or across the borders of nation-states that have not recognized their self-determination or sovereignty – which according to international law is an inherent right of all peoples. This is why indigenous peoples insist that they are *peoples* (in plural), not minorities, populations, groups, or something else that denies this status. A reflection of this status is, for instance, the preservation and continued practice of their particular social, economic, and cultural institutions and traditions.

Another widely employed definition is that of the UN Special Rapporteur, José R. Martínez Cobo. Cobo’s definition emphasizes four characteristics of indigenous peoples: the historical continuity of their societies on territories they have occupied and inhabited for generations; their distinctiveness from “mainstream” or dominant societies; their current non-dominant status in relation to the larger society; and their desire and willingness to defend, protect, advance, and pass on their identities, languages, cultural and social traditions, conventions, and philosophies.¹⁴

Furthermore, the concept of indigeneity (at least as it is used by indigenous peoples themselves) is grounded in and inseparable from the legacy and aftershocks of colonialism. This is clear both in the Cobo definition, which refers to present-day societies, and in statements which make it clear that to be indigenous is synonymous with being colonized *today*. To claim, then – as is often done – that “we are all indigenous” is either to be blind to this contemporary reality or to refuse to recognize the ways in which colonial history continues to affect not only indigenous peoples but also relations between states and indigenous peoples. The statement “we are all indigenous” reflects a reluctance to take responsibility for or engage with those issues which, far from belonging to the past, continue to keep

indigenous peoples in a subordinate position and to deny them rights that peoples who belong to nation-states can and do take for granted.

It is interesting that academics are often deeply troubled by generalizations and even more so by essentialisms, especially when these involve non-dominant, non-mainstream peoples or issues.¹⁵ One can only wonder whether this is another sign of the continuance of colonial control over names and thus over people. Or is it simply academic arrogance? Or are these people fearful that they will lose sight of their disciplinary boundaries and their carefully defined specialties?

“Academy” and “indigenous” are complex concepts with multiple internal divisions and conflicts. When constructing an argument or analyzing anything, however, one cannot avoid using certain generalized categories. As Spivak notes, the moment of essentializing is sometimes irreducible. In effect, she suggests, anti-essentialism can be a way of *not* doing one’s homework. She proposes that instead of pretending that we never essentialize or repudiate our practices, “let us become vigilant about our own practice and use it as much as we can.”¹⁶

Whatever their historical, political, social, economic, and geographical differences, the world’s indigenous peoples share certain experiences of colonialism as well as certain fundamental values and ways of viewing the world. Their immediate relationship with the natural environment has generated various cultural values and practices, some of which will be discussed in the following chapters. Instead of attempting an exhaustive explanation of what they have been in the past or what they are in the present, I will be focusing on certain underlying aspects and values. I realize that I will be doing this at the cost of addressing the specificities of indigenous peoples and communities. But it is these shared similarities that have inspired me to attempt a vision for change that does not rely on idealized or homogeneous actual indigenous epistemes (or peoples). Obviously, there are dangers to this approach, but at least we can acknowledge their existence and our complicity instead of pretending that if constructed in another way, we would be freed from all risk. Moreover, it is possible to discuss some of the common themes of indigenous philosophies without egregious generalizing.

A central question in the present inquiry is the apparently irreducible differences between worldviews. This concern is what prompted me to engage in the current undertaking. It may sometimes seem that the worldviews that have characterized indigenous societies on the one hand, and modern Western societies on the other, are incommensurate. Yet I think that if we commit ourselves to examining our own assumptions, and reject the hegemonic will to know, and accept our responsibilities to the “other,” we will encounter possibilities of reciprocity at the level of different ontological understandings. This will require a different temporality, one that challenges today’s dominant preference for quick fixes and for cost-effectively

mass-producing graduates within predetermined time frames. As Spivak's example indicates, patience is the only viable option: a benevolent European campaigning against the irresponsible development of a mega-project seeks to interpret and translate the terminology of a subaltern but gets it wrong because of his impatience and inattention. Comments Spivak: "However sympathetic the intention, to rob the mother tongue of the subaltern by way of an ignorant authoritative definition that is already becoming part of the accepted benevolent lexicography is a most profound silencing."¹⁷

Many who have been socialized into and trained within the Eurocentred, modern consciousness may sometimes find it difficult to fully grasp the meaning of the arguments and perspectives represented by indigenous thought. For one thing, indigenous thought often involves radically different modes of expression. Some might have found it helpful if I had provided plenty of definitions. However, I will be remaining attentive to the dangers of definitions. Certain concepts and issues are inherently difficult to discuss, as will be clear on those occasions when I attempt to explicate – while seeking to avoid sweeping totalizations – how certain taken-for-granted and apparently transparent concepts such as "responsibility" may have radically different meanings in different epistemes and systems of thought.

We may agree that there are no fixed meanings – that any word or concept consists of a field of meanings rather than a single unassailable meaning. However, I do not think that in this particular case, the use of the same words with different meanings can be ascribed solely to poststructuralist "différance." It rather reflects some of the differences in the ways in which people in indigenous and dominant societies perceive themselves in relation to others and to the world in general. So it will be necessary for me to inquire into concepts that are central to the main argument of my work. My sometimes long explanations will demonstrate how some of the most commonly employed concepts and notions can have altogether different meanings and contents in different epistemes and modes of social reality. They will also reflect the complexity of the current undertaking.

Critiques of the Academy

We can hardly assume that the West invented higher learning. However, the contemporary university shares many characteristics and values with Ancient Greece and Rome. The word "university" is derived from the Latin *universitas*, "guild," signifying a union of scholars (as found in fifteenth-century Europe). A key feature of the contemporary university is the notion of liberal education, *eleutherios*, which was intended to provide individuals with a holistic education and to encourage personal growth. The university as we know it today is founded on a key ideal of the Western intellectual tradition known as rationalism. The premise here is that truth exists independently of human perceptions of it.

The academy is often defined as a community of intellectual inquiry that nourishes critical thinking (or “speculative contemplation,” as the Ancient Greeks put it) and that allows individuals to cultivate diverse ideas while specializing in a single discipline or field of knowledge. It is often suggested that the main function of the university is to preserve, advance, and disseminate knowledge – or that it is a place to produce and reproduce knowledge. Moreover, universities are perceived as playing a key role in the development of the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of contemporary societies.

Contemporary universities are commonly viewed as the inheritors of Immanuel Kant’s notion of the university. It was Kant who first distinguished between higher and lower faculties and who argued that universities must be established on the principle of reason. This is how philosophy – in particular, German philosophy of the late nineteenth century – came to be a central influence on the model of the modern university.

Simply put, the academy denotes certain more or less taken-for-granted academic settings, scholarly practices, concepts, paradigms, and epistemological and theoretical traditions. It also refers to certain long-standing approaches to producing and reproducing knowledge. The university is rooted in a particular historical and geographic context; it is from this context that it derives its legacy and intellectual traditions. Some contend that the university is “an intellectual world that has been assembled from within an exclusively European tradition, which therefore organizes the work of classrooms, the resources of library, and the language, objects, and conventions of discourse as a centre defining others who are not represented as subjects of authorized speakers ... Women or students from histories or cultures that were and are discursively excluded as subjects, and who may today be finding themselves as subjects and speakers in specialized programs (Women’s Studies, Native Studies, and so on), are still absent or marginalized in mainstream discourse.”¹⁸

This is not to suggest that the university has been a monolithic entity through its centuries of history – one can talk, for instance, of British, German, Scottish, and American academic traditions and models. Yet these various traditions are founded on certain fundamental values and principles of Western thought, and they can all be traced to the Greek humanist tradition.¹⁹ Edward Shils and John Roberts have pointed out that “the world’s idea of the university as it was shaped in the nineteenth century is ... a European one.”²⁰ By and large, universities outside Europe have been established along Western lines. Thus the university can be viewed as a form of cultural and epistemic imperialism.

Universities were both the products and the initiators of various intellectual and societal developments in Europe, such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, the Industrial Revolution, and (ultimately)

colonialism and imperialism. Universities have been established to support the historical processes of colonization; they have been founded on the denial of the collective existence of indigenous peoples. In this regard, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes that the University of Auckland benefited directly from the oppression of Ngati Awa people, whose land was confiscated in 1865 for the university.²¹ Writing in the Hawaiian context, Kanaka Maoli scholar and activist Haunani-Kay Trask discusses how the University of Hawaii is “a living symbol of colonialism”: “In many ways, the university is an educational equivalent to the American military command center in Hawai’i. Both serve as guardians of white dominance, both support the state economy, and both provide a training ground for future technocrats. Just as universities in other colonies function to legitimate and entrench the power of the colonizing culture, so the University of Hawai’i functions to maintain *haole* [white] American control.”²²

Having participated historically in the displacement of indigenous peoples, today’s universities reflect and reproduce epistemic and intellectual traditions and practices of the West through discursive forms of colonialism. During the colonial era, universities, accompanied by the ideology of the superiority of European knowledge, were transplanted to various colonies, where they were assigned an emphatically stated civilizing mission. The metaphors employed in this context revealed the colonial attitude with great clarity. In some cases, the metaphor was that of a “family”: the British university was the parent, and the colonial universities were the children. Other metaphors related to land cultivation, for example, “tilled and untilled soil.”²³ That is, a “civilized” person was the tilled soil. This particular metaphor evokes the colonialist ideology that no one could be said to own the land until it had been cultivated.

Another ideological tool of the university system has been the formation of academic disciplines and the drawing of disciplinary boundaries. As mechanisms of social and political control, disciplines consolidate certain ways of looking at the world while excluding others. For Michel Foucault, “[a] discipline is not the sum total of all the truths that may be uttered concerning something; it is not even the total of all that may be accepted, by virtue of some principle of coherence and systematisation, concerning some given fact or proposition.”²⁴ Rather, disciplines consist of “truths” but also of “errors,” and the latter have their own positive functions and valid histories, which cannot always be separated from the “truths.” For a proposition to belong to a discipline, it must fulfil certain conditions that are recognized to be “within the true,” that is, understood to be valid at a particular time or in a particular epoch. In other words, while one can always speak the truth in a void (i.e., remain unrecognized and unlegitimated by one’s peers and discipline), one is considered to be “within the true” only if

one obeys the rules of a certain discourse. Disciplines, therefore, “constitute a system of control in the production of discourse.”²⁵

The boundaries of a discipline are constantly being modified. Nevertheless, there are strict rules for determining the limits of the modification – rules that serve to deny access to other propositions and, it follows, to other individuals. Factions and disciplinary boundaries are neither natural nor inevitable; even so, they tend to circumscribe the limits of our thinking, and they often contribute to situations in which indigenous epistemes seem incommensurable with the dominant, academically recognized disciplines and discursive truths.

