



# **Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Education**

## **A READER**

EDITED BY George J. Sefa Dei

FOREWORD BY Akwasi Asabere-Ameyaw



An important academic goal is to understand ongoing contestations in knowledge in the search to engage everyday social practice and experiences, as well as the social barriers and approaches to peaceful human coexistence. This reader pulls together ideas concerning Indigenous epistemologies (e.g., worldviews, paradigms, standpoints, and philosophies) as they manifest themselves in the mental lives of persons both from and outside the orbit of the usual Euro-American culture. The book engages Indigenous knowledges as far more than a “contest of the marginals,” thereby challenging the way oppositional knowledges are positioned, particularly in the Western academy. Subsequently, this book is a call to recognize and acknowledge Indigenous knowledges as legitimate knowings in their own right, and not necessarily in competition with other sources or forms of knowledge. The project offers an opportunity for the critical thinker to continue on a de-colonial/anti-colonial intellectual journey in ways informed by Indigenous theorizing.

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# **Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Education**



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Shirley R. Steinberg  
*General Editor*

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This compilation of essays is dedicated to our departed ancestors who continue to guide and watch over us and strengthen us mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and materially as we navigate the treacherous waters of the academy.





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# Foreword

This book is a bold attempt to challenge and make very uncomfortable the imperial procedures of knowledge making. Though there is much work concerning the transformation of schooling and education, this book gives us a genuine sense of hope. Writing through a communal spirit and engendered by the will to liberate educational philosophies, Dei and the authors address the different forms of epistemological colonization, which reifies itself through the pedagogue and resides within conventional classroom spaces. Wherever we look, Indigenous communities are making valid and legitimate claims for the recognition, authentication, and preservation of their cultures, histories, heritage, and languages. Local cultural knowledge systems are similarly being contested for validation and legitimation. All is part of the continuing struggle for identity, representation, and authentication in a search for human and collective dignity. Therefore, every knowledge system is worthy of examination in the provision of education to learners. My own foray in Indigenous knowledge goes back to my early training as a science educator when I examined the academic and practical fascination with Indigenous science and its contributions to science education in general.

Our institutions of higher learning have placed tremendous responsibility on educators to contextualize knowledge such that learners develop a deep and critical understanding of everyday social practice and the experiential reality as legitimate sources of knowledge. We work with knowledge from the known to the unknown. By working from the familiar and known, learners are able to develop a shared sense of identification and ownership in the knowledge production process. For some time now, there have also been raging contentions as to what really constitutes the “Indigenous” and the connections or disconnections with the traditional, folk, and local knowledges. The essays in this collection help sharpen our understanding of the linkages as well as the challenges of claiming Indigenousness. What is significant overall is the recognition that there are many different forms of knowledge and there is a need for education to examine these different knowledge forms rather than simply assign some forms of traditional cultural knowledges to the dustbin of history as

irrelevant to contemporary experience. Local peoples use these knowledges every day. These knowledges constitute their established ways of knowing, an understanding of their communities as embedded in culture, history, science, local languages, ancestral practices, folklore and traditions, songs, riddles, and proverbs. Within communities we have custodians of important knowledge that have continued to serve communities from time immemorial. These knowledges are not static or frozen by change with the times. But they are rooted in communities' histories, heritage, and cultural repertoire, and the challenge for educators of today is to work with such knowledge as we address the tensions of tradition, change, and modernity in human societies. I commend Dei and the contributors to the collection for presenting their knowledge in ways that help move the cause of knowledge production and education. Dei being a traditional Chief in Ghana understands the importance of local cultural resource knowledge and why such knowledge should be upheld in our schools, colleges, universities, and communities.

In many contexts, claiming Indigenous knowledge in the educational system is also to promote Indigenous education. To be truly effective, such Indigenous education must reflect the political, cultural, social, spiritual, as well as pedagogic, instructional, and communicative needs and aspirations of Indigenous peoples and their communities. When these communities abandon their local epistemologies, all they are doing is committing "epistemic suicides." The responsibility of Indigenous education lies beyond a mere challenge of colonial and colonizing curricula and school texts. Indigenous education is about affirming the relevance of Indigenous knowledge. We cannot hope to educate learners of today outside their socio-cultural and political contexts and milieu. Our schools, colleges, and universities cannot deliver education that pays little or no attention to the cultures, traditions, histories, identities, and ancestral knowledges of the learners in our classrooms. Our students must be able to identify with the classroom knowledge in ways that empower, embolden, strengthen, and sustain them to become fully engaged in their education. When they are able to assert their own cultural knowings they easily develop a sense of ownership of the learning process. Thus, for many Indigenous peoples and their communities, claiming their cultural and traditional ways of knowing is part of the continuing struggle to resist and shed the vestiges of colonization and to recover who they are and remake their own destinies.

No doubt *Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Education* is an excellent addition to the existing literature on Indigenous studies. The breadth of coverage of the issues—starting with the question of knowledge as philosophy and the implications of critical education for decolonization; the question of social difference, identity, and knowledge production; the tensions of change, tradition, and modernity as conveyed in development discourses; Indigenous science education and the place of spirituality in Indigenous knowledge production—are all significant themes to be addressed in this far-ranging subject area.

The book has been exhaustive in its treatment of Indigenous philosophies, and the conscious decision to cover a wide geographical area, engage an inclusive subject matter, and to draw on the perspective of a diverse crop of academic scholars, researchers, and community educators is very impressive and commendable. The way I see it, the pressing challenge of critical education in schools, colleges, and universities is to examine different philosophies of knowing, their relative strengths and contributions to knowledge production, as well as their applicability to the resolution of human problems. Science education is no longer a question of simply training people in the technicalities of science. It is about education of learners with a much broader understanding of knowledge that embraces the sciences, arts and humanities, and literatures.

This book calls for a counter-knowledging to challenge conventional systems of education. There



are huge possibilities and limitations to the study of Indigenous ways of knowing. Contributions in this volume have strived to disentangle Indigenous knowledges from the entrapments of Western/dominant configurations of knowledge. What is truly remarkable is the fact that Indigenous philosophies have not been presented as the all knowing, the panacea for the colonial episteme. Indigenous knowledges are engaged dialectically and inclusively in ways which allow for multiple centres of knowing. Ultimately, this collection is about experiential knowledge; it is about the challenges for Indigenous bodies of knowledge to assert their validity in their own right and as well make claims for moving into conventional classrooms. Presently, discussions concerning schooling and education have been regulated through the dominant edict of “Western-Enlightenment thought” steeped in colonial and colonizing ways of knowing. There is a dearth of local cultural knowledge in our classroom curricula. The authors do well to address this lacuna by highlighting the pedagogic relevance of the “Indigenous” in the context of schooling and colonial forms of education. We are continuously reminded of the need for decolonization for all bodies. The culture of globalisation engendered through the culture of capitalism *promotes* a particular culture of development that simply commodifies the human condition. Local peoples, local ways of coming to understanding and coming to make sense of the experiences of the self and community is about local cultural knowledge. Indigenous philosophy has well been historicized by local peoples through oral spaces through time and *place*, and has reflected on histories and cultures as counterpoints to dominant bodies of knowledge. Claiming a place for Indigenous philosophies in our schools, colleges, and universities is about resistance and the affirmation of the self, group, and community. Indigenousness concerns have brought to the fore of contemporary politics and social thought the experiences of colonialism. Consequently theorizing Indigenousness necessitates knowing and understanding the experiential. It also requires writing through the vagaries of the human experience. There is the challenge of coming to know through uncertainty, coming to know through that which is incommensurable, and to think through those vexing moments to understand the relationship with the tangible, material, and non-material. As chapters in this volume show, such cogitation speaks to the spiritual self, that is, to know through that which is innate and to be intuitive in a particular way that dialogues with the infused spirit.

We must also recognize how we come to know differently through our social spaces, keeping in mind, Indigenousness is about praxis. Indigenousness is also about critical consciousness, that spirituality, for example, is not fixed, nor definite, nor operating through a set of finite locus points. Spirituality is about the governing ethic and care onto self as a form of praxis. I am encouraged that the authors are not prescribing doing away nor dismissing the present-day canon embedded within schooling and education. Refreshingly, they offer different ways of knowing in which all bodies can come to know and understand their social milieu. Central to the authors’ work is seeking the interest of local and Indigenous communities. With this invested interest, the collection leaves us thinking about the relevance of activist scholarship, that we simply cannot theorize for theorizing’s sake; we simply cannot theorize for academic prowess. If the collective goal concerns decolonizing and transforming schooling and education from the context of difference, then we must dialogue with knowledge from local peoples. We must speak about the colonial as it becomes revealed through all the complex forms of imposition.

Given that claiming Indigenousness is not without its politics, there are consequences, implications, and challenges for the Indigenous scholar. Notably, pedagogues claiming Indigenous frameworks have collectively struggled to have their scholarship recognized. What is needed and, as the authors here have rightly done, is to engage critical social science research without negotiating the lived experiences of the Indigenous body. They have made us aware of the danger of co-opting one’s

research and the need for Indigenous thought to co-exist with conventional ways of knowing. The power of this collection speaks to the deliberate accounts to miseducate learners about Indigenous, local, and cultural bodies of knowledge. The authors share their experiences and local conversations to give us a critical dialogue concerning the politics of Indigenous knowledges and the “struggles of the Indigenous peoples to be recognized as a contributing body of knowledge.” We are given a writing of courage to continue the work of resistance, transformation, and decolonization.