In the academy, indigenous people and indigenous scholarship are confined within limiting and often oppressive structures – that is, within dominant Western or Eurocentric canons, standards, and notions of knowledge and research that serve certain values and interests while excluding and marginalizing others. Many indigenous scholars have argued that the intellectual and epistemological basis of the academy is thoroughly saturated by colonial (and also patriarchal and racist) assumptions and practices that define and characterize the conditions of academic and intellectual endeavours. Indigenous Studies programs (like other interdisciplinary “area programs”) are often viewed as a threat to conventional disciplines and their demarcated territories.

Over the past decades, interdisciplinary studies have contributed to gradual changes in epistemological and discursive boundaries. Yet the negative effects of the academy’s ideological position can still be felt, especially by those who long have been and often still are marginalized within academic settings. Chippewa sociologist Duane Champagne and Jamestown Band S’Klallam scholar Jay Stauss have discussed the limitations for indigenous people of institutions built, by and large, around Western thought: “Mainstream academia reflects the goals, interests, values and institutions of Western civilization – that is, the community it studies. Applying the Western intellectual experience and categories of discourse and analysis to the study of Indigenous Nations puts the prospective scholar of Indian life at an initial disadvantage. Such modes of analysis may be helpful and illuminating within their own context, but they most often do not address or express the interests, values and goals of Native communities.”²⁶

Like the critiques of colonial education and residential schools, the general criticism of the academy by indigenous scholars analyzes, first and foremost, the structural and institutional legacies of colonialism. In the university, the struggle is especially over the control of academic knowledge and the content of curricula: what is being taught and expected, from which perspective, for what purposes, in whose interests. Another key issue in indigenous scholarship is research ethics – conducting research so that

it follows indigenous protocols and guidelines for ethical and culturally appropriate research.

Indigenous scholars have also criticized the Eurocentric bias that results in the questioning and undervaluing of the work of their research departments and colleagues. Research by indigenous scholars is deemed irrelevant or “revisionist” because often it either falls outside mainstream research or focuses on the personal experiences of those who belong to minority groups. Indigenous scholars who conduct research on their own communities are often accused of bias and subjectivity; consequently, their work is dismissed as self-serving. Lakota scholar Vine Deloria has observed that “the identification of scholars working in the field of Indian-white relations has this strange quality to it: proponents of the Indian version of things become ‘revisionists,’ while advocates of the traditional white interpretation of events retain a measure of prestige and reputation.”²⁷ Michael Dorris contends that while Native American scholarship may be revisionist, one cannot automatically dismiss it as invalid: “Europeans and Euro-Americans have not felt shy in writing about their respective ancestors and are not automatically accused of aggrandizing them; why should native scholars be less capable of relatively impartial retrospection?”²⁸

These concerns reflect the broader question of hierarchies of knowledge, for example, the way in which indigenous epistemologies are often perceived as inferior compared to Western scientific knowledge, which claims to be based on neutral and rational inquiry. As first pointed out by Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, colonialism signifies not only the occupation of territories but also a certain type of relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in which the latter is considered inherently inferior (“uncivilized,” “savage,” “primitive”). In the contemporary university, it is no longer non-Western people, but rather their systems of knowledge and their perceptions of the world, that are labelled inferior.

Like other faculty belonging to groups traditionally excluded from the academy, many indigenous scholars and academics allude to the alienation and sense of irrelevance they must confront, as well as their frustration with various manifestations of institutional racism, discrimination, marginalization, and assimilation, all of which are rooted in the legacies of colonial history. Métis political scientist Joyce Green refers to her condition in the academy as a “never fitting in” phenomenon, commonly experienced by “women of all sorts.”²⁹ Mohawk legal scholar Patricia Monture-Angus talks about feeling homeless and in cultural peril in the university.³⁰

Academic Freedom and Hospitality

Is it possible to argue for hospitality and responsibility toward the “other” in an institution premised on freedom “to teach and to learn unhindered

by external or nonacademic constraints"?³¹ The concept of academic freedom arises from the need to protect academics against unfair repercussions if and when their views are at odds with those of the university, the government, or society at large.³² The reality of academic freedom, however, is much more complex, problematic, and, above all, confoundingly relative. Academic freedom has never been absolute, nor has it ever been applied uniformly. One must not think that there exists some unproblematic, philosophically coherent conception of it.³³ For example, it is quite clear that "what professors teach is not completely unregulated."³⁴ Jennie Hornosty further argues that "free expression of ideas is available only to those whose ideas fall within the parameters of the approved discourse; unorthodox critiques are ignored or dismissed as nonscholarly. Accordingly, academic freedom fails to protect those whose ideas and scholarship are deemed subjective, irrational, incompetent, and without merit."³⁵ This appears to be true especially with regard to traditionally marginalized people in the academy. Trask is only one academic who was told what to teach and what not to teach; the latter included sections on racism and capitalism that she had initially included in her course. "The chair pressured me to remove those sections and supplant them with units on the family and Christianity."³⁶ When she refused, the disagreement affected her professional relationship with her colleagues. The relativity of academic freedom is also visible in the variety of purposes to which it can be employed. Based on her experiences at the University of Hawaii, Trask maintains that academic freedom is largely controlled and decided by white men: "If they do not like what you say, they will try to shut you up by punitive actions and public vilification."³⁷

Academic freedom is usually raised very selectively and only in certain contexts. It does not protect indigenous scholars when they are faced with criticisms related to teaching content and research methods.³⁸ Academic freedom and free speech have been used to justify racist remarks and colonial attitudes toward indigenous people.³⁹ More recently, it has also become a tool for some to plunder indigenous knowledge.⁴⁰ The increased need to protect indigenous knowledge and other forms of intellectual property from rampaging global capitalism has led to a challenging situation for indigenous scholarship. It is no surprise, then, that some indigenous scholars are now asking whether academic freedom has gone too far.⁴²

For many scholars, academic freedom is first and foremost about the freedom to be critical.⁴³ Critical interrogation is one of the backbones of intellectual inquiry. Thus, in order to retain its critical edge, the academy cannot

Academic Freedom for Whom?
 What Rights will I ever have
 in these Systems
 Systems meant to Confine
 Confuse
 Conform Me
 Me and My Kind.⁴¹

place “too strong an emphasis on harmony and consensus.”⁴⁴ At their worst, however, defences of the right to be critical can turn into a backlash against pressures to create more inclusive universities. There have been suggestions that “postmodern academia” has abandoned the Enlightenment principles of intellectual inquiry in the name of relativism and mysticism; from this, it is clear that academic freedom often feels threatened by the heterogeneous student body. Michiel Horne, one of Canada’s leading scholars on academic freedom, contends that demands for inclusive curricula “on demographic or political grounds” pose a threat to the very core of academic freedom.⁴⁵

Labels such as “political correctness” have served as convenient shorthand for dismissing equity initiatives and for reducing critiques of power relations to “anti-intellectual dogma unworthy of exploration or discussion.”⁴⁶ The idea of “free and fearless pursuit of knowledge” is also sometimes used as an excuse to repress and silence emerging paradigms and to perpetuate the status quo. This status quo, “a mask for the will to power,”⁴⁷ is commonly referred to as “standards”; but on closer examination it reflects the traditional Eurocentric, androcentric canon and curriculum. Graham Good suggests that “[a] new politics of feeling is emerging on campus, using nebulous metaphors like ‘chilly climate’ and ‘hostile environment’ for any incident that doesn’t ‘feel right’ or ‘feels uncomfortable.’”⁴⁸ It is interesting that he dismisses so lightly arguments of “chilly climate,” which are based on a large body of research.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Good himself seems guilty of practising the politics of feeling, when we consider that he devotes much of his article to his personal views on the assumed damage that gender studies are inflicting on universities and their principles. Moreover, his arguments are not supported by a single reference to an academic study. Derrida observes that “we can easily see on which side obscurantism and nihilism are lurking when on occasion great professors or representatives of prestigious institutions lose all sense of proportion and control; on such occasions they forget the principles that they claim to defend in their work and suddenly begin to heap insults, to say whatever comes into their heads on the subject of texts that they obviously have never opened or that they have encountered through a mediocre journalism that in other circumstances they would pretend to scorn.”⁵⁰

When we consider academic freedom from the two different perspectives – that of the “white malestream” on the one hand, and that of indigenous scholarship on the other – we find ourselves faced with a profound question: Which of the two threats should be taken more seriously? The threat to academic freedom as a result of the pressure to diversify curricula? Or the threat to the existence of indigenous peoples through the continuation of a hegemonic academy? The academy has been guilty of (among other things) ignorance, erasure, silencing, and appropriation and theft of knowledge and culture. As Mi’kmaq scholar Marie Battiste notes, curricula modelled after

Eurocentric thought have long had disastrous effects on indigenous peoples, whose fears of losing their languages, identities, and cultural integrities are very real. Many indigenous scholars deal with these concerns on a regular basis. The colonizing, Eurocentric mentality and its discourses “continue to erode the very identity and knowledge bases we seek to retain or restore.”⁵¹ How intellectually sound can the argument for academic freedom be, when that argument goes against creating curricula that would better reflect historical, political, social, cultural, and, yes, demographic realities as well as the very objective of academic freedom – free and fearless pursuit of knowledge? How ethically sound can an argument for academic freedom be if it is predicated on the erasure of indigenous epistemes?

So, is the idea of academic hospitality – and of a responsible and responsive relationship, and of the recognition of the gift – at odds with the idea of academic freedom? Academic freedom is a concept that rests on and draws from liberal humanist assumptions, some of which share certain similarities with calls for hospitality within the academy and for responsibility toward indigenous epistemes. No doubt it is risky to draw parallels between liberal education and indigenous epistemes, when we consider how many liberal tenets are in fact complicit in the processes of colonialism.⁵² Moreover, from the perspective of indigenous peoples, liberal humanism and its values – equity, individualism, rationalism, progress, and democracy, among others – are inherently problematic in that in many cases they run squarely counter to key principles of indigenous philosophies and worldviews. The ideology of equal opportunity also ignores differences in circumstances arising from race, culture, class, gender, and other factors. It assumes a level playing field without acknowledging various structural inequalities and systemic barriers in society. Equality of opportunity implies that success and failure are solely individual responsibilities. Hornosty also notes that while equality of opportunity “opened universities to members of nontraditional groups ... [it] did not change the organizational culture or affect the traditional power structure of the institution.”⁵³ Thus, with its blame-the-victim approach, the ideology of equal opportunity is an inadequate response to calls for hospitality within the academy.

It might be worthwhile, however provisionally, to recall and emphasize one of the liberal principles – namely, openness to *all* ideas and knowledge. Whatever the arguments of some of the strongest supporters of academic freedom, liberal education involves more than reading “great books” and including them in curricula. As Amy Gutmann notes, when unfamiliarity with a topic leads to blind rejection, the central tenet of liberal education – the spirit of free and open inquiry – must have been forgotten.⁵⁴ The ideal of liberal education is to cultivate the “whole” person, whose various sides – mental, emotional, and physical – must be balanced and integrated. The lofty goal of intellectual comprehensiveness and malleability – promoted

by liberal, humanist education but regularly ignored or forgotten by its defenders – corresponds to the goals of holistic education that are characteristic of most indigenous pedagogies.⁵⁵ Openness to various kinds of knowledge is key to the notions of hospitality and responsibility. John Dewey suggested that the notion of hospitality signifies “an attitude of mind which actively welcomes suggestions and relevant information from all sides.”⁵⁶ So is it possible to argue for hospitality and responsibility toward the “other” in an institution premised on academic freedom? The simple answer is “yes” – it is more than possible, it is necessary. Openness toward indigenous epistemes, and thus teaching and learning about them, is not at all a peripheral issue in the academy – it is part of the academy’s *raison d’être*.

The Structure of This Book

This book has three main sections. In the first section, I introduce the philosophy of the gift as a critique and vision for the future academy. I discuss the notion of the gift both as an aspect of indigenous ontologies and as a critique of current ideologies. I also examine how indigenous epistemes have been repeatedly silenced and erased. In the second section, I expose epistemic ignorance as a serious but little discussed concern in the academy. In the third and final section, I analyze hospitality of and in the academy. For some readers, perhaps, a more logical approach would have been to start with the second section, and I did in fact consider this. However, I decided that in order to articulate the gift logic so as to build on it, I would need to discuss the concept of the gift first. I hope that the fluid order of the sections is a reflection of the river as a guiding metaphor. If nothing else, the notion of the river has allowed me to remain flexible. I hope that in the end, all of this will make sense to the reader.

In Chapter 1, I consider the concept of the gift, emphasizing how it reflects a particular worldview rather than a form of economic exchange (as it has been defined by many past theories and analyses). So that readers will be able to understand my argument as it relates to the gift of indigenous epistemes, I will critically examine past assumptions about the gift and offer a new perspective on it. In doing so, I will be showing how it is possible to build new relationships not only between humans but also between humans and the natural world. Many scholars of the logic and functions of the gift have noted the intricate and ambiguous nature of the gift, yet they have not been able to rid themselves of certain biases that influence their interpretations. Many of these analyses are laced with condescension; although the authors recognize the complexity of the gift, they treat indigenous systems as “primitive thought.” In Chapter 1, I discuss some aspects of the traditional Sami worldview and practices with regard to the gift.

After redefining the concept of the gift – which forms the backbone of my argument – I delve into the question of indigenous epistemes in the academy.

Chapter 2 outlines the current academic circumstances that drove my analysis. By drawing from various examples of the experiences of indigenous people in the academy (including some of my own “field notes”⁵⁷), I hope to demonstrate the main issues – commonly referred to as “cultural conflicts” between the cultures of indigenous peoples on the one hand and the academy on the other – that underlie the inhospitable stance of the academy and its lack of responsibility toward the “other.” In the same chapter, I problematize the concept of culture and explain my use of the concept of episteme. I discuss how my analysis of epistemic ignorance and intellectual discrimination differs from common analyses of institutional racism and antiracist discourse. At the end of the chapter, I elaborate the notion of epistemic ignorance and analyze its principal mechanisms. I do so with the help of Val Plumwood’s findings on the logic of dualism and structures of control.

In Chapter 3, I suggest, following Spivak’s argument, that considering the present circumstances, many indigenous people often cannot “speak” in the academy. In other words, they are neither taken seriously, nor heard, nor understood. Instead they are reduced to the position of native informants whose task it is to buttress the dominant individuals in the academy. The indigenous Other is allowed to appear only when he or she is needed for the production of hegemonic knowledge. I examine the common rhetoric of respect and argue that it is an inadequate response to epistemic ignorance. Also in this chapter, I return to the notion of the gift and explain why it has been perceived historically as a threat. This discussion foregrounds my argument that in today’s circumstances, indigenous epistemes remain an impossible gift in and to the academy. At the end of the chapter, I consider the notion of “recognition” and explain what I mean by calling for the recognition of indigenous epistemes as a gift. I suggest a specific form of recognition that is central to the indigenous logic of the gift.

In Chapter 4, I analyze and problematize the idea of “knowing” other peoples and cultures. Obviously, one must have knowledge and understanding of indigenous peoples and their epistemic traditions if one is to rid oneself of ignorance. However, this project of knowing sets many traps for the unwary, including “unexamined nativism,” Eurocentric arrogance, and Romantic notions of the colonized “other.”⁵⁸ Here, Spivak’s articulation of the need to do one’s homework is very useful. I link it to the notion of the responsibility toward the “other” as the crucial premise of the reimaged future academy. In this chapter, I also further explicate the concept of responsibility – a concept often evoked in academic circumstances but rarely defined or specified. How does this notion relate to the ways in which responsibility is often understood in indigenous contexts? I also examine whether the idea of responsibility toward the “other” is at odds with the idea of academic freedom. I discuss responsibility as a call for a specific form of action and knowing.

In Chapter 5, I consider the possibility of a new relationship of hospitality between the academy and indigenous epistemes, based on indigenous thought and Derrida's theoretical work on hospitality. First I delineate some initial encounters of hospitality between indigenous people and early colonizers as well as traditional perceptions of hospitality. Then I consider what an unconditional welcome to indigenous epistemes would look like. I link the idea of unconditional hospitality to some recent attempts to indigenize the academy. Finally, I examine the possibilities and challenges of reciprocity between epistemes in the academy, arguing that reciprocation is a process of decolonization that is negotiated and worked out between the parties involved. I conclude with the argument that the logic of the gift constitutes a necessary paradigm shift that promises to steer the university toward its future fully open to the "other."

1

The Gift

There is no shortage of studies and theories of the gift. While practices of giving in “primitive” or “archaic” societies¹ have been a popular topic in anthropological research since its early days, the gift has more recently also attracted interest in ever-widening circles, including those of philosophy, economics, theology, and sociology. It is a well-established argument that the gift functions mainly as a system of social relations, for forming alliances, communities, and solidarity. It is often ignored that in indigenous worldviews, the gift extends beyond interpersonal relationships to “all my relations.”² It is a key aspect of the environment-based worldviews of many indigenous peoples, for whom giving entails an active relationship between the human and natural worlds, one characterized by reciprocity, a sense of collective responsibility, and reverence toward the gifts of the land.

My particular focus in this book is on introducing a logic capable of teaching the academy that relations and interdependence are indispensable. The philosophy of the gift foregrounds the notion of responsibility as well as a recognition that gifts cannot be taken for granted or regarded as commodities. In indigenous gift philosophies, these responsibilities are observed through diverse ceremonies (such as the potlatch and various “give back” practices) and verbal and physical gestures of gratitude (such as the thanksgiving address). The academy has yet to realize that recognition of the gift is informed by responsibilities such as participation and reciprocation.

However, all considerations of the gift, including my own, must be careful not to assume the existence of the “pure” gift or a clear demarcation between the gift and other paradigms. My intention here is not to present a “truly indigenous essence”³ of the gift; rather, it is to discuss a worldview with which some people still genuinely associate themselves as it differs from the worldview that dominates the world today. This is not to suggest that values and practices similar to the logic of the gift in indigenous thought do not exist in the “modern” world. I *am* saying that in mainstream society today, established hierarchies and gross inequalities are deeply embedded

in most people's everyday realities, and that as a result certain values are foregrounded and emphasized while the principles of the gift are overlooked.

There is a need for a new interpretation of the gift that can force us to question our predominant values and that offers an alternative to the current paradigm of greed, self-interest, and hyper-individualism. In our examination of the gift and its logic, we must remember that the gift is not inherently new; rather, it involves a transformation of perspective, as well as a paradigm shift in the values we apply when critiquing our relationships in and with the world.

A call for academic recognition of indigenous epistemes is not the same as a demand for an impossible nativist project for returning to precolonial indigenous practices. Rather, it is part of a growing trend among indigenous scholars toward reorienting our current practices and activities by seeking appropriate solutions within ourselves and grounding them in premises and values deriving from our own epistemic conventions rather than those of the West. Clearly, then, elaborating a logic of the gift in and for contemporary contexts is different from evoking "traditions" (which remain largely undefined) and formulating action plans grounded in cultural authenticity, nationalism, or separatism.

Mohawk political scientist Taiaiake (Gerald) Alfred is one of the strongest advocates for a return to traditional values and a revival of traditional teachings in the name of preserving indigenous nationhood. Promoting what he refers to as self-conscious traditionalism, he suggests that "the answer to our problems [of cultural and linguistic erosion, poverty, economic dependency, political confusion and co-optation] is leadership based on traditional values."⁴ Indigenous people have become distracted from their common goal of self-determination – a goal that, if it is to be achieved, will require pride in indigenous traditions, economic self-sufficiency, independence of mind, and a defence of indigenous lands. Developing pride in traditions was also one of the recommendations of the Hawthorn Report (1967) on Indian issues, which suggested that instilling pride and dignity among First Nations again would cure the problems of colonialism and the systemic racism of colonial institutions and policies.⁵ However, Spivak argues that attempts to evoke cultural pride amount to a form of "civilizationism [that] is good for gesture politics and breeding leaders" but not for much else.⁶

I agree with Alfred that indigenous philosophies are highly relevant to the present-day circumstances of indigenous peoples and that we need to identify the common aspects of indigenous thought and practice and shape them into a meaningful philosophy. That said, an uncritical invocation and reinscription of tradition is problematic, not least because of the real dangers of further marginalizing already disenfranchised groups within the society, such as indigenous women.⁷ Furthermore, endorsing concepts such as "the power of reason" – concepts that have long been highly destructive

not only to indigenous people but also to women and the environment – can be counterproductive in the sense that they can generate new hegemonic formations. Before we raise concepts that derive from our own cultural framework but that have strong colonial, European (more specifically, Enlightenment), and patriarchal connotations in common parlance, we will need to carefully deconstruct and decolonize those concepts so that we will be able to employ them in ways that remind us to heed their oppressive origins in other cultural contexts. Moreover, Alfred’s idea of “the Rotinohshonni cultural imperative” of spreading the message of peace, power, and righteousness is somewhat ominous because of its echoes of past missionary aspirations in indigenous communities. It resembles what Cathryn McConaghy has called “Aboriginalism,” a process of constructing normative or prescriptive statements about being “real” Aboriginal.⁸