I conclude noting that the area of Indigenous philosophy has a multidisciplinary edge that is inclusive of knowledge from the diverse sciences, arts and the humanities. As has been noted the subject area for discussion has a lot to offer Political Studies, Post-Colonial Studies, African and Caribbean Studies, Literature, Anthropology, History, Sociology, Gender Studies, Development Studies, Administrative Studies, Community Health and Medicine, Law, and Semiotics, International Development workers, and government policy officials. The special focus of the collection on the specific implications for schooling and education is welcome. Given their research interests and breadth of coverage, Dei and his excellent list of contributors have ensured that this book will have a wide appeal.

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# Acknowledgments

I acknowledge many have helped along the way in making this work come to fruition. First of all, I sincerely thank Shirley Steinberg for proposing my name when the idea of doing this volume was initially discussed and supporting me throughout the process. I trust this collection of essays will not disappoint the original dreams and hopes expressed. I could not have succeeded in my task without the help of Isaac Darko, whose call to duty went beyond the usual expectation of a “graduate assistant.” His overall assistance has been amazing from the initial correspondence with prospective contributors to ensuring the final technical details before the draft manuscript went to the publishers. Similarly, my thanks go to Rainos Mutumba of the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, Marlon Simmons, Yumiko Kawano, Eric Riskes, and Dr. Arlo Kempf, all of the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT), for their varied assistance including reading and making insightful comments on drafts of the manuscript before and after all the chapters from contributors were put together. I also cannot forget the anonymous reviewers! This book came about by “invitation only,” and I want to thank all the contributors for being willing to share their knowledge. Even a few who could not honor the invitation sent messages wishing me well in such an intellectual undertaking.

I acknowledge that there is a growing interest in the pragmatics/praxis of Indigenous knowledges. This is attested to by the complex and diverse ways Indigenous knowledges continue to be claimed and engaged with in the academy, not to mention the evocation in everyday social practice in local communities. Personally, I have been fortunate to have Elders who have steadfastly insisted on the urgency of sustaining such knowledges for our collective survival, histories, and social development. Indigenous knowledge is about community building. It is about affirmation, resistance, and decolonization. It is also about developing respect for land, acknowledging the spirits of our ancestors and Elders, and ensuring that knowledge thrives and is used responsibly. In reading through the chapters in this collection, I could not help but feel the power and sense of pride in Indigenous knowl-

edge. It is without saying that I came out of this entire process much better than when I entered. I end with a special thanks to my graduate students who over the years have and continue to teach me about why we as teachers, educators, students, and learners need to develop an Indigenous consciousness based on Indigenous unity. These students have always insisted on “never settling for less” as we continue to disrupt the boundaries and complacency of dominant scholarship.

GEORGE J. SEFA DEI  
TORONTO, JUNE 2010

# Introduction

GEORGE J. SEFA DEI

I start the “Introduction” to this important collection of essays by acknowledging First Nations and Aboriginal peoples of Canada for the space and location from which I am writing my thoughts and ideas into text. This is important especially since from time immemorial certain spaces and territories have come to be and are continually represented by colonizing practices. I will also do something unconventional for an “Introduction” to an edited collection. In this piece, I will not undertake specific discussions on the individual pieces in the book. I leave that to the various sub-themes/section in which each chapter appears. My goal here is to simply reflect in a broad sense on some general ideas that guide the direction of this book. It has been such an honor and privilege to edit this reader on *Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Education*. As an educator who has always striven to broach critical and oppositional knowledge, such moments allow for the sharing of ideas and for the opportunity to learn about multiple perspectives. Most of us are driven by an intellectual desire to diversify our academies in terms of actual physical bodies, knowledge representation, and the politics of pursuing social and educational change. Our intellectual and political projects acknowledge, validate, and legitimate Indigenous knowledges and philosophies as ways of knowing in their own right. Unfortunately, there are times when one wonders whether the present academy may ever be able to shed the chains of its past. Hence, is the goal to “transform the academy” or to “replace the academy”? (see also Kempf, 2010). I am speaking of a past which has presented particular hegemonic ways of knowledge production, validation, and dissemination and also given currency and legitimacy to certain bodies and practices. While reminded of the Fanonian exhortation of the limits of particular oppressed and colonized bodies seeking validation and acceptance in colonial spaces, I am also moved by a “pedagogy of hope” to have a newly transformed academy (see Dei, 2010).

Perhaps it is important for me to clarify from the onset why I chose as the title of this collection *Indigenous Philosophies*. I see Indigenous knowledge as philosophy, specifically as a body of Indigenous social thought embedded with critical, oppositional, and resisting knowledge and counter narratives for decolonization. In other words, Indigenous knowledge as a body of Indigenous thought has located itself contrapuntal to dominant knowledges, in that, the Indigene reveals itself through resistance, as counter-hegemonic and as tangential to conventional knowledge systems. I position philosophy as a body of knowledge central to the epistemological framework, one that accords discursive authority, power, and privilege onto the pedagogue. My claim is that (Western) philosophy as an epistemology has been historically granted a certain academic identity that endows precedence onto philosophy as a particular classification of knowledge and simultaneously locates the Indigene to the periphery of knowing. My concern with philosophy (especially Western philosophy) is not about removing philosophy as a canon, but to question the positioning/authenticity of the episteme, which reveals itself through a particular historic primacy that at the same time forms colonial relations with the “Othered” discursive episteme.

In effect, if we are to take up this trope of philosophy, philosophy must not only be about being European. Philosophy must be revisioned and rearticulated through the embodiment of different peoples, through different geographies. Philosophy in a sense then constitutes the human condition, that is, the mode of thinking, an orientation of thought imbued through all peoples alike. Philosophy, as a discursive category neither is apolitical nor does it occupy an ahistorical space. Knowledge production is not an innocent or neutral project. Every process of knowledge creation, validation, and dissemination is about the embodiment of politics. This is where Indigenous knowledge as philosophy becomes important. It challenges the normative of particular forms of knowledge while also articulating a particular politics of decolonizing dominant knowledge. I am also contending that conventional knowledge production is a hegemonic instrument which works to form colonial knowledge that reveals itself as the all-knowing universal body of knowledge.

An important academic goal is to understand on-going contestations in knowledge in the search to engage everyday social practice and experiences as well as the social barriers and approaches to peaceful human co-existence. There is a need for new, counter/alternative and multiple knowledge forms in diverse social sites to provide critical understandings to individual and collective political action. The role and importance of Indigenous knowledges and philosophies in the promotion of multi-centric paradigms are increasingly being claimed and contested. Some questions are in order: What accounts for the resurgence in Indigenous knowledges and philosophies in the academies? How does the complexity of Indigenous philosophies contribute to promoting a subversive pedagogy for educational and social change? How can we, as educators and earners, draw on the myriad intellectual traditions and philosophies of knowing to understand the nature and dynamics of imperial power relations as a necessary exercise in social, political, and intellectual liberation? This reader is an attempt to pull together ideas concerning Indigenous epistemologies (e.g., worldviews, paradigms, standpoints, and philosophies) as they manifest themselves in the mental lives of persons both from and outside the orbit of the usual Euro-American culture. The book engages Indigenous knowledges as far more than a “contest of the marginals,” thereby challenging the way oppositional knowledges are positioned, particularly in the Western academy. Subsequently, this book is a call to recognize and acknowledge Indigenous knowledges as legitimate knowings in their own right, and not necessarily in competition with other sources or forms of knowledge. The project offers an opportunity for the critical thinker to continue on a de-colonial/anti-colonial intellectual journey in ways informed by Indigenous theorizing.



We place Indigenous knowledge and philosophies within the terrain of contemporary critical intellectual traditions that articulate emancipatory discourses for particularly colonized and oppressed subjects. The recognition of Indigenous knowledge as legitimate in its own right requires that we rethink the spaces that are currently in place for nurturing and sustaining a healthy multiplicity of knowledge in the academy. We would argue, then, that we not only have to decolonize existing spaces but create new non-hierarchical spaces of knowing. We cannot ask hegemonic/dominant spaces to simply make room for other knowledges to co-exist. The politics of de-centering spaces and dominant knowledge requires that we rethink new ways of creating spaces that allow for a centrality of multiple knowledge systems to contend with the asymmetrical power relations that currently exist in educational settings. If we fail to contest power, then the liberal and neo-liberal relativist stance, and to some extent, post-modernist tendency of heralding/insisting on spaces for all voices, ideas, and standpoints to be heard can only be seductive and end up actually affirming the dominance of particular forms of knowledge. Currently, not all knowledges have the same power and influence in our academies. To say that all knowledge comes to a level playing field is limiting.

What is Indigeneity and what are the possibilities of Indigenous knowledges in creating a different understanding of education that holds the promise and possibility of excellence for all? As noted, the binary tensions between so-called Western science/scientific knowledge and the Indigenous knowledge system are unproductive for learning, especially if it is acknowledged that we are dealing with multiple systems of knowledge and that no one body of knowledge can claim superiority over another. If a distinction must be made in knowledge systems, the focus should be on the processes of differentiation that set knowledge systems apart in their epistemic and philosophical emphasis, as well as on how power dynamics shape the production, interrogation, validation, and dissemination of knowledge systems, both internally and globally. The romanticization and de-contextualization of knowledges are concerns for both Indigenous and Western science knowledge. Historically, the privileging of Western ways of knowledge is accompanied by the tendency to impose such knowledge on others, while simultaneously denying or subjugating traditional/Indigenous knowledge systems. In a sense one can argue there has been a corresponding glorification of Western knowledge systems.