Furthermore, Alfred argues that many indigenous people are currently “living inauthentic lives” and that only by rejecting the values of mainstream society and by honouring traditional teachings will it be possible for them to recover from the current crisis “with [their] nations intact.”⁹ It is clear, however, that neither the contemporary lives of indigenous people nor their ontologies and systems of thought can be reduced to simplistic dichotomies of good/bad, authentic/inauthentic, real/false, colonizer/colonized. These and other binary categories can only reverse and thus reproduce colonial hierarchies and subjugation. *Because* colonialism continues to be the reality today, we cannot argue that indigenous nations can emerge from the current crisis intact.¹⁰ As a result of colonialism, contamination *is our reality today*. Whether we like it or not, it must be our starting point. Just as in the past, calls for remaining Native and for expressing our indigenous selves may end up creating more confusion, not less. What we need instead is a more nuanced language as well as a careful understanding of our various circumstances and situations. Having established these, we will be able to examine more closely certain common indigenous philosophical premises and principles. A prescription can only work in one specific context, leaving all the others unaddressed. Or as Spivak bluntly puts it, “repeating slogans, even good slogans, is not the way to go, alas. It breeds fascists just as easily.”¹¹

I also contend that the significance of indigenous philosophies extends beyond indigenous communities; these can be employed in various non-indigenous contexts as well. Indeed, I believe that indigenous philosophies offer a timely alternative paradigm for the entire world, which is increasingly characterized by tremendous human suffering and environmental destruction. Alfred focuses on Native nationalism and advocates traditional governance structures and values; in contrast, I maintain that in addressing the well-being of indigenous people, we cannot limit ourselves to “indigenous communities,” which in the North American context are often synonymous

with reservations. More and more indigenous people are living and working outside their communities (the off-reserve Native population in North America is well over 50 percent). This is but one of the many realities we must accept when we debate the future of indigenous peoples. Furthermore, indigenous people must be allowed to have communities outside their traditional ones (especially when somebody's "traditional community" has never been where it is traditionally expected to be – on a reservation, or in a village or rural township). For example, the indigenous community in the academy is growing, however slowly.

Besides generating respectful and responsible scholarship, the recognition of the gift of indigenous epistemologies may also provide the academy with a deeper and better informed understanding of the contemporary relationship between human beings and the natural environment. When we consider the destructive agendas of neoliberalism and global capitalism (often labelled as "free trade"), and when we consider how life forms are rapidly and increasingly being commodified, we see all the more reason for the academy and for society at large to begin learning and embracing indigenous philosophies.

Classic Gift Theories

In anthropology, the gift is usually treated as a mode of exchange between groups (or individuals representing groups). The gift comes with certain obligations, counter-gifts, return payments, and debts. Classic gift theories regard reciprocity (or exchange) as the primary structuring principle of society. This is the central thesis of Marcel Mauss's influential study of the gift, *Essai sur le don, forme archaïque de l'échange*, first published in 1924. Mauss argued that a gift comprises three obligations – giving, receiving, and paying back – and that it involves distinctive social rules. The gift is both required and "interested" even if it may first appear voluntary and disinterested. Moreover, gifts in archaic societies represent "total social phenomena" that encompass a society's legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, and political spheres. There are two forms of "total prestation": agonistic and non-agonistic. Mauss, however, focuses on the agonistic gift exchange, which in his view represents an alternative to hostilities, including war. This is apparent especially in the obligation to receive and accept the gift – to refuse it is to create a conflict.¹²

Building on Mauss's agonistic notion of the gift exchange as a substitute for hostility, Pierre Bourdieu has analyzed the gift as symbolic violence, which according to him is "the most economical mode of domination."¹³ For Bourdieu, the gift exchange ultimately leads to the accumulation of social capital of obligations and debts, which are then paid back in the forms of homage, respect, and loyalty (among other things).¹⁴ In this system, the gift implies power acquired by giving: "There are only two ways of

getting and keeping *a lasting hold over someone*: debts and gifts ... or the moral obligations and emotional attachments created and maintained by the generous gift, in short, *overt or symbolic violence*, censored, euphemized, that is, misrecognizable, recognized violence."¹⁵ For Bourdieu, gift giving is an observation of "moral obligations" and involves an active denial and misrecognition of the embedded symbolic violence. Material capital produces symbolic capital, which in turn is actively misrecognized as something else, such as obligations, relationships, and gratitude. He suggests that "the pre-capitalist economy is the site *par excellence* of symbolic violence." In this system, the only way to establish and reinforce relations of domination is through strategies the true nature of which cannot be revealed – because doing so would destroy them – and that instead must be masked, transformed, and euphemized.

It is interesting that Bourdieu should want to interpret a social order constituted mainly of non-adversarial relationships observed through mutual responsibilities as a site of violence. It serves no purpose to romanticize indigenous (or precapitalist) communities as non-violent; that said, we are doing no justice to the logic of the gift or to the indigenous social order, which depends heavily on negotiation, cooperation, and non-aggression, when we reduce one of its central structuring principles – the gift – to a form of violence, however subtle and symbolic.¹⁶ Generally, violence has not characterized indigenous societies in the same way as it has modern capitalist/patriarchal societies, which are rooted in violence.¹⁷ It seems that Bourdieu's interpretation is informed by his own cultural notions of adversarial, competitive, and dominating relationships more than by anything else, and that this prevents him from seeing other functions and logic. Kaarina Kailo notes that "a scholar who has himself naturalized human self-interest rather than the nurturing impulse thus ends up projecting such a negative assumption on the cultures he is studying."¹⁸ She also questions the often unquestioned view that Western assumptions of human nature are somehow more correct and legitimate than are those of indigenous peoples. Remember here that judgments of humanity or human nature are always mere interpretations in that they cannot be "scientifically" measured or evaluated.

Bourdieu's analysis of the logic of the gift ignores the giving and sharing that exist outside the system of indebtedness. This, even though he has at hand plenty of examples that indicate otherwise. "Threshold gifts" or "gifts of passage,"¹⁹ such as Sami "grave gifts," are a good example of this. In the Sami tradition, the dead are given gifts, including food, tobacco, and items related to their livelihood. Also, tobacco is "placed on the earth for the departed" every time a person passes by a grave.²⁰ The purpose of this kind of giving is profoundly social and spiritual: it is to ensure an ongoing good relationship between the deceased and the surviving relatives. Scholars have

documented indigenous peoples' customs fairly accurately, yet they have failed to analyze and understand them except within their own epistemic and cultural frameworks.

One of Mauss's themes in his essay is gifts to the earth's spirits. Yet he does not advance a theory to account for these gifts, partly because he lacks facts in this area but also because of such gifts' "strongly marked mythological element which we do not yet fully understand." Similarly, most studies that have alluded to the giving of gifts "to nature" have paid only cursory attention to this practice. Moreover, these studies often view such gift giving as bizarre, not to mention primitive. Many scholars fail to extend non-Western systems of thought the same rigorous attention as Western systems receive; in part, this is because of the commonly held view that "non-Western peoples represent an earlier stage of their own cultural evolution – often that tribal cultures represent failed efforts to understand the natural world ... Non-Western knowledge is believed to originate from primitive efforts to explain the mysterious universe. In this view, the alleged failure of primitive/tribal man [sic] to control nature mechanically is evidence of his ignorance and his inability to conceive of abstract general principles and concepts."²¹

Informed by the paradigms of modernity, many theories of the gift have failed to grasp the deeper meanings of giving gifts to the earth. Instead of viewing the giving of gifts to gods and nature as a reflection of indigenous worldviews founded on an active recognition of kinship relations that extend beyond the human realm, Mauss explains it as a "theory of sacrifice"; by his interpretation, people must enter into exchange contracts with the spirits of the dead as well as with the gods, who are the real owners of the world's wealth. For Mauss, "the idea of purchase from gods and spirits is universally understood."²² According to Mauss, the Toraya (or as Mauss spells it, Toradja) of the Celebes, Indonesia, are a classic example of people who believe that "one has to buy from the gods and that the gods know how to repay the price."²³

The Toraya, however, see this relationship quite differently. According to them, Deata ("Creator") provides them with everything, and their gifts to Deata constitute thanks for the abundance they enjoy. Thus, for example, after the harvest, the Toraya hold a ceremony to express gratitude for the season. These practices are not considered purchases from the gods; rather, they are expressions of thanks and of respect for the natural world.²⁴ Considering this, one can only wonder why Mauss, who himself was critical of economic interpretations of the gift, resorted to interpretations of this practice that were rooted in Western economic terminology ("exchange contract," "purchase," and the like).²⁵

The economic bias seems to inform most interpretations of the gift. Jacques Godbout is critical of analyses that view the gift in terms of exchange. He

contends that the gift constitutes a coherent, *sui generis* system and cannot be reduced to mere economics: "The gift forms a system with its own coherence, one that cannot be reduced to the market or anything else. Attempting to analyze the gift in terms of something else violates its nature as a system of its own."²⁶ He further argues that classic theories "all downplay the uniqueness of the archaic gift, on the pretext that in order to understand it we must see it as an expression of constraints or motivations that are universal in themselves: economic interest, the prohibition of incest, the obligation to exchange, substitution of peace for war through social contract, the necessary subordination of the imaginary to the symbolic, or the sacrifice of a scapegoat in order to reestablish order among all members of society."²⁷

Yet Godbout, like so many others, analyzes the underlying philosophy of the "archaic" gift only cursorily and in a somewhat condescending tone, referring to gift practices as "strange," "curious," and "primitive."²⁸ Like Mauss, he recognizes that "the gift represents the overall complex of relationships that brings together ... all the personalized powers that inhabit the primitive cosmos: human, animal, vegetable, mineral, or divine,"²⁹ but he reduces the gift to "the strange law of alternation," which suggests that in archaic societies, giving is only possible by taking turns. In his view, this is perhaps "a primitive democratic requirement" motivated by fears of revenge and destruction.³⁰

This representation is inaccurate because it ignores the fact that giving to nature is grounded neither in "the strange law of alternation" nor in fear of revenge. Perhaps this is sometimes the case, but it can hardly be said to be the rule, at least in indigenous societies, past or present. In worldviews characterized by the giving of gifts to the land, the emphasis is not on fear of retaliation but rather on expressing gratitude for the gifts and kinship provided by the natural realm. The main purpose of gifts to the land is to sustain the relationships on which the socio-cosmic order is based. As Kailo argues, Godbout's interpretation "consists of elements (values, structures, gender roles) which it has naturalized without heeding the animistic [sic] world's own attitudes towards life."³¹ In other words, giving to the land is not necessarily constructed along dichotomous, conflictual lines, which is what many theorists take for granted.

What is more, Godbout's analysis and approach "reproduce the values and biases of the exchange economy" in contexts where gift giving may not be marked by exchange (i.e., "giving in order to receive"). The ethnographic accounts of give-back ceremonies (such as bear rituals) do not explicitly discuss the underlying paradigms on which their interpretations are based; even so, one can observe the implicit ideology of nineteenth-century nationalism and its unexamined assumptions of "primitive" cultures and male interpretations that emphasize the primacy of self-interest, guilt, and

aggression. These interpretations are rooted in certain colonial, Eurocentric, and patriarchal worldviews, ideologies, and values.³²

Gift Paradigm as Alternative to Exchange

From the perspective of feminist gift-economy theory and practice, the gift represents a radical challenge to the dominant neoliberal market ideology. Whereas mainstream studies see the gift as a form of exchange, Genevieve Vaughan argues that the gift and exchange are two distinct, logically contradictory paradigms with different values and objectives. These primarily economic paradigms are also complementary, even though the exchange paradigm, as it manifests itself in patriarchal capitalism, has rendered the gift largely invisible and undervalued in Western societies.

For Vaughan, exchange – often defined as giving in order to receive – is ego oriented as well as prompted by self-interest. The exchange paradigm requires that what is given and what is received be of equal value; furthermore, it is based on the values of self-interest, competition, domination, and individualism. Gift giving, in contrast, is based on the values of care, cooperation, and bonding. It is other-oriented, and it gives directly to the needs of others. The gift paradigm is present everywhere in our lives, yet it is not only erased but also viewed as inferior and unrealistic compared to exchange.³³

The current capitalist, patriarchal economic system is based on exchange. Although naturalized as the self-evident norm, exchange is built on the exploitation of cultural traditions and knowledge, of “free” or unilateral gifts of the land, and of cheap (even free) labour, especially in the Third World. Moreover, the exchange economy encourages artificial scarcity in that it wastes the wealth of the world in military spending (in 2004, global military expenditures exceeded \$1 trillion) and funnels the gifts of many into the hands of the few. Markets are founded on the principle of scarcity (most obviously, to maintain high prices); in contrast, a gift economy is founded on abundance. Artificial scarcities thus make it difficult if not impossible to practise a gift economy. On top of this, capitalist ideology has declared giving and sharing to be irresponsible (except when practised within highly limited parameters, such as charity, which does not challenge the exchange logic).³⁴

In contemporary society, the gift is being increasingly commodified and appropriated by consumer capitalism, within which it often takes a different meaning than in gift practices at the level of local communities, where networks of social support are still in place to a lesser or greater extent. The notion of the gift as a commodity is especially valuable (and profitable) for the advertising and marketing sectors. In today’s materialist and market-oriented society, the value of the gift is no longer measured in terms of its capacity to establish and maintain social relationships or (in the case of gift giving to the land) the overall balance of the socio-cosmic order, but rather

in terms of its monetary value.³⁵ This inflated and transformed definition of the gift has become the dominant one in the minds of many people in modern society. Genevieve Vaughan points out:

In our society the gift paradigm seems to have many defects, even to be dysfunctional. I submit that its defects are all due to its forced coexistence with the exchange paradigm. For example, one consequence of the coexistence of gift giving and exchange is that the gift givers do not see that what they are doing is valuable. The exchange paradigm seems to be the “human” way to behave. Getting to the top of the heap appears to be the way to survive and thrive in “reality.” Actually we are creating the heap ourselves. Our validation of patriarchal competitive values only operates because we are inside the paradigm and therefore cannot see the exchange economy for what it is – an artificial parasite which derives its sustenance from the gift economy.³⁶

As a response to the “New World Order” and the resulting ecological and human crises, Vaughan has called for the validation and restoration of gift giving as a basic human principle. Besides being part of the current economic model, hierarchy, domination, and violence are also elements of the dominant masculine identity. Vaughan points out that we are all born into the gift economy of mothering – nurturing mothers practise unilateral giving to their children. However, and as Nancy Chodorow and others have demonstrated, boys must then construct their male identities in opposition to their mothers.³⁷ Put another way, they are expected to disassociate themselves from the values and practices of nurturing, care, and gift giving. Like women’s mothering and domestic labour, giving and its values have been rendered inferior in Western societies.³⁸

Living in a market-based society makes us think of all bonds in terms of exchange, of debt and repayment; yet the fact is that the gift paradigm is present in all our lives. Once we foreground needs and their satisfaction, we can begin to see the bonds established through gift giving (which are often broken by the adversarial logic and process of exchange). Vaughan suggests that if everyone were giving to everyone else, there would be no need to exchange. What we must do is restore the principle of mothering as the basis of humanity and re-establish gift giving as the key social value. In other words, we must generalize the values of nurturing and care so that they apply to both men and women (rather than use the gift paradigm to justify the exploitation of women and their domestic labour). Also, we can reorganize the institutions and structures of society (which are often built around the exchange paradigm and its values) to reflect the principles of gift giving – for example, by eliminating the rewards that accompany dominance and hierarchy.

Vaughan's ground-breaking work on the gift as an alternative paradigm for exchange-based market economies has been further elaborated by other feminist scholars and activists.³⁹ For Kailo, Vaughan's theory and practice promises "renewal and 're-sourcement' to counter the scarcity of solidarity, the freezing over of social responsibility."⁴⁰ Kailo envisions a "Gift Imaginary" that reunites the politics with the spirituality of everyday life and that dismantles the reductive dualisms that prevail in the master imaginary: "Whereas many materialist feminists ignore or willfully neglect the issues of ecology and sustainability, many ecofeminists do also ignore the concrete material differences of women around the world. Resurrecting the goddess religions and going back to nature may work for the chosen few; the majority of the poor in the world, however, are women in need of direct political and economic action, food, clean water, unpolluted surroundings and medicine. Yet, we also need the long-term transformation of values, away from profit-based greed towards the circulation of gifts and the reinforcement of all peoples' economic, basic self-sufficiency."⁴¹

The Gift Imaginary draws from various sources, including aspects of indigenous worldviews and gift practices. Kailo notes that if women are the most appropriate leaders of the new gift-based paradigm, indigenous women and women of colour may be even better equipped for this role. Many of them have a more nuanced understanding of oppression and exploitation; even more importantly, they have retained more of their gift-based, sustainable worldviews than have most white people.

The Logic of the Gift in Indigenous Philosophies

Instead of viewing the gift as a form of exchange or as having only an economic function, I argue that the gift is a reflection of a particular worldview, one characterized by the perception that the natural environment is a living entity which gives its gifts and abundance to people provided that they observe certain responsibilities and provided that those people treat it with respect and gratitude. Central to this perception is that the world as a whole comprises an infinite web of relationships, which extend and are incorporated into the entire social condition of the individual. Social ties apply to everyone and everything, including the land, which is considered a living, conscious entity. People are related to their physical and natural surroundings through their genealogies, their oral traditions, and their personal and collective experiences with certain locations. Interrelatedness is also reflected in many indigenous peoples' systems of knowledge. These systems are commonly explained in terms of relations and are arranged in a circular format that consists mainly (if not solely) of sets of relationships whose purpose is to explain phenomena. In many of these systems of knowledge, concepts do not stand alone; rather, they are constituted of "the elements of other ideas to which they were related."⁴²

It should be noted that when we talk about indigenous peoples' relationship with their lands, it is not a question of whether an individual may or may not have a relationship with her or his environment. Obviously, it is important to distinguish between a philosophy or worldview and individual thinking and behaviour; the latter may not always reflect or comply with the former.⁴³ Here, the question is about a worldview or an ethic, in other words, about a specific way of knowing and being in the world that is transmitted through values and cultural practices. Thomas King notes that "while the relationship that Native people have with the land certainly has a spiritual aspect to it, it is also a practical matter that balances respect with survival. It is an ethic that can be seen in the decisions and actions of a community and that is contained in the songs that Native people sing and the stories that they tell about the nature of the world and their place in it, about the webs of responsibilities that bind all things. Or, as the Mohawk writer Beth Brant put it, 'We do not worship nature. We are part of it.'"⁴⁴

In indigenous worldviews that foreground multilayered and multidimensional relationships with the land, the gift is the means through which the socio-cosmic order is renewed and secured. The gift is the manifestation of reciprocity with the natural environment; it reflects the bond of dependency and respect toward the natural world. From this bond, certain responsibilities emerge. In this system, one does not give primarily in order to receive but rather in order to ensure the balance of the world on which the well-being of the entire social order is contingent. Thanks are given in the form of gifts to the land's guardians, who sustain human beings; but the gifts are also given for continued goodwill. According to this worldview, human beings are only one aspect of the creation; that is why their view of the world is marked by a clear sense of responsibility toward other aspects with which the socio-cosmic order is shared and inhabited. As Deloria notes, this "view of life was grounded in the knowledge of these responsibilities ... The human ceremonial life confirmed the existence of this equality and gave it sustenance."⁴⁵ Next, I apply an example from the Sami to clarify the gift logic and the gift-based worldview.

The Sami Perception of the World

Like many other indigenous worldviews, that of the Sami posits that the land is a physical and spiritual entity of which humans are one part. The Sami maintain their traditional relationship with the land through collective and private rituals, of which the gift and giving back are an integral part. This intimacy and interrelatedness is reflected in how they communicate with various aspects of the land – aspects that are often addressed directly, as if they were relatives. This close connection to the natural realm is evident also in the permeable and indeterminate boundaries between the human and natural worlds. A skilled individual can assume the form of

an animal when necessary. There are also stories about women marrying animals.⁴⁶

The porosity of the boundary between the human and the non-human is sometimes viewed as an attribute of shamanistic worldviews. In traditional Sami society, shamans in particular – *noaidis*,⁴⁷ who were the spiritual leaders but also healers and visionaries of the community – were in contact with the spirit world, where they travelled in animal form. In a worldview in which survival depends on an intimate connection with the world, this kind of transformation is viewed not as supernatural but rather as a normal part of life. For the Sami, an important part of knowledge is an awareness of one's responsibilities and of norms of behaviour. As "every geographical place was considered an entity in which the physical dimension was in balance with the spiritual one ... both aspects needed to be taken into consideration when making a living."⁴⁸ Gifts played an important role in maintaining this balance.

We still did not erect our *lávvu*⁴⁹
 without the spirits' permission
 moved *lávvu* if it chanced to be
 placed on a trail
 And when we left our winter camp
 we apologized if we had acted
 wrong
 and thanked the camp because it
 had fed us and our reindeer
 And when came to the summer camp
 some of us dressed in red *gáktis*⁵⁰
 adorned ourselves
 offered a libation as well to your
 light beautiful camp
 and asked it to open its embrace
 for protection once again⁵¹

A fascinating yet almost completely ignored aspect of Sami cosmology and "religion" is the key role played by the female deities in giving the gift of life (to both human beings and domestic animals, mainly reindeer) and their connection to the land. The Sami deity *Máttaráhkká* ("Ancestral Mother") with her three daughters may well signify the very foundation of the Sami cosmic order, although the ethnographic literature has usually reduced their status to that of wives of the male deities (reflecting the patriarchal bias of these interpretations). These female deities of new life convey the soul of a child, create its body, and also assist with menstruation, childbirth, and the protection of children.⁵² *Máttaráhkká* and her daughters thus personify the generative forces of the world: procreation, giving birth, and sustaining life.