Currently, Indigenous and oppressed peoples are reclaiming their cultural knowledges and asserting their legitimacy in many spaces. It is clear the academy is no exception (see Abdi & Cleghorn, 2005; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999; Wane, 2009; Waterfall, 2008; among many others). However, despite the fact that Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge constitute a growing field of study in the academy, the relationship between Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge is often merely assumed rather than theorized. Indigeneity is a claim to identity, history, politics, culture, and a rootedness in a place. It is about a socio-political consciousness of being as a knowing subject. It is also about an existence outside the purview of colonial encounter and the colonizing relations as over-determining of one's existence. Indigeneity is about how a body/subject is defined by self and group—a definition of an existence outside and resistant of that identity, which is more often constructed and imposed by the dominant. The politics of claiming Indigeneity in a so-called transnational context allows one to construct an identity that is beyond what is constructed within Euro-American hegemony. Consequently, to claim and reclaim an Indigenousness or an Indigenous identity is a political and decolonizing undertaking. The values, worldviews, and epistemes that govern such Indigenous existence and how we come to know and understand our communities, are appropriately termed “Indigenous knowing/knowledge.”

## RE-CONCEPTUALIZING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE/PHILOSOPHIES

Indigenous knowledge is primarily about epistemology. Like every body of knowledge, Indigenous knowledge has its own ontological, conceptual/philosophical, methodological, and axiological groundings. Indigenous knowledge is science, philosophy, and practice of knowing about one's existence as not conscripted and scripted by simply a colonial and colonizing experience. It is also about understanding the nature of social reality as real (i.e., materially consequential for the body) as well as meaningfully in physical and metaphysical realms. Indigenous knowledge speaks of the inseparability and inter-dependence of selves and the collective. It heralds the mind, body, and spirit connections and connectedness of society, culture, and nature in the ways we come to know about ourselves and our worlds. It is based on a cosmological understanding that the elements of the universe are interrelated and intertwined (e.g., the mental, physical, spiritual, material, political, and economic). We cannot simplistically atomize and particularize the everyday living experience. The everyday experience and the social world are not always subject to the certainty of knowing. Indigenous peoples' use of their cultural knowledge system is derived from living in close relations and appreciation of nature and society. Hence the Indigenous knowledge system usually would comprise the understanding of the successful ways by which people deal with their environments and surroundings.

Culture is seen as critical to knowledge production. In fact, cultural paradigms shape knowledge; the role of local culture(s) in producing multiple ways of knowing is salient. The advancement of any one cultural perspective cannot be universally applied and/or seen as superior to other perspectives. This is the basis of the critique lodged by Indigenous knowledge regarding the ways in which hegemonic knowledges (e.g., Eurocentric ways of knowing) often masquerade as superior and "all knowing." Indigenous knowledges also affirm that there are cultural continuities as well as cultural discontinuities in a people's experiences. Knowledge does not necessarily leave the body with a relocation. Knowledge can reside in cultural memory and can be called upon/recalled to deal with contemporary pressing problems in different contexts. The belief is that all knowledges are shared and accumulated across time and space.

A culturally grounded perspective helps center Indigenous peoples' worldviews. It also helps local (oppressed) peoples to resist the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives/knowledges. When reclaimed and affirmed, Indigeneity and Indigenous knowings provide intellectual agency to marginalized, colonized peoples who then become subjects of their own histories, stories, and experiences. The Indigenous philosophical tradition provides a space for colonized and oppressed peoples to interpret their own experiences on their own terms and understandings, rather than being forced through Eurocentric paradigms. The politics of Indigenous knowledge production is to (re)construct an Indigenous identity rooted in place, culture, history, and politics.

Indigenous knowledges cannot be romanticized as they are also embedded in power relations. To claim "Indigeneity" is to validate and work with Indigenous knowledges. The claiming of Indigenous knowledge is not about denying others their cultural knowledge. Given that Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge are connected to time and place, there is no denial of their embedded intellectual politics. Historically, all groups can claim an Indigenous past and history in so far as it is outside the realm of a colonial domination and the colonizing experience. The time and space dimensions to Indigenous knowledge merely speak to the contextual basis of knowing and the fact that all knowledge is first and foremost local and needs to be situated in appropriate cultural and political contexts.

As already alluded to, knowledge exists in cultural memory and experience. Indigenous knowledge is embodied in the ability of the self and collective to call on history/cultural memory, politics, myths, stories, heritage, and traditions as important sources of knowledge. This is why discussions of Indigenous knowledge must always reference history, culture, place, social justice, colonialism, decolonization.

The Indigenous landscape articulates an Indigeneity which must be understood in terms of the society, culture, and nature nexus. Such Indigeneity is about a spiritual and spiritualized view of human existence. Indigeneity cautions that the material and non-material aspects of life cannot be dichotomized, and neither can we evade the power issues of knowledge making, validation, and dissemination. Given that knowledge “borrows” and learns from other ways of knowing, Indigeneity is about resistance to domination and colonization and a welcoming of “strangers” into existing communities. Indigeneity is not simply about rights (e.g., who has rights to a place) but more so about our individual and collective responsibilities to ensure the existence of a sustaining community. The issue of responsibility means owning up to the knowledge we produce and allowing such knowledge to compel action to bring about social transformation and change.

Questions of race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, language, religion, and spirituality are also central to discussions of both Indigeneity and Indigenous philosophies. Every knowledge form is demarcated by questions of social difference. Knowledge is power and the asymmetrical power relations are structured along lines of difference. Therefore, such differences construct multiple ways of knowing. But this understanding also implies that there are political and social contexts for knowledge, and that these subjects produce knowledge to make sense of social existence from particular standpoints. The body is also implicated in how we come to know and interpret the world. Our histories, politics, identities, social experiences, cultures, and subjectivities position us to know differently. We speak from particular contexts, out of particular experiences, and within specific, yet interconnected histories and social locations (see also Hall, 1991).

Local cultural knowledges are gendered as in cultural festivals and expectations of gender , around social norms and morals, traditional folkloric practices and the meanings embedded in oral stories, proverbs, fables, and tales. Certain traditional knowledge speaks directly to youth (e.g., rituals about age sets in African contexts). In most Indigenous communities we also learn the respective roles of women and men in safeguarding local cultural resource knowledge. In a pertinent article, exploring the relationship between conservation of biodiversity, Indigenous knowledge systems, gender and intellectual property rights, Quiroz (1994) highlighted gender aspects of Indigenous knowledge. She argued that Indigenous people have sustainably managed their environments for centuries, with women playing a key role in preserving biodiversity . Women possess an intricate knowledge about their environment that is distinctive from men’ s knowledge. Unfortunately, such gendered aspects of knowledge (and women’s knowledge in particular) are often ignored by male-biased social science research. The author also notes that Indigenous peoples in general, and women in particular, are not adequately compensated when their own knowledge is collected and utilized by Western researchers and companies. Due to their low social status in many cultures, women are increasingly disadvantaged when dealing with issues of intellectual property rights.

## LOCAL CULTURAL AND ECOLOGICAL RESOURCE KNOWLEDGES, DEVELOPMENT AND TENSIONS OF CHANGE AND MODERNITY

For Indigenous peoples, concern over the continued loss of their identities, cultures, traditions, and histories has prompted a renewed interest in their philosophies of thought. As already alluded to, such knowledge has never been frozen in time and space. They are continually relied upon in everyday challenges of human survival. Despite foreign influences and everchanging trends of modernity and post-modernity, Indigenous knowledges have remained dynamic and evolved with contemporary challenges. In Indigenous communities, such knowledges can be found in their story forms, songs, myths and mythologies, fables, tales, folklore, riddles, and parables. They can be found in other forms of material culture, such as symbolic ornaments and body ware, and the meanings encoded in cultural artifacts. They can also be found in local cultural resource knowledges and practices associated with traditional pharmacology/plant medicine, farming technologies and agricultural methods, environmental management, soils and vegetation classification, arts and crafts, cultural norms, belief systems, social organization of families and kin groups, cultural festivals, and cultural products (e.g., weaving, pottery, poetry, folklore, music, as well as ornaments creatively fashioned from Indigenous materials). Through the power of oral traditions, we witness the flowering of a truly Indigenous literary tradition with succeeding generations of Indigenous communities. Music, drumming, dancing have been exceptional communication modes.

To reiterate, these knowledge systems do not stand apart or as distinct from Western science knowledge. Grassroots development approaches working with local knowledge have integrated different systems of thought. Knowledge is “Indigenous” to the extent that it works within the prism of local cosmologies that are localized in specific understandings of the society, culture, and nature nexus or interface. Difference is central to understanding Indigenous communities and knowledge forms. However, unlike hegemonic ways of knowing that sow the seeds of myriad forms of xenophobia (i.e., fear of the unknown or tendency to treat the unknown as undeserving), Indigenous communities (and particularly their ancestral knowledges) were rarely afraid of the strange and new. These communities and their knowledges actually welcomed strangers. But the local community was also careful not to allow influxes of different traditions and cultural practices to simply overwhelm them. (This is why most Indigenous peoples are often cautious of so-called modern influences that go a long way to devalue their cultures, heritage and histories.) Over time, local/Indigenous communities incorporated the new into the old, made over the old practices and ideas to serve the needs of the community. This speaks to the dynamism of Indigenous knowledge, and it attests to the fact that such knowledge is powerfully ingrained in local community thought and practice. Indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants (which includes information of the different kinds and functions of plants) has developed on the basis of careful observations and experimentation in local habitats. These knowledges go way back into ancestral times, and they are continually subjected to daily improvements and adaptations. Such a body of knowledge about traditional pharmacology is often contextualized on the community’s historical experience with local health and illness situations and has been confirmed by their common usage and societal norms. In effect, it constitutes a collective traditional knowledge that cannot be conveniently dismissed.