Traditionally in Sami society, one of the most important means of maintaining relations and the socio-cosmic order was giving gifts to various *sieidis*. *Sieidi* is the sacred place of the gift; it is where the gift is given to thank certain spirits for past abundance and also to ensure fishing, hunting, and reindeer luck in the future. Several centuries of Christianity deeply eroded the Sami practice of sharing with and giving gifts to the land; the missionaries viewed it as a form of pagan worship. Yet there is plenty of evidence that the Sami continue to practise *sieidi* gifting.

Most *sieidis* are found near campgrounds, sacred sites, or fishing and hunting areas. Most often, *sieidis* are natural rock formations with unusual shapes, and serve as natural landmarks, especially in the mountains. Wooden *sieidis* are either trees with the lowest branches removed, or carved stumps or fallen trunks. The Sami practice of giving back to *sieidis* involves spirits and guardians of the elements (e.g., wind, thunder) as well as various aspects of everyday activities (e.g., animal birth, hunting, fishing). For the Sami, *sieidis* are alive, although many ethnographers have interpreted them as merely representing inert stones and structures. In the early twentieth century, Sami reindeer herder Johan Turi described the *sieidi* as follows: "Some *sieidis* were satisfied if they received antlers, and others were content with all the bones, which meant every single bone, even the most wee ones. Fish *sieidi* did not demand less than a half of the catch but then it directed to the nets as much fish as people could collect. Some *sieidis* wanted a whole reindeer which needed to be embellished with all kinds of decorations, cloth, threads, silver and gold."⁵³

Sieidis require regular attention, and when neglected, the consequences can be drastic: a loss of subsistence luck, illness, even death. It is interesting that in Turi's description, the gift reindeer had to be decorated. As Kira Van Deusen suggests, for some indigenous peoples such as those in the Amur region of Siberia, decoration (more broadly, aesthetics) has a unique spiritual function – to protect humans from malevolent spirits.⁵⁴ Thus, the decorations on the gift reindeer could be considered gifts in their own right, not simply a means to increase the gift value of the reindeer.

Especially in ethnographic literature, *sieidi* gifts are almost invariably referred to as "sacrifices" and are usually defined as gift exchanges with gods and nature. As a forfeiture of something for the sake of receiving something else, a sacrifice is not voluntary; rather, it is made under certain pressures or conditions. Jacques Derrida notes: "Sacrifice will always be distinguished from the pure gift (if there is any). The sacrifice proposes an offering but only in the form of a destruction against which it exchanges, hopes for, or counts on a benefit, namely, a surplus-value or at least an amortization, a protection, and a security."⁵⁵ I argue that contrary to conventional interpretations, giving to *sieidi* cannot be completely understood through the concept of sacrifice. *Sieidi* gifts in some ways resemble sacrifices, but they are not and should not be regarded solely as such. They may have other dimensions that are just as significant as the sacrificial one, if not more so. At *sieidi* sites, bones are given back to the spirits and guardians of hunting, the catch is shared with those of fishing, and reindeer are given to those of reindeer luck. This sort of giving at *sieidi* sites is an expression of gratitude for the spirits' goodwill and a means of ensuring future abundance. In this sense, giving to *sieidis* is involuntary, since it is done in order to protect the individual and the community and to secure the future of both.

Yet *sieidis* are an inseparable part of the social order, which makes looking after them an individual and collective responsibility. It may seem at first glance that such a gift is an exchange and a mandatory forfeit (especially when viewed in outsiders' terms); I would suggest, however, that in fact it is a voluntary expression of a particular worldview that reflects a respectful and also intimate relationship with the land. Like many other gift practices, the *sieidi* practices of the Sami contribute in concrete ways to the well-being of individuals and communities.⁵⁶

When we analyze *sieidis* through the paradigm of the exchange economy, it can of course be suggested that giving is always a form of exchange, in that gifts are exchanged for collective well-being. But here we must do more than consider the act of giving; we must examine more closely the ethos, prevailing values, and ontological context of the gift practice, which can point to something very different from the spirit of gift for gift.

Reciprocity and Responsibility: Ability to Respond

Most gift theories consider reciprocity the condition of the gift as well as central to processes of creating communities. Reciprocity is often defined as giving back in kind or quantity. However, reciprocity is viewed differently in economic discourses than it is in anthropological ones. For economists, reciprocity represents a two-way market exchange. This economic discourse was first articulated by Adam Smith, who in *The Wealth of Nations* argued that there are three main reasons for exchange.⁵⁷ First, exchange increases productivity, which in turn increases the wealth of nations. Second, humans are inclined to barter and exchange. Third, humans are motivated by self-interest, which according to Smith is a good thing for everyone.

Anthropological discourses on reciprocity focus on non-market practices of exchange. Marcel Mauss, for example, distinguished gift exchange from market exchange, arguing that the gift creates community and social ties whereas markets interrupt them. Mauss cited Bronislaw Malinowski's work in developing his theory of reciprocity. According to Malinowski, reciprocity is limited to "primitive" societies.⁵⁸ For Claude Lévi-Strauss, reciprocity is a reflection of basic forms of the human mind. It is the basis of the social contract, and without it there can be no society.⁵⁹ Marshall Sahlins also developed a theory of reciprocity, largely built on the work of Karl Polanyi.⁶⁰ According to Sahlins, there are three forms of reciprocity: generalized, balanced, and negative. Generalized reciprocity is found in "putatively altruistic" acts such as kinship obligations and mothering; balanced reciprocity is an equal exchange, a like-for-like interaction; negative reciprocity seeks to receive something for nothing.⁶¹

From the perspective of the gift paradigm, the difference between economic and anthropological discourses of reciprocity is fairly small, in that both are predicated on the notion of exchange and, it follows, the exchange

paradigm. Genevieve Vaughan contends that reciprocity is problematic because it is “a way of maintaining the self-interest of both of the parties involved in the interaction.”⁶² The underlying logic of the exchange paradigm is that gifts cannot be given unless the receiving of counter-gifts is assured. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, contends that the gift can remain unreciprocated only when one gives to an “ungrateful person.”⁶³ This kind of “binary give and take” emphasizes the movement inward and toward self, and seeks to maintain the independence of the self. It requires that gifts be “paid off” by giving exact value back. This allows the giver to remain self-contained and to avoid being obligated to anyone.

Lewis Hyde suggests that there are two forms of giving: reciprocal and circular. Reciprocal giving is the simplest form of gift exchange; in circular giving one must give blindly, that is, “to someone from whom I do not receive (and yet I do receive elsewhere).”⁶⁴ For Hyde, the condition attached to the gift does not involve constrained reciprocity, but rather circulation and an effort to keep the gift moving. The circulation of gifts is recognized also by Mauss, who points to the secondary importance of utility when goods are circulated in traditional societies.⁶⁵

In reciprocity of the sort that Sahlins would call balanced but that is better described as “constrained,” the gift is best viewed as a “loan” or “credit.” Unlike limited, binary reciprocity, circular or loose reciprocity seeks to assert the bonds of relationships in the world simply because according to the worldviews from which these bonds stem, our very existence depends on it. In constrained reciprocity, dependence on others is seen as a burden. Constrained reciprocity reflects the Cartesian subject and the worldview of individualism, which is rooted especially in Renaissance humanism. It strongly emphasizes unique, self-sufficient, independent individuals whose possibilities and freedoms are viewed as limitless. This type of individualism manifests itself today in those economic ideologies which focus on individual rights, freedom, and choice; all of these conflict with those notions of collective solidarity that are so fundamental to indigenous value systems.⁶⁶

According to the Western liberal norm of the individualist subject, dependence on other people is something to be feared. The common attitude of “no strings attached” or “even-steven” supports the existence of separate, self-contained individuals with minimal responsibilities toward one another. When this model is taken to its extreme, receiving gifts can only be a burden, because one then owes the giver something of at least equal value: “Behind every gift lurks the ulterior motive of the giver who expects a return, and it is the recipient’s perception of the giver’s ulterior motive that impels him to ‘give as good as he gets’ in order to be free of obligations or, conversely, to be locked into an ongoing relationship of reciprocal relationship of reciprocal exchanges over time.”⁶⁷ According to this ethos, dependence

and responsibility are bad, because they imply obligations and duties that are external to oneself, whether these involve other individuals or society at large. From this, it follows that responsibilities are unnecessary to the well-being of individuals and communities. Such a worldview inevitably weakens the connections between self and the world. Hélène Cixous argues that this view reflects the masculine economy, which distrusts displays of generosity. As an alternative, she suggests feminist economies, which do not imply a form of exchange and instead affirm generosity and the development of relationships.⁶⁸

Radical exclusion and the hierarchization of the realms of the self and the world has a long history in the Western intellectual tradition, beginning with the Greek philosophers and articulated particularly by Descartes. It is beyond the scope of my project to discuss this in depth. Let it suffice that this point underscores a key difference between Western and indigenous philosophical traditions.⁶⁹ Jeannette Armstrong notes that traditional Okanagan teachings and prophecies caution “that we are cutting ourselves off from the ability to live well by distancing ourselves from the natural world. This is what my generation has been told by our elders. We are cutting off the abilities that we previously had that gave us the best chance to be in a healthy relationship with ourselves as people and with the rest of the world.”⁷⁰

Reciprocity is commonly viewed as central to indigenous thought. But it is very different from reductionist “binary give and take.” It often takes the form of circular reciprocity and sharing or “ceremonial reciprocity” – that is, reciprocity practised in life-renewing ceremonies and gift-giving rituals, of which the land is part. I am not suggesting, however, that the circulation of gifts (or goods) is carried out only in indigenous or precapitalist societies. The modern economy is also characterized by circulation. However, circulation in that economy is based on accumulation. Rodolphe Gasché maintains that this form of circulation “seems to be somehow deficient because a certain privilege of accumulation tends to produce absolute impoverishment. The privilege of accumulation makes closure of the circle of circulation as well as its compensatory action simply impossible.”⁷¹ Marx distinguished between the “simple circulation of goods” and “extended circulation,” aimed at producing surplus. Depending on the motive, then, circulation can be either a means of exchange or a form of reciprocity, which is different from equal exchange. In so-called traditional societies, the goal is usually to provide for the well-being of a community; in “extended circulation” the principal motive is to accumulate capital.