Indigenous knowledge also recognizes the important role of local peoples in preserving ecological balance and biodiversity. There are customary laws (e.g., cultural taboos, rites, and rituals) governing individual and community use and relationships to social and natural environments. These

customary practices and belief systems are a form of built-in protection mechanism for overexploitation of natural resources. Local ecological sustainability works when Indigenous peoples maintain ownership status of their resources, where they can freely adopt local strategies of conservation, regeneration, and distribution and control of resources. To think otherwise is an insult to the integrity and intellectual resource knowledge of Indigenous communities. Although such practices of local food trends and 100-mile diets may be popular and seemingly new and innovative, these principles and practices pre-date the modern North American state and indeed emerged out of experience and consideration of the local environment and the food system.

Castro-Palaganas, et al. (2004) have rightly argued that “new development paradigms brought about by globalization and information technology have threatened Indigenous knowledge systems” (p. 1). The dominance of so-called modern science knowledge has largely led to an untenable situation in which Indigenous knowledge is ignored and neglected. With this trend, the authors continue “many Indigenous peoples find themselves in a transitional stage, facing the demands of an evolving and intrusive modern world but their knowledge and practices are still rooted in the traditional lifestyles of the past” (Castro-Palaganas, et al., 2004), especially in such as project planning and implementation. From time immemorial many Indigenous communities have used their own locally generated knowledge to change and to improve their circumstances (e.g., local governance and natural resource management). If local people have long plotted their own destiny, it is important to question why their knowledges are being dismissed in contemporary challenges of charting new paths for development?

Many challenges confront a critical study of Indigenous knowledge. These need to be carefully examined and engaged as our strategies for preserving and promoting such knowledge systems may actually end up leading to the (mis)appropriation of local cultural resource knowledge and heritage. For example, the capturing, documentation, and storing of such knowledge in a systematic way is not without problems. To whose benefit is such an undertaking? How and when do local peoples get to decide on the key issues affecting their lives? What happens to Indigenous knowledge when it is transformed into such codified ways from its orality (see also Dei, 2000; Domingo-Morales, 2002)? How do we include Indigenous knowledge in the modern development planning process as central building blocks of local development practice? As Castro-Palaganas, et al. (2001) note, there is little information readily available to guide project planners in using traditional knowledge. Besides, most development interventions have failed to induce Indigenous people to participate because of the absence of instruments and mechanisms that enable them to use their own knowledge.

## INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES, EDUCATION, AND THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The focus on Indigenous knowledge has a politics that envisions a system of education in Indigenous traditions and philosophies. Indigenous philosophies are founded upon and express thoughts about the ways of life, traditions, and cultures of Indigenous peoples, from which all learners can, and do, benefit. For example, in an earlier work, Chinn (2007) evaluates Indigenous practices positively and critiques the absence of locally relevant science and Indigenous knowledge in the school curricula. Indigenous knowledge is about a way of life. With this reading, the author identifies local issues of traffic, air, and water quality which should be addressed, and the development of lesson plans, utilizing Indigenous prior knowledge, place, and to a lesser extent, culture, to pinpoint challenges of

curricular development. The author's findings suggest that critical professional development, employing decolonizing methodologies articulated by Indigenous researchers, is critical. A methodological implication is the development of a framework for professional development which is able to shift science instruction toward meaningful, culture, place, and problem-based learning, relevant to environmental literacy and sustainability. Let me briefly focus on the pedagogic, instructional, and communicative significance of folklore and proverbs as Indigenous philosophies for educating youth. In Indigenous philosophies, spirituality and folklore are infused into everyday activities such as planting, fishing, burials, and religious and ceremonial events. But folkloric production (as in proverbs, story forms, folk music, dance, art, etc.) is about the totality of a people's experience, a way of life that speaks to the cultural, political, economic, social, and spiritual interconnections of human life and/or psycho-existential existence. Pedagogically, folkloric production can be taken up in the education of the learners. The study of Indigenous knowledge can help illustrate the ways folk culture can be positioned as a creative response to centuries of colonial oppression and exploitation. In documenting folklore as a creative response to colonialism, we can better understand the history of colonial oppression and how local folk culture emanated out of the creative imaginations of oppressed peoples.

Indigenous knowings, embedded in local religions, folklore, celebrations, healing practices, food preparation, oral tradition, pageantry, and work activities, all reveal local understandings of the connections of society, culture, and nature. Indigenous African and Diasporic cultural media, such as folk music and dance, Ananse stories, etc., can serve as useful tools for teachers. Folklore and proverbs contain a profound richness of the thought processes and language of Indigenous peoples. They constitute important communicative tools by reinforcing the epistemic saliency of peoples whose epistemologies are often devalued or negated in the formal educational arena. A careful examination of the richness of ideas carried in such cultural productions gives readers a critical insight into the moral fabric of the community. As Onuora (2009) also notes, the fact that rich proverbial sayings are usually uttered in particular contexts, along with specific explanations, makes it all the more useful as a communicative tool which teachers could use to impart invaluable lessons about the world as seen through the eyes of folk peoples. Proverbs invoke a psycho-spiritual consciousness which combines old and new strategies of addressing ongoing colonial and anti-colonial struggles. Local cultural knowings can be identity devices that shape the Indigenous consciousness of self and environment (John, 2003).

The narrative tradition of folktales can help create awareness about the political concerns of the people within a given locale. Folktales in a post-colonial and ante-colonial context also convey relevant political meanings. This provides a key resource for academics and researchers conducting research on identity formation within the context of the nation-state. Importantly, it makes explicit the connection between nation and state politics as they manifest in folkloric cultural expressions. The vitality of the art of story-telling as a legacy of Indigenous African ancestors is often conveyed in proverbs, fables, and tales. These offer an important pedagogical and communicative tool in the study of language and literature, and they relay important lessons of local history, experience, and ontological perspective on life. The retention of African cultures in the Diaspora shows the cultural continuity in knowledge systems. Indeed, Ananse stories narrated in Diasporic contexts are of importance in a social studies curriculum, as they impart lessons about work attitudes, humans, and their surroundings (see Klein, 1995; Pollard, 1985; Walter, 1966). The continuity of culture and cultural memory itself functions as a signifier of the vitality of African culture in the Diaspora today.

As educators at the classroom, administrative, board, ministry/department, regional, and feder-



al levels debate questions of community integration, whole child education, multiple intelligence-based instruction, differentiated instruction, environmental education, and holistic pedagogy, Indigenous knowledges bring much to offer in all these areas. Understanding the learner and the teacher as embedded producers of community who are as well produced by that community the notion of schooling as part and product of the community is possible. Indigenous conceptions of the learner who never walks alone, and who indeed is accountable to the world around her (including the environment) address a number of the issues raised earlier. Further, as teachers and administrators struggle to understand their students and create relevant individualized approaches to instruction, the community has for too long been overlooked as a source of understanding and knowledge about its children. Educating the whole child is impossible if s/he is understood as divorced from a particular socio-cultural (and we might add environmental) context. Looking toward critical approaches in education, Indigenous approaches and knowledges are key to solving the “impossible” challenges facing educators today.

## THE QUESTION OF CRITICAL INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGIES

As we seek to engage Indigenous knowledges as part of multiple ways of knowing, the question of how we secure/access such knowledge is crucial. A recent collection dealing with Indigenous and critical methodologies is helping to advance the course of Indigenous philosophy. To make a difference such methodological approaches must be anti-colonial in posture and challenge conventional assumptions that undergird Western social science research methodologies (see Smith, 1999). This book adds to the debate by highlighting the basic principles and ideas regarding Indigenous philosophies as anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-imperialistic. We must engage issues of responsibility and appropriation of knowledge as essential dimensions of critical social research. As much as bringing a critical gaze, locating the self, identity, and politics and affirming complicities and social responsibility are important, Indigenous research approach is about strengthening the capacity of local Indigenous peoples to undertake their own research. Indigenous research method poses some key epistemological questions and methodological concerns on critical/Indigenous research. The epistemological considerations of domination studies, conceptual and methodological issues of anti-colonial and anti-racist research; critical social research and the questions of power, difference, identity, and representation in knowledge production are all relevant to fleshing out the boundaries of Indigenous research and dominant social research.

The worth of a social theory should be judged both on its philosophical groundings/merits, as well as the ability of the theory to offer a social and political corrective. Researching Indigenous philosophies and undertaking an Indigenous research agenda must have both an academic and political component. In an Indigenous research approach, our concern is not a more conventional research agenda, using research simply to “generate knowledge about a group of (people),” or seeing our participants as “objects of knowledge.” By its nature, an Indigenous research methodological approach is an activist research agenda that focuses simultaneously on ways that research allows local peoples to claim discursive agency and authority over their own lives and experiences, and which can point to discourses of resistance so as to transform the current social existence. Such a research methodological approach works with local peoples to offer their own perspectives on events, experiences, and developments in ways that can challenge dominant conceptions of everyday world and social existence. The ethical and political tensions in forging a productive Indigenist activist research

agenda are part of the process of claiming multiple ways of knowing, if we are to challenge the dominance of particular ways of knowing (see Bhavnani & Davis 2000 in another context) An Indigenist research approach is itself “evolving” while in the field, rather than “moving from one predetermined step to another” (Fine & Vanderslice, 1991, p. 208).

## INDIGENOUS AND SPIRITUALITY AS RESISTANCE: ASKING QUESTIONS

Resistance as part of the creation of new futures/visions of education and society is a long physical, material, metaphysical, and emotional struggle. For many of us it begins by claiming and reasserting our Indigenous identities. As mentioned earlier, for educators in general we need to develop new pedagogies anchored in our myriad identities, particularly spiritual identities. Reasserting our Indigeneity must embody the essence of ancestral knowing and geographies of cultural memory. Pedagogies of resistance (including claiming spirituality by asserting the importance of the learner's spirit) must be directed at helping young learners overcome the de-spiriting aspects of schooling (e.g., depersonalization of the learner, spirit wounding, and the everyday “humiliation rituals” including Othering of bodies) (see also Sium, 2010). We cannot disconnect ourselves from our surroundings, cultures, histories, and heritage. We must act on the basis of our history and spirituality (see also Asante, 2003).

Meaningful and genuine educational change starts with the exploration of the self of the learner. This means exploring the body, mind, and soul nexus. Conventionally, education has tended to fragment the self/learner, separating the body, mind, and the soul. To initiate change we must re-center the soul and the spirit. Spirituality as has been noted (see Smith, 1999) remains one of the clearest points of difference between Indigenous knowledge systems and Western systems of thought. Spirituality is relational and holistic and it is about a relationship with “nature, cosmos and the universe” (Mazama, 2002, p. 225). For the Indigenous scholar in the academy claiming spirituality is a form of healing, redeeming oneself and embarking upon a revolutionary journey to make the self whole again (see also Reid, 2010).

For many Indigenous and colonized peoples the politics of reclaiming and affirming our Indigenous and local cultural knowledges is a recognition of the importance and relevance of such knowledges in their own right. Yet, we also maintain that such knowledges have a right place in our academies to be shared with all learners. Therefore, in this final section of my Introduction I want to sound off a few cautionary notes as we seek to study Indigenous knowledges in the academy. There are significant challenges as to how we teach and instruct on Indigenous knowledges. Effective teaching calls for a full understanding and conceptual grounding in the systems of thought and bodies of philosophies that constitute “Indigenous knowings.” So questions about who the teachers will be, who the students are and why, are very important. Furthermore, we must ask whether Indigenous teachings allow for an intellectual space for colonized and marginalized bodies in our classrooms to reclaim identity, history, culture, and space.

As we all welcome and encourage moments and pedagogic spaces to claim Indigenousness so as to subvert hegemonic knowings, we must also affirm the particularities and the shared connections of the colonial experiences among oppressed, colonized, and Indigenous peoples everywhere. There is an important caution here: In broaching Indigenous knowledges how do we avoid hyper-localization? As we make clear the local specificities of all knowledges we must also highlight the shared commonalities of Indigenous knowledges everywhere. As educators we must avoid the reproduction of colonial and re-colonial pathologies rolling out in Indigenous and anti-colonial

instructional and pedagogical methods, strategies, and practices. We must meaningfully introduce Indigenous knowledges without trivializing these knowledges in the (Western) academy. We must also note the class, gender, racial/ethnic, and social difference dimensions in Indigenous knowledges. No knowledge is class, gender, race, neutral. There is always the danger for cultural custodians of knowledge to perpetuate particular patriarchal gender, class, ethnic, race, and sexual ideologies. Tradition can be invented in the service of power and oppression. Claims of Euro-modernity continue to impact the dynamics of Indigenous knowledge. As knowledges interact with each other, we see the appropriation of Western forms of modernity that may be problematic. Personally, I have always struggled with some current claims to African Indigeneity that I see as rooted in Western modernity. For example, to understand African spirituality is to distinguish such knowledge forms from syncretic religious practices. Claiming the “Indigenous” is not an end in itself. It is simply a means to an end, that is, decolonization. In effect, we must seek to repair the damage caused by colonialisms and colonial relations to all local cultural knowledge systems. Indigenousness is a search for wholeness and the repair of spiritual, emotional, physical material damage to oppressed communities through colonial practices.

I conclude by revisiting questions raised at the beginning. Can the academy “change its ways”? What are the possibilities of Indigenous knowledges co-existing in the Western academy? What capabilities (e.g., resources and spaces) exist in the academy for this to happen? Admittedly, we cannot simply make Indigenous knowledges fit into the “Eurocentric metaphorical box” by simply transforming the box into what it is not through deconstruction or reconstruction (Giambone 2010, p. 13). What we can and should do is create a new box from the beginning and/or push for the co-existence of multiple centers of knowledges. Contributions in this book offer lessons on many issues in this Introduction. Indigenous philosophies shape the theory and practice of education (broadly defined), and help stem the tide of spiritual “dis-embodiment,” particularly of learners. Indigenous knowledge forms in global and transnational contexts point to the pedagogic, instructional, and communicative implications for decolonized education. Some individual contributions begin with a brief overview of processes of knowledge production, interrogation, validation, and dissemination in diverse educational settings. There is an interrogation and critiques of theoretical conceptions of what constitutes “valid” knowledge and how such knowledge is produced and disseminated locally and externally. A particular emphasis is on the validation of non-Western epistemologies and their contributions in terms of offering multiple and collective readings of the world. Among the specific topics covered are the principles of Indigenous knowledge forms; questions of power, social difference, identity, and representation in Indigenous knowledge production; cultural appropriation and the political economy of knowledge production; Indigenous knowledges and science education; Indigenous knowledges and development in times of change and modernity; and the question of Indigenous spirituality as bedrock for transforming the academy. The book utilizes case material from diverse social settings to understand different epistemologies and their pedagogical implications. Indigenous knowledge is thus defined broadly as local cultural resource knowledge and the Indigenous philosophies of colonized/oppressed peoples.

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## SECTION I

# Indigenous Knowledges as Philosophy and the Implications of Decolonization

## INTRODUCTION TO SECTIONS

Chapters in this book are written by scholars working in the areas of Indigenous knowledges and anti-colonial studies. While our focus is on education (broadly defined), we have planned for the book to have an inter- and multi-disciplinary edge. The book is divided into five (5) sections, with contributions dealing with overarching themes. A good number of the contributors speak from a position of what elsewhere (Dei, 1996, 1999) I have termed “epistemic saliency,” that is, speaking with/from the authenticity of their own experiences and voices, a space that allows local subjects and scholars to speak about their informed knowledge base as opposed to being spoken for. Politically, such epistemic saliency allows us to accord salience to the voice of the oppressed, marginalized, and colonized bodies as they recount and reflect upon the experiences of colonization, oppression, marginalization, and resistance both at the local level but also in connection to larger social and theoretical frameworks.

## SECTION ONE: INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES AS PHILOSOPHY AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF DECOLONIZATION

Section One broaches the conceptual and practical questions of Indigenous knowledges as philosophies of knowing and the implications for decolonization. It is significant to have clarity when engaging “Indigenous knowledge” as a way of knowing, especially given the voraciousness of its critics.

Such issues as the history of colonial and imperial knowledges, the perils of anti-colonial politics and discourses of Indigeneity must be approached from a critical perspective rooted firmly in discussions about knowledge, power, and decolonization. As noted in my introductory chapter, it is important for us to must move away from an essentialized, narrow, and circumscribed or bounded definition of “Indigenous” to recognize difference as well as to account for multiple and diverse experiences of Indigenous peoples under colonialism and imperialism. Particularly in Euro-American contexts we must bring a broad interpretation to Indigenous as beyond Aboriginality (e.g., inclusive of African, Hawaiian, Alaskan, Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit, Metis, Indigenous European, and Asian). While some of these claims may be contested it serves to produce a healthy discussion of how European colonialism has positioned Indigenous knowledges as non-knowledge, backward, primitive, and inferior, as something not worthy of intellectual engagement (e.g., the denigration of Indigenous spirituality as evil, witchcraft, over-mythical, and superstitious, and hence not worthy of attention). This denigration and dismissal of Indigenous knowledges continue today, thinly veiled beneath critiques of undue romanticization, over-mythicization, overglorification, uncritical essentialism, and fetishization that are sure to accompany any claims of Indigeneity.

There have been other consequences. For example, we ask: Why is it that within the Western academy some minority/colonized and oppressed learners do not claim an Indigeneity or/and go to the extent of denying their own Indigenousness? It takes courage to openly engage Indigenous knowledge as oppositional and counter discursive in the Western academy. For many of us, we continually lead fragmented existences as learners. We are asked to put our local cultural knowledges in secluded compounds, not in the open arena of intellectual and public discourse. This is a stark reminder that a vital aspect of the decolonizing project involves the insertion of the whole self into knowledge production and the learning process; the individual experience and narrative are powerful tools in dislodging universal, colonial tropes that posit a universal subject. The Indigenous knowledge that resides in bodies and individuals is vital in securing the enduring survival of Indigenous knowledge and, in these knowledges, holds the possibility of speeding the “painful demise of Eurocentricism” (Asante, 2009).