In reciprocity as practised in terms of indigenous worldviews, gifts are not given primarily to ensure a counter-gift later on, but to actively acknowledge kinship and coexistence with the world; without this sort of reciprocity, survival – not just of human beings but of other living beings – would be

impossible. Thus the main purpose of circular or ceremonial reciprocity is to affirm myriad relationships in the world; from these relationships arise an acknowledged collective and individual requirement “to act responsibly toward other forms of life.”⁷² This kind of reciprocity implies *response-ability* – that is, an ability to respond, to remain attuned to the world beyond oneself, as well as a willingness to recognize its existence through the giving of gifts. This sense of responsibility embedded in the gift is the result of living within an ecosystem and being dependent on it.

Culturally, socially, economically, and spiritually, indigenous peoples, as collectivities, continue to depend directly on the natural environment that surrounds them. Such thinking is still central to indigenous philosophies; for many other peoples, this relationship with their physical surroundings has been almost entirely erased. For these groups, the connection once existed but began to erode generations ago as a result of modernization, urbanization, and other developments. This process began with the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and is continuing today, driven by the forces of neocolonialism, capitalism, consumerism, and globalization.⁷³

An example of the capacity to respond to and remain attuned to the world beyond self, and of the will to recognize its existence by means of gifts, is the *Sohappy* case, which was heard in Oregon in the late 1960s. David Sohappy of the Wanapam Band fought for decades for the right to fish as part of his tribal rights as well as his identity. The Wanapams had never signed a treaty. In the early 1940s, Sohappy’s family was evicted from its home territory in order to make room for a nuclear installation. By that time, fishing runs were dwindling rapidly as a result of overfishing by non-Native fishermen, some from as far away as Scandinavia.⁷⁴ When Celilo Falls, or Wyam (“Echo of Falling Water”), one of the most significant traditional fishing sites in North America, was inundated by the Dalles Dam in 1957, many Native people were forced to give up fishing, their traditional livelihood, and moved to the Yakima Reservation or to urban centres.⁷⁵ Sohappy, however, moved with his wife to Cook’s Landing, which was above the first of many dams along the Columbia River. He and his wife built a small longhouse, and he continued fishing despite his father’s warnings. The game and fishing officials soon “raided his camp, beat family members, and, in 1968, put Sohappy in jail on charges of illegal fishing.”⁷⁶

For the First Nations on the northwestern shore of Turtle Island, salmon is more than a food – it is the cornerstone of their culture. An annual “first salmon” ceremony is still often held to thank the salmon for returning. During the ceremony, the first salmon caught in the yearly run is cooked over a fire and shared with everyone: “The bones were saved intact, to be carried by a torch-bearing, singing, dancing, and chanting procession back to the river, where they were placed in the water with the head pointing upstream –

symbolic of the spawning fish, to assure that there would be runs in the future."⁷⁷

The *Sohappy* case is a poignant example of conflicting worldviews as they relate to people's responsibilities toward the natural world. The explanation that David Sohappy gave when asked why he had to keep fishing the river was never properly understood in courtrooms or by the media. Makah filmmaker Sandra Osawa notes: "He was speaking as a man with a unique relationship with the salmon and he knew that the salmon and his people were as one. Along with this relationship came a special duty and responsibility to remain on the river."⁷⁸ Westerners, though, were unable or unwilling to recognize and comprehend this relationship, which flowed from his tribal traditions. For them, Sohappy was simply poaching. He was not heard or understood because he was speaking from a different worldview. Because of their ignorance, those who upheld the legal system were unable to recognize that salmon is a gift that comes with a relationship and responsibilities. Sohappy served five years in prison for what Westerners considered poaching.⁷⁹

In many indigenous worldviews, responsibility is regarded as integral to being human and as inseparable from one's identity. In cultures and societies that emphasize reciprocity, children are raised to understand that as adults, they will be expected to act for others. Jeannette Armstrong articulates this in terms of her relationship to the natural environment: "I know the mountains, and by birth, the river is my responsibility: They are part of me. I cannot be separated from my place or my land. When I introduce myself to my own people in my own language, I describe these things because it tells them what my responsibilities are and what my goal is."⁸⁰

Armstrong's notion of self is not limited to her as an individual; it inevitably entails a connection to a certain place on the land toward which she has certain responsibilities. As pointed out by Navajo/Yakima poet and scholar Elizabeth Woody, everyone must face this responsibility. Woody's uncle once told her, "We are all in this together, except we, as tribal people, will not leave or neglect our responsibility. We don't have that luxury. There is too much at stake."⁸¹ Because their survival depends greatly on social and ecological stability, indigenous people have developed a worldview in which a key teaching is responsibility toward other beings. This suggests how important the concept of giving is to them: only through giving can they be human. Their very survival depends on it.⁸²

Because she recognizes her responsibilities, Armstrong knows her location and role in her community; in short, she knows who she is.⁸³ This notion of responsibility emphasizes the interrelatedness of all life forms – the well-being of the mountains and rivers is linked to her personal well-being as well as to the well-being of her community. In her community, the

self and the world are not separate entities. It is inconceivable that humans can ever detach themselves from the socio-cosmic order. Thus “life depends on maintaining the right kind of relationship with the natural world,”⁸⁴ and personal and collective responsibilities toward the natural environment are the necessary foundation of society.

This understanding of responsibility is qualitatively different from Western ones. Gasché contends that “there is perhaps no theme more demanding than that of ‘responsibility.’”⁸⁵ A normative definition in the West views responsibility “as a mechanical application of a framework of rules that simultaneously relieves the subject of the onus of decision and, hence, of all liability.”⁸⁶ Yet responsibility implies a measured response that can be carried out “only if the decision is truly a decision, not a mechanical reaction to, or an effect of, a determinate cause.”⁸⁷

Western liberal notions of responsibility are often constructed as a social Darwinist “burden of the fittest,” with the benevolent imperialist self-cast as “helping” those less fortunate (read “privileged”). In this discourse, responsibility soon becomes nothing more than a duty, as is apparent, for example, in the UN Declaration of Human Responsibilities, which seeks to establish philosophical foundations for a global ethic (1997). Such notions of responsibility often merely produce a hierarchy in which the “helper” enjoys moral superiority, which often manifests itself as patronizing attitudes and practices. Put another way, there is a “difference between ethics as imagined from within the self-driven political calculus as ‘doing the right thing’ and ethics as openness toward the imagined agency of the other.”⁸⁸ Spivak calls the latter also a “predication of being-human as being called by the other, before will.”⁸⁹ This sense of responsibility and ethics is also called for by the gift, and is what this inquiry calls for in the context of the academy.

Tom Mexsis Happynook, Nuu-chah-nulth hereditary whaling chief and founding chair of the World Council of Whalers, contends that indigenous peoples’ practices reflect a sense of responsibility that is engrained in their culture: “When we talk about indigenous cultural practices we are in fact talking about responsibilities that have evolved into unwritten tribal laws over millennia. These responsibilities and laws are directly tied to nature and are a product of the slow integration of cultures within their environment and the ecosystems. Thus, the environment is not a place of divisions but rather a place of relations, a place where cultural diversity and biodiversity are not separate but in fact need each other.”⁹⁰

Happynook further observes how in the colonial context, these cultural responsibilities have been forced into a framework of “Aboriginal rights,” which are to be defended usually “in an adversarial system of justice.”⁹¹ Yet these rights are responsibilities more than anything. The problem with “rights” discourses is that they allow privileged individuals to deny the existence of

oppression in society. Sherene Razack contends that “rights thinking is based on the liberal notion that we are all individuals who contract with one another to live in a society where each of us would have the maximum of personal freedom. Starting from this premise, there then are no marginalized communities of people and no historical relations of power.”⁹² Furthermore, examining the international (but Eurocentric) human rights discourse, Spivak challenges the common assumption that there is an unbroken line that leads from rights to responsibilities. She argues that reinscribing rights as duties not only creates confusion (as pointed out by Amnesty International) but also allows continuing intervention on the subaltern.⁹³ She suggests that the language of collective rights be replaced with a language of collective responsibility as rights. This reflects Happynook’s articulation that rights are in fact responsibilities practised by individuals and communities.

As with many classic interpretations of giving to nature, analyses of responsibility in indigenous societies are often characterized by assumptions that are grounded in foreign worldviews and values, where they remain blind to other ways of knowing and relating to the world. For instance, Bourdieu contends that the circulation of gifts is nothing more than “mechanical interlockings of obligatory practices.”⁹⁴ It is not incorrect to suggest that giving to nature is one of the many forms of socialization whereby an individual learns to conform to certain cultural norms and rules; yet, it is extremely reductionistic and dismissive to interpret indigenous (or any other) gift practices as mere rules to be obeyed through blind duty. Such interpretations betray a lack of awareness that there are other possible ethics and worldviews, and in doing so deny an ethical sense to other peoples and cultures. Giving to nature is far from a mechanically observed practice; it is, in fact, the basis of ethical behaviour among indigenous people, as well as a concrete manifestation of worldviews that emphasize the primacy of relationships in a world in which the well-being of all is contingent on stability.

To discuss, then, relationships with nature as part of indigenous worldviews is not to romanticize them. The relationships that indigenous peoples have forged with their environments for many centuries are a consequence of living off the land and depending on its bounty. They are a result of a clear understanding that the well-being of the land is also the well-being of humans. As Annie Booth and Harvey Jacobs contend, the statement “we are the land” often expressed by indigenous people “goes beyond the romanticized lore of nature that modern-day environmentalists are said to indulge in.”⁹⁵ Living off the land involves hard work, but in return, the land gives indigenous peoples their very being. Indigenous people understand the land’s bounty both as a gift and as a relationship made manifest, but they do so in concrete rather than romanticized terms. That is why so many of them continue to recognize their ties to the land in various ways.

Once they learn to avoid romanticism and reductionism, Westerners will also start to understand how gift-based, reciprocity-oriented philosophies are linked to the land rights of indigenous peoples and to their very survival. Until Western governments recognize that indigenous peoples have title to their lands, it will be difficult if not impossible for these peoples to assert their identities and govern themselves, and to maintain their livelihoods and social and cultural practices – in short, to be who they are and to control their own lives and futures as peoples.

Many will argue that it is not only unrealistic but hopelessly naïve and romantic to suggest that a logic based on the gift relationship be employed in today's society and in places such as the academy. Clearly, the neoliberals' "hard realities" have finally caught up with many academics as well. However, Veronica Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies maintain that the romanticization argument "is implicitly derived from the image of a lineal historic process in which Western industrial society is seen as the pinnacle and the inescapable image of the future for all 'pre-industrial' societies."⁹⁶ It is also a reflection of the epistemic ignorance that prevails in society at large toward different modes of organizing society.