As pointed out earlier (Dei, in this collection) (re)claiming Indigenous knowledge as a necessary exercise in decolonization is a messy, violent, contradictory, and painful undertaking. For particular oppressed, minoritized, and colonized subjects, resisting internalized racist, Euro-patriarchal notions about ourselves, cultures, traditions, and histories is a tortured undertaking. There is spirit injury on both counts (e.g., both in what the Eurocentric knowledge does to us and in the cost to us/our bodies for engaging in perpetual resistance). In resisting Eurocentric ways of knowing through Indigenous knowledges, there is the need for scholarship which not only challenges the validity of Western conceptions of “truth,” “philosophy,” and “objectivity,” but also, the need to revisit and interrogate how Indigenous ways of knowing are taken up in the academy. This is the task of this section.

George Dei’s chapter, “Revisiting the Question of the ‘Indigenous’” begins with the self and the personal subject(ive) location as critical in terms of what brings him to the topic of Indigenous knowledge. He situates the self as a methodological and discursive feature of the chapter so as for the reader to examine and understand the perspective from which he is conducting the discussion of Indigeneity. The chapter then moves to pose some key questions that guide both the theorization and re-conceptualization of “Indigenous knowledge” and “Indigeneity.” It is argued that “Indigenous,” notwithstanding its contestations, must be applied broadly to include cultural knowledges of local

and Indigenous communities globally. This includes Aboriginal, African, Hawaiian, Native American, and Australian knowledges. Such knowledge resides on the land, and in bodies, places, cultural memories, history, culture, and language. Dei briefly raises the question of who is/is not Indigenous, and/or who has Indigenous knowledge. It is pointed out that, however legitimate some of these questions are, we need to move beyond such preoccupations to ask about the politics of reclaiming Indigenous knowledge and how such politics helps subvert and/or destabilize the complacency of dominant knowings. The chapter concludes by putting forward twelve (12) principles that should form the basis of articulating an Indigenous discursive framework.

Temitope Adefarakan's chapter, "(Re)Conceptualizing 'Indigenous' from Anti-colonial and Black Feminist Theoretical Perspectives: Living and Imagining Indigeneity Differently" also takes up the notions of "Indigeneity" and "Indigenous" from anti-colonial and African feminist theoretical perspectives. She points out that these standpoints provide a critical approach by re-conceptualizing the "Indigenous" and allowing for more flexible discussions where concepts such as "migrant" or "Diasporic" Indigeneity can be imagined and framed. It is contended that this way the unique positionings of Diasporic Africans is accorded a space to theorize the particularities of myriad experiences. Using a study of Diasporic Yoruba Indigeneity her chapter shows that an intellectual and ontological shift in current notions of Indigeneity is necessary if we are to include the diasporic African experience.

Today we are witnessing the resurgence of Indigenous forms of knowing (specifically Indigenous holistic thought) in many local communities after years of European colonial denigration of such knowledge forms. Farah Shroff's chapter, "We Are All One: Holistic Thought-Forms within Indigenous Societies—Indigeneity and Holism" briefly offers important insights about holism and holistic thought from various parts of the world, focusing on Asian schools of thought—primarily Hinduism and Buddhism. Her discussion illustrates the virtually universal, historical as well as contemporary nature of ideas such as "interconnectedness," "unity," and "oneness." In outlining Indigenous holistic philosophical foundations and working with the concepts of unity and oneness, interconnectedness, prana, panchamahabhuta theory, karma, etc., the author pinpoints the efficacy of these systems of science knowledge for education in general. Within holistic cosmologies, two notions are central: "all beings are connected" and "life is circular" By understanding and acting upon the profound nature of these ideas through visualizing all beings on Earth as one big family, Indigenous holistic thought would have a positive impact on the state of the world today.

The socio-political ideology of "assimilationism" has featured prominently in colonial discourses and colonizing projects of "civilizing" and "educating" Indigenous Australian peoples. Marcelle Cross-Townsend in his chapter, "Indigenous Education and Indigenous Studies in the Australian Academy: Assimilationism, Critical Pedagogy, Dominant Culture Learners, and Indigenous Knowledges" notes assimilationist assumptions posit Indigenous peoples, their knowledges, and practices as inferior to Western peoples' knowledges and practices. Indigenous people's survival is perceived to be dependent on wholesale assimilation into the dominant, "superior" culture and language, where the economic and social dominant culture objectives of education override any Indigenous cultural, linguistic, social, or human rights imperatives. Drawing on his own research, workplace practices, experiences, and observations over the past ten years teaching Indigenous studies in a regional Australian university, the author explores some of the divergent contextual complexities, contradictions, practical challenges, and limitations of engaging critical pedagogical approaches to challenge assimilationism and dominant ideology in Indigenous studies in the Australian higher education sec-

tor. The chapter highlights particular challenges of working with predominantly dominant culture learners, the institutional and systemic imperatives of the Academy, and the limited capacity of Indigenous studies to protect embodied Indigenous knowledges from appropriation by the disciplines of the Academy.

Ali Abdi's chapter on "African Philosophies of Education: Deconstructing the Colonial and Reconstructing the Indigenous" opines that as we speak about the general notations and assumed practices of philosophy, we must not discursively and/or analytically escape the overall conceptual and theoretical fluidities that inform the general structure, as well as the overall parameters of "philosophy." That fluidity should also assure us that, however we define and functionalize philosophy its subjective locations will be attached to the social contexts and relationships of the human-inhabited terrains where it is physico-consciously lived. It is with this understanding that philosophical traditions would be selectively Indigenous to all spaces which people collectively inhabit. Such co-habitation refines the original meaning of philosophy from the occasionally romanticized "love of wisdom" into the more epistemically coherent perspective of critically inquiring about and relating to our world. In the colonially driven European epistemic and analytical traditions, Africa and its peoples have been located as aphilosophical, and therefore, devoid of the sophisticated knowledge categories that can create and sustain any reliable educational categories that could implicate effective social development and life management schemes that should be deployed for individual and communal well-being. Abdi challenges the false assumptions about African education and philosophies of education, African ways of knowing and attached systems of Indigenous know-how that have helped sustain peoples and development. He offers some preliminary perspectives on deconstructing the shaky colonial side of the story and reconstructing the life-affirmed context of African Indigenous philosophies of education and attached ways of knowing.

In "Space, Time, and Unified Knowledge: Following the Path of Vine Deloria, Jr." Jeffrey Anderson notes that much less attention has been paid to the philosophical line of inquiry that is integral to the writings of Vine Deloria, Jr., than to political-legal controversies and contradictions, the chasm between Euro-American and Native American metaphysics, and the multiple attacks on various Western scientific paradigms. It is contended that underlying all of these particular aims was the quest to move toward a unified knowledge that transcended the pernicious binary boundaries posed by colonization and modernity, between science and religion, Indigenous and Western metaphysics, marginal and core academic paradigms, and past and present Indigenous cultures. The grand appeal was for dialogue and reciprocity across the imagined borders of specialized and fortified epistemologies toward a unified system of knowledge that genuinely includes Indigenous, metaphysical unities and ultimate concerns, rather than simply estranging them as objects of inquiry and observation. A running thread throughout Deloria's works is to set a path for North American Indigenous communities to return ultimate concerns and turn away from the trends toward commercialization, fragmentation, and chaotically concocted forms of religion. At the core of all of these concerns is the quandary of space and time. With a particular focus on dimensions of space and time that permeate Deloria's project and others to supplement the pursuit, the chapter examines some of the fundamental ways that American Indian models of space and time move toward unified knowledge and identifies the main barriers to spatio-temporally unified knowledge.

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# Revisiting the Question of the 'Indigenous'

GEORGE J. SEFA DEI

A few opening remarks about my background and how I have come to engage this topic; I see the personal subject[ive] location as critical in terms of what brings me to the topic. The contextualization of writer/self as a methodological and discursive feature of any textual discussion is significant. It helps the reader to understand the perspective from which one is conducting the analysis. And by perspective, I do not mean just ideology or analytical framework, but a personal accounting of why I write about what I do. I am a social anthropologist by academic training who has bridged the disciplinary background with a focus on the sociology of education. I have been writing on the subject of Indigenous knowledges since the early 1980s. I also teach an advanced graduate course on "Indigenous Knowledges and Decolonization" at the University of Toronto. My long-term research interests lie in the areas of anti-colonial theory Indigenous and anti-racism studies, minority education in Canadian contexts, and issues of African education. I have been a committed proponent of an Afrocentric school for children and youths of African descent in Canadian contexts. I find current schooling processes that depersonalize, disembody, and de-root young learners from their cultures, histories, and identities quite troubling to say the least. Of course, I am wary of race essentialism. But increasingly, I have also become skeptical of attempts to deny race as part of our identities and as consequential for knowledge production and education. I see a detailed connection between identity, schooling, and knowledge production. I have repeatedly argued that the effective education of African Canadian and minoritized youth rests on the extent to which schools can engage questions of identity, culture, spirituality, place, and history in order to give some sense of a rootedness, connectedness, and belonging to students.

In writing this chapter I seek to claim my Indigenous roots even while today living in a Diasporic context. My Indigeneity is rooted in my African experience, having been born, raised, and

schooled in the surroundings and rootedness in my Ghanaian and African culture, history, and ancestry. Through the passage of time and living in different and multiple places, my local cultural resource knowledges have never left me. As a traditional elder/Chief in Ghana I respect and honor my ancestral knowledge which requires that I bring myself continually in tune with traditional customs, practices, and knowledge that have sustained many local communities over the years. It does not mean these knowledges are static. Neither does it mean that such knowledges should not be interrogated for their sites of empowerment and disempowerment for self and groups. Such knowledge resides in my cultural memory, and I know and use it to guide everyday social action. My everyday understanding and interpretations of the world around me have been shaped by Indigenous histories, cultures, heritage, myriad identities (including spiritual identity), and social experiences. My identity is steeped in my Indigeneity. With formal European schooling systems devaluing my ancestral and cultural knowledges, claiming Indigenous knowledge for me is both a political and intellectual exercise in decolonization. I, therefore, write about Indigenous knowledge as an intellectual and political exercise to subvert and resist colonial hegemonic ideologies and Eurocentric discourses masquerading in the (Western) academy as universal knowledge. I also want to understand the self and take personal responsibility to know me (the self) in order to relate holistically with others, communities and the outer world (see also Fitznor, 2005, p. 8).