In this vein, Spivak reminds us that "the other side of romanticizing is censorship."⁹⁷ She urges a shift in perception "from the anthropological to the historico-political." Such a shift may help us see how the cultural fabric of local and indigenous communities has been torn "from the dominant loom in a historical moment."⁹⁸ It is not that these "cultural scripts" no longer work in contemporary contexts because of their "simplicity" or "backwardness"; rather, it is that they "have *not been allowed to work* except as a delegitimized form forcibly out of touch with the dominant through a history that has taken capital and empire as telos."⁹⁹ There is nothing romantic about the logic of the gift; to describe it as such is to subordinate a paradigm that has never been given a chance. Without having been tried, the indigenous worldview has been delegitimized and made invisible by a system that privileges capital accumulation rather than giving and reciprocation.

The logic of the gift continues to characterize indigenous peoples' thinking and conventions in contemporary contexts. This is one reason that it is misleading and inappropriate to discuss the gift in "archaic societies," especially when those doing the talking narrowly interpret the gift as economic exchange. The focus on archaic aspects also leads to a perpetuation of implicit and explicit assumptions about "frozen" cultures and may reinforce traditional/contemporary binaries. Yet as Brody asserts, "we are all contemporaries, whatever lands we live on and whatever heritage we rely on to do so. All human beings have been evolving for the same length of time."¹⁰⁰ An example of the gift logic in contemporary contexts is indigenous research practices and protocols.

Scholarly “Give Back”

A central principle of indigenous philosophies, that of “giving back,” forms the backbone of the research that is presently being conducted by many indigenous scholars and students. It expresses a strong commitment and desire to ensure that academic knowledge, practices, and research are no longer used as tools of colonization and as ways of exploiting indigenous peoples by taking (or, as it is often put, stealing) their knowledge without ever giving anything back. Deloria was one of the first indigenous scholars to call on non-indigenous researchers to recognize the need to “[put] something back into the Indian community.” He even questioned the need for further research into Native communities, especially by outsiders.¹⁰¹

After centuries of being studied, measured, categorized, and represented to serve various colonial interests and purposes, many indigenous peoples now insist that research dealing with indigenous issues must emanate from the needs and concerns of indigenous communities instead of those of individual researchers or the dominant society. Indigenous research ethics now requires academics – both indigenous and Western – to “give back,” that is, to conduct research that will be both relevant and helpful to indigenous peoples themselves.¹⁰²

Researchers now face other responsibilities as well. For example, they are expected to share their research results in appropriate and meaningful ways and to recognize that sharing knowledge is a long-term responsibility that must involve more than simply sending a final report back to the community. Linda Smith distinguishes between “sharing knowledge” and “sharing surface information” and points out the importance of sharing “the theories and analyses which inform the way knowledge and information are constructed and represented.”¹⁰³

The principle of “giving back” in research – whether it means reporting back, sharing the benefits, bringing back new knowledge and vital information to the community, or taking the needs and concerns of the people into account when formulating research agendas – is part of a broader process of decolonizing colonial structures and mentalities and restoring indigenous societies. The ethics of relevance and giving back also guide my work. My consideration of the relationship between indigenous epistemes and dominant academic discourses is an attempt to help decolonize scholarly practices that continue to exclude and marginalize various groups and their epistemes. With my work, I hope to “give back” to the growing body of indigenous scholarship by addressing a question that today faces many indigenous people in the academic community but that so far has received little scholarly attention. That question is: how can we convince the academy to sincerely accept the gift of indigenous epistemes?

Indigenous research is recognized as unique for a number of reasons: it calls for participation by the communities being researched; it acknowledges

traditional genealogical and other organizing structures; it supports research that is relevant to the communities being studied, as well as culturally appropriate methodologies and codes of conduct; and it is activist in the sense that it is committed to capacity building and to addressing the damage done by colonization.¹⁰⁴ Most of the theories and methodologies embraced by indigenous scholars are rooted in the principles of reciprocity and responsibility, which are derived from indigenous protocols and cultural values and which are often incorporated into research ethics guidelines. Related to this acceptance of responsibility is the common practice among indigenous researchers of “decolonizing” the notion of generic “Indians” by indicating the tribal affiliations of indigenous individuals. This is a way of recognizing and respecting the fact that indigenous peoples vary in their social, cultural, historical, economic, and political contexts, however much they share with other indigenous peoples around the world.

As this book will demonstrate, the principles of indigenous gift philosophies can also be applied in other spheres of academic inquiry. The gift serves as a powerful critique of the values and general ethos of the academy, which in at least some respects is going through its own “extreme makeover” as it evolves from a place of knowledge into a “lean and mean” corporation. The gift paradigm disrupts the global capitalist, patriarchal world order by not following its rules and values. It pays close heed to the problematic nature of individualism, which is not only a value opposite to that of the gift but is also linked to the colonization of indigenous peoples.¹⁰⁵ Clearly, though, indigenous peoples are not the only ones who are suffering from the values being promoted by cut-throat market fundamentalism. The globalization ethos is causing problems for the entire planet, by endangering ecosystems as well as the very lives of individuals and communities from the Arctic to the global South. In this context, the ambivalence of the gift (as *pharmakon*, which has a double meaning: medicine *and* poison) is apparent: it may appear to be poison (i.e., a threat) to those who adhere to the global capitalist patriarchal agenda and who argue that there are no alternatives to the one they support; but it is medicine for those who envision alternative paradigms.

Gift as a Threat

Besides constructing the gift as symbolic violence, colonial and patriarchal authorities have interpreted it as a threat and in this way have demonized and pathologized it. One of the best examples of this is the construction of the potlatch tradition of the Northwest Coast as a threat to “civilization” and to the establishment of the nation-state.

Scholars and theorists have long represented the gift as a paradox, enigma, aporia, simulacrum, or impossibility. Mauss, for example, concluded that the gift is an odd “confusion” that blends everything together

into a hybrid. The ambivalence of the gift is also reflected in its double meaning. Etymologically, the word for gift in most Romance languages derives from the Latin *dosis*, a “dose,” as for instance in poison.¹⁰⁶ In this sense, the gift is a *pharmakon* – a Greek word that means both “remedy” and “poison.”¹⁰⁷

Christopher Bracken’s account of the potlatch shows us how the gift as practised in the indigenous societies of the Northwest Coast came to be perceived as a threat to the emerging Canadian nation-state – in particular, to the values the new nation wanted to represent.¹⁰⁸ The potlatch was associated with excess and waste, and colonial administrators viewed those who practised it as the apotheosis of the “other.” In the potlatch, the earliest government agents on the Northwest Coast saw “a practice that Western civilization wants above all to exclude from itself: the practice of non-productive expenditure as it is manifested in gambling and giving away.”¹⁰⁹

At the time of First Contact on the Northwest Coast, the Europeans did not immediately oppose the potlatch. Antagonism increased, however, with the arrival of missionaries and government agents, for whom the potlatch and various other feasts were signs of moral degeneracy. Such practices marked the people who engaged in them as savages, as “barbaric,” and officials and other government representatives saw an urgent need to put an end to them – which turned out to be very difficult.¹¹⁰

As an example, the Kwakwaka’wakw on Vancouver Island were repeatedly defined by colonial agents “as a group incapable of integrating themselves into Euro-Canadian culture.”¹¹¹ According to commissioner Malcolm Sproat, “the Patlach is a form of aboriginal self-government that stands in the way of the Canadian government and its civilizing mission.”¹¹² Sproat also condemned the potlatch for producing “indigence, thriftlessness, and a habit of roaming about which prevents home associations and is inconsistent with all progress ... It is not possible that Indians can acquire property, or become industrious with any good result, while under the influence of this mania.”¹¹³

For the Europeans, then, gift giving in the form of potlatches was a threat to nascent civilization and progress. A former Hudson’s Bay Company trader named George Blenkinsop declared that until the local Indians could be cured of their propensity for potlatching, “there can be little hope of elevating them from their present state of degradation.”¹¹⁴ Note that in formulating his remarks, he resorted to pairs of oppositional terms: high and low, elevation and degradation, civilization and barbarism. From the perspective of the gift, it is interesting that the concept of “expenditure,” not “feast,” is what marks the boundary between these binary oppositions.¹¹⁵

Frustration over failed attempts to “civilize” those who practised potlatch and gifting led to calls for federal legislation that would prohibit these

ceremonies. The first anti-potlatch law was passed in 1884, but was difficult to enforce because of its ambiguous language.¹¹⁶ The law was later amended, and

following a large potlatch held at Village Island in December 1921, forty-five people were charged under Section 149 of the Indian Act. Of those convicted of offenses including making speeches, dancing, arranging articles to be given away and carrying gifts to recipients ... twenty men and women were sent to Oakalla Prison to serve sentences of two months for first offenders and three months for second offenders ... For some years the potlatch went “underground” to evade further prosecution under the law. In Fort Rupert, for example, people favored stormy weather as a suitable time to hold potlatches, knowing that neither the police nor the Indian Agent could travel in such weather. The Kwakwaka’wakw continued to hope that the anti-potlatch law would be repealed. However, when the Indian Act was revised in 1951, Section 149 was simply deleted.¹¹⁷

Whether an event of pure loss that violated the principle of classical utility (as it was for Sproat), or a manifestation of the absolute “other” relative to the West (as it was for Franz Boas),¹¹⁸ the potlatch signified an aporia: “The northwest coast sits at the very limit of the Western European economy. The gift is the sign of this outer boundary. A pure loss without return, the gift marks the zone where civilization ends and barbarism begins.”¹¹⁹ For Europeans, the gift and the potlatch represented alien and entirely irrational practices of prodigality, in opposition to all the fundamental values of the Western world, which at the time was attempting to gain a foothold on the Northwest Coast. The practice made no sense to Europeans, and furthermore, it was viewed as a threat to the values and principles of Canada as an emerging nation-state.

Clearly, gift giving in indigenous societies cannot be reduced to mundane and obligatory giving and receiving – that is, to a form of exchange that can serve as the predecessor of a modern market economy. Indigenous people’s relationships with their territories cannot be understood in only utilitarian, economic terms – that is, in terms of giving solely to receive. The early colonial authorities were keenly aware of the problems inherent in this kind of giving, which did not conform to either their values or their notions of progress. Ironically, had they interpreted the gift as merely a form of exchange, they might not have viewed it as so dangerous that it needed to be outlawed. But the colonial authorities saw the power of the gift of the potlatch, and furthermore, they saw how it represented a potential subversion. The only way for them to protect themselves from this threat was to forbid it by law.

In light of the anti-potlatch law and the measures that preceded and followed it, it should not surprise us that the academy does not currently recognize the gift of indigenous epistemes. For some in the academy, the gift of indigenous epistemes amounts to a threat to the values that underpin the structures and discourses of the status quo. To paraphrase Hopi/Miwok poet Wendy Rose, some may be benefiting from *not* recognizing and receiving the gift and from *not* engaging in a new logic of reciprocal responsibilities. The gift, therefore, continues to be a *pharmakon* – both remedy and poison – in contemporary settings, including the academy.