As I reflected on my background training as an anthropologist over the years and my on-going engagement with Indigenous knowledges I have grappled with the following question: How might we mobilize the Indigene within the academy? I raise this question because the process of Othering and studying peoples and societies for the purpose of controlling their representation, which my institutional disciplinary background taught me, is not consistent with Indigenous knowledges. There are also tensions arising from the fact that the roots of much social science, arts, and the humanities can arguably be found in the West's historically racist tradition of exploiting, disrupting, and renaming the world of the Other. If we want to drastically change the colonial foundations of our academies, then we should rename and reimagine the academy altogether. And, we must do so in a way that connects them through a multidisciplinary approach and resonates with Indigenous ways of knowing. Pertinent to this reimagining are also discussions that explore how Western science epistemologies and academic disciplines engage questions of politics and embodiment as well as how we come to understand the intellectual practices of spiritual dismemberment and disembodiment. Similarly, issues of place are very integral. Place is more than a location of knowledge. It speaks of a past, history, culture, language, as well as to the necessity to engage with questions of materiality, spirituality, and metaphysical realms. The examination of the structure and logical coherency of Indigenous knowledge as philosophy of knowing should also respond to questions of the moral, ethical, spiritual, cosmological dimensions of knowledge (see also Kincheloe & Seinberg, 2008; Nakata, 2007a).

Postmodern, post-structural, and post-colonial theories as modes of thought have dominated the (Western) academy. The largely Eurocentric schools of thought have become the tacit norm used by everyone who purports to be "critical" to view the world. These discursive prisms/frames (if I may be allowed to name them as such) have been constructed as the sole legitimate yardstick to gauge the intellectual validity of scholarly knowledge. Consequently, they have taken on a hegemonic monopoly over what ought to constitute a legitimate logic of critique. Indigenous ways of critique and reimagination have been tangentialized by this claim of authority. However, Indigenous bodies know too well that, structures and institutions script individual lives differently and resistances are shaped by such encounters. We therefore bring different readings and experience to narrating the colonial and a supposedly "post" colonial encounter. Thus, we need to be mindful of the moments when



critical and oppositional discourses are erased, denied, or discredited. Furthermore, we need to be aware of the dangers of fitting different frameworks (sometimes incompatible frameworks) (e.g., Indigenous and anti-colonial) into Western prisms or lenses that only serve to reify the dominance of Eurocentricity. We cannot use Eurocentric standards to ensure the worth of the Indigenous prism as social theory. It is intellectually foolhardy to claim that dominant standards of what constitutes theory are what theory is all about. Much of what accounted for "theory" in social science disciplines until recently (and this phenomenon persists) barely accounted for the experiences of the oppressed/minority and colonized bodies. One cannot be oblivious to this contradiction in our work. Many of us are still grappling with some of the ironies and paradoxes of our academy [Intellectual] agency is often tied to a "mastery" of the very things one is resisting. Hence the "mastery" of dominant discourses is required in order to initiate counteroppositional discourses. A decolonizing practice rooted in Indigenous epistemologies understands the need for this "mastery" as an intellectual impediment to the project of decolonization. An intentional and practical engagement with Indigenous knowledges from a place that views these epistemologies as critical in their own right might offer a poignant point of references for reimagining. This grounding process speaks to the centrality of claiming and reclaiming of Indigenous ways of knowing and living in the decolonization process.

By claiming Indigenous knowledges, no one is calling for a return to a mythic past or for a mythic return to a pre-colonial past. Nor is the claim a substitution of new forms of imperialist knowledge. It is a recognition of the need to renegotiate knowledge and develop multiple ways of knowing to allow us to be able to read, know, understand, and interpret our complex world.

## NECESSARY QUESTIONS

Indigenous knowledges are contested. In fact, many have pointed to the futility of striving for a universal definition so I will not attempt to offer one here. All definitions are limited and it is crucial that we focus on issues and questions rather than search for neat definitions. As Battiste and Henderson (2000) rightly observed, Indigenous knowledge "is not a uniform concept across all Indigenous peoples" and we must resist the Eurocentric temptation to define, label, and categorize all human experiences (p. 35). I will instead focus on seeking some clarifications on some very familiar questions. In discussing "Indigenous knowledges" I would point out that the key issues must center around concepts of positionality and politics, identity language, culture, and history. We also have to respond to questions around origin, authenticity, and essentialism. Language, cultural memory, and colonization always need to be evoked in a critical investigation of what is Indigenous. Fundamentally the Indigenous should be perceived as mostly about place-based knowing, an understanding of a traditional sacred relationships between peoples and their cultures and cosmologies. These relationships offer a holistic knowledge base to operate.

There is a critique that the term "Indigenous" homogenizes and obliterates distinctiveness and that we need to offer multilayered meanings. Much of this debate seems to gloss over what the term Indigenous might reveal as opposed to what it obscures. For example, the term is a self-application by Indigenous peoples in contrast to the imposed notion of "primitive," "tribal," and "folk" knowledge (see also Purcell, 1998). Hence, the use of the term Indigenous is about a political reclamation and self-definition to challenge Eurocentric dominance. It is also significant to see Indigenous knowledge as knowledge originating from the land (Fals-Borda, 1980). Such knowledges are also dynamic, experientially based, holistic, relational, and connecting physical, metaphysical, and the cos-

mos (see Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 1994; Dei, 2000; Ermine 1995; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999).

A lot of intellectual energies have been devoted to addressing such questions as What is an Indigenous perspective as opposed to a Western-centric perspective/prism or lens? What is the connection between Indigenous peoples (identified with land/territory) and Indigenous knowledges (as localized, culturally specific knowledge but not boxed in time or space, and as knowledge residing in the body)? While the questions are worthy of pursuit, the process ought to be underlined by a recognition of the limitations of binary modes of thought. At the same time it is even more important to recognize the historical and current politics of Indigenous knowledge as “discredited,” “subjugated,” devalued or denied. Indigenous bodies also know that Indigenous knowledges have limitations just like other ways of knowing (e.g., disempowering of certain groups, women, and ethnic minorities; and queer relationships). These limitations, however, rarely serve to undermine the Western rationalism, for example, but are persistently mobilized to discredit non-dominant knowledges.

Creating a space in the academy to discuss Indigenous knowledges in the first place constitutes a political act, a cognitive and affective imperialism (see also Battiste, 1986), it changes the meaning of what you are conveying. That is, it is a political affirmation of the relevance of the past, culture, tradition, as well as challenging and simultaneously insisting on the self of local voices and subverting the colonial and imperial ordering of knowledge. Indigenous knowledges and peoples have been colonized, and today the need for a politics of reclamation of the past, present, and for the future has never been more pressing. This begins by recognizing the degree to which this is underway in myriad places and spaces as resistance has always existed to dominant knowledges and practices.

It has at times been asked: Who is/What is not Indigenous? Who has Indigenous knowledge? These are again very significant questions that deserve critical interrogation. After all, every subject can lay an Indigenous claim to some place and location, somewhere and at some time (see also Churchill, 2003). This is especially a concern when constructions of Indigeneity that are located within historical and contemporary legacies of White conquest, colonial control, domination and occupation have become the dominant socio-political discursive order. We are compelled therefore to heed Churchill (1993, 2003) when he pushes us to think of the limitations (and I might even add possibilities) of claiming an Indigenous identity to land and territory that one is not Indigenous to. On the other hand, claims for Indigeneity that are grounded in marginalized and colonized peoples’ struggles, resistance, and liberation need to be taken seriously within this context as they open up possibilities and creative designs for Indigenous bodies to re-narrate their own experiences and histories (see also Adefarakan, 2010). Furthermore, however legitimate some of the questions asked earlier might be (see St. Denis, 2004), we also need to ask who is raising these questions and why? For Indigenous bodies engaging with debates engineered by dominant bodies might end up serving as a distraction to the project of decolonization and reclamation. We must see some of this questioning as a denial of Indigeneity which serves the latest Euro-colonial project. The “Indigenous” predates colonialism and Euro-colonial impositions of dominant knowledges. Such knowledges have not remained static. In fact, colonialism and the processes of colonial imposition of knowledge transformed (or affected) Indigenous knowledges and vice versa. But such processes do not negate the existence of Indigenous knowledge, Indigeneity, and the Indigene.

Speaking directly of the Canadian context where I find myself located, we also need to discuss the relationship with the land, Indigeness, the colonial, and what has been touted as the “Black or immigrant settler.” The nomenclature of “settler” has a historic specificity to the Euro-colonial, the dominant body, that of Whiteness. Historically the settler has been installed in a particular way,

which worked to erase the atrocities done onto Indigenous peoples. We cannot forget that “settler” is about hegemonic relations with Indigenous peoples, settler is about power and privilege as endowed through the Euro-American body. This is because historically settler has been and continues to be about White civility, settler is about citizenry as citizenry constitutes in a totalizing way what it means to be human. Yet concerning citizenry and the experience of the colonial in relation to settler and Indigeneity, it does not mean the racialized (Black, immigrant) body is exempt from being implicated, given the complexity of this thing we have come to know as citizenry given that citizenry constitutes the legitimating act of belonging to the imperial nation-state. I work with the conceptualization of the “colonial” as beyond being “alien” or “foreign” to anything imposed and dominating (see Dei, 2000; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). Indigeneity forms a certain relationship in and through the land, be it through the geography of time and space, or the tangible good of its materiality. Indigeneity then must be theorized through, as James (1993) notes, *dialectical histories of materialism*. In this way we can come to understand holistically the limitations, possibilities, consequences, and the implications of these historically contested sites, such as the expropriation of Aboriginal land, of what constitutes settler, of the question of immigration, of how we come to experience/understand *belonging*. As well we come to know about the experience of the Indigenous body and about how we make sense of the colonial, not to mention how we make sense of questions of identity, the Diaspora, and the history of African enslavement as contextualized through the contemporary edict of Western globalization.

It is critical and significant for a distinction to be made between the conventional/dominant take about the need for a term/concept/notion of what constitutes “Indigenous” and what Indigenous peoples allude to when they assert their Indigenousness. This distinction is not only helpful in finding the moments when claims of Indigenousness are being denied, invalidated, or negated. But such distinction is also helpful with engaging the points of convergence and divergence, for example, between Aboriginality and Indigeneity. Indigenous is a much broader concept than Aboriginal. The latter is specific to a place. But a broader conception of Indigenous and Indigeneity (which includes understanding of Aboriginality) may also allow for discussion of Diasporic and myriad Indigeneities as well. I would argue that the distinction between “Aboriginality” and “Indigenous” allows us to bring a complex reading to the term Indigenous. One may not be “Indigenous” in the sense of an uninterrupted long-term occupancy of a place, but she or he can still work with the knowledge and politics of Indigeneity.

This clarification is important, given the sometimes-unfounded criticisms that Indigenous has come to mean a singular approach. It is pertinent to ask, for example, who imagines the Indigenous as singular? Most Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems do not imagine their worlds as singular/undifferentiated. Therefore caution must be exercised not to theorize and “interrogate” Indigenous through the established discourses and specificities of Aboriginality and through the Eurocentric essentialization of both Indigenousness and Aboriginality. Making this assertion does not imply the connection between Aboriginality and Indigeneity is lost. Land, for example, has been integral in making any claims of Indigenousness or Aboriginality whether in occupational, territorial, relational, and affinal sense. But the Indigenous allows us to travel to varied, broader and complex terrains and territories.

Theorizing Indigenous and Indigeneity broadly to implicate multiple bodies, spaces, and locations would bring to the fore some additional questions: for example, why is such a project of an expansive definition of Indigenous so necessary and to what intent and purposes? How do we theorize Indigeneity to recognize the ontological and epistemological lineage among some peoples dis-

persed in the Diasporic contexts? What are the implications for the politics of claiming and reclaiming? (see also Adefarakan, this volume). I agree with Adefarakan (2010) that theorizing Indigenous identity raises tensions with uncritical postmodern politics of identity, which presents a singularly valid or acceptable approach to how we vigorously theorize the question of identity. For example, the idea that Africans are “not Indigenous enough” or “not Indigenous at all” (see also Adefarakan, 2010) needs to be troubled. Bringing a broader reading to Indigenousness allows for displaced peoples, transitory, and migratory subjects and many others in Diasporic and transformed contexts to search and lay claim to a sense of belonging. In other words, there is a politics of re-assertion of the Diasporian Indigenous identities as a necessary exercise in our decolonization.

It is when we are able to make the connections between Aboriginality and Indigenousness, and also, draw the points of divergence that we can boldly articulate a confluence of Indigenous knowledge and the question of Indigeneity. The struggle for Indigeneity and Indigenization is about disentangling control of knowledge production from the colonizer and addressing the complicity of local Indigenous elite. It is also a struggle to retain one's identity in the call for a global sameness. As noted elsewhere (Dei, this collection) there are pitfalls and ills of the so-called modernist project and modernization. The tensions and contradictions in the narration and reclamation of Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge exist when it is argued that one loses their Indigenous knowledge simply by being transplanted into a different space from the source of that knowledge.

The politics of resistance to such a loss means one can claim their Indigeneity as a form of identity for political and intellectual purposes. Indigenous knowledge can reside in bodies and cultural memories notwithstanding global migrations, globalization, and the emergence of Diasporic communities. Purcell (1998) points out that “as colonialism uprooted Indigenous peoples it also uprooted their knowledge systems” (p. 266). However, these knowledge systems have continued over centuries to adjust to and persist in new environments. The recognition of the specific situatedness of knowledge forms does not amount to a “fetishization of the local” or the Indigene (Ginsbug, 1994, p. 366).

For Diasporic Indigenous bodies, tensions in the use of Indigenous knowledge are the result of an incommensurability of knowledges. In other words, they are the result of unbridgeable and profound differences that cannot be easily reconciled in particular contexts, for example, some aspects of Eurocentricity and the variegated forms of Indigenous ways of living. The argument raised above has implications for knowledge integration or “cultural interface” (Nakata, 2007a, b). Cultural mixing, however, has always been a human reality/condition.

Given the discourse of “identity,” such hybridity can be an articulation or fusion of two or more disparate elements to engender or create a new distinct identity. But when evoked in knowledge production, it calls for separating the politics of disrupting/interrupting binaries or dichotomous cultural differences, from an affirmation of important differences that separate knowledge forms given their unique characters and differences. In other words, while identities are not mutually exclusive, the politics of reclaiming Indigenous knowledges requires a resistance to the idea that we have somehow lost part of ourselves and our knowledge in the supposedly new and transformed spaces.

As educators within the Western (Eurocentric) academy, the key questions for us to focus on are, in bringing Indigenous knowledges to the academy, what are the specific challenges—staffing, administration, curriculum, resources, pedagogical differences, etc. and how are these problems and challenges to be resolved? Quite evidently place and context are very important to discussions of Indigenous knowledge. Colonization served to destabilize Indigenous knowledge for most communities but it does not mean their local cultural resource knowledge is lost. For example, if Africa or

the African body today has no Indigenous knowledge, then what does it mean to say “Indigenous plants” of Africa? What are we to make of the ancient African civilizations, knowledges about local plant pharmacologies, local peoples’ soils, climate, and vegetation classification methods and methodologies, artworks, and folkloric productions and other cultural artifacts, Indigenous proverbs, fables, talks, songs, proverbs, and local understandings of society-culture-nature nexus? Saying these are “traditional” does not convince me, as the term has historic Eurocentric baggage when made synonymous with “primitive.” The discussion about what constitutes Indigenous knowledges and practices should also transcend the borders of the notion that everything Indigenous bodies practice is Indigenous.

It is imperative to recognize that there has been incessant pressure for Indigenous bodies to Indigenousize Western ideologies and practices, sometimes for survival in local contexts and other times to fit into the Western-centered globalization project order. The whole issue of the absence of colonial imposition is not only significant but also necessary in claiming Indigenous knowledge. When knowledge is imposed it loses its Indigeneity. With regards to the pragmatics of Indigeneity, a recycling of colonially imposed practices is counterproductive to decolonization and serves to perpetuate Western hegemony around the discourse of knowledge production. The separation of colonially imposed ideas from knowledges originating in specific localities need not be confused with a rejection of a healthy hybridization of knowledge systems. On a different but related note, the politics of [re]claiming Indigeneity is different for human subjects (e.g., for some developing a sense of what such knowledge offers humanity in general; for others claiming knowledge to strengthen Indigenous and marginalized groups of the value of the cultural knowings in their own right). This is what the whole project of decolonization is about.

The foregoing discussion also highlights the prominence of the question of origin. How far do we go to claim an Indigenous identity? As noted earlier, a question can be a political distraction. It forces a linear thinking rather than acknowledging that what is important is the rootedness in place, culture, and politics of knowledge production. We must also be bold to question: why is it that claims to be Indigenous to certain places and locations with histories and politics of knowledge creation are contested while others are not? (see Adefarakan in this collection) We believe that origin is relevant if one is defining Indigenous solely to a place. But, as noted, Indigenous also refers to knowledge located within a body even when that body travels out of the space/place/location. Reclamation also requires a consciousness of what one has lost. This consciousness is as vital in claims of Indigeneity as reclaiming is about a past and history. There is the popular adage that it is important to know where one is coming from in order to know where one is going. In this saying I invoke the West African symbol of the “Sankofa” bird who is looking around behind while it watches ahead. The search for new answers can only succeed if we carefully dissect and understand what has failed us in the years before. It could be argued a river never returns to its source. But I like a “return to the source.” Why? After all, every river contains the water from its original source. In other words, as PADjei (personal communication, March 5, 2010) contends, a river carries the source of its water with it! The present is constitutive of the past and we must learn from that history if we are to understand the present and contest the future (Lattas, 1993). For many of us what we seek to “reclaim” is not actually something that has been lost, rather it has been intentionally marginalized. What we are reclaiming has always been around and all we are seeking to do is to bring it to the foreground or surface.

The claim of Indigenous knowledges must be contextualized in a particular Indigenous rootedness. But Indigenous knowledges can be engaged by all learners. Hence, it is important to make a distinction between Indigenous peoples (identified with land/territory) and Indigenous knowledges

(localized but not boxed in time and space, as knowledge residing in body and also, that such knowledge can be engaged by any subject irrespective of body). There is also what I would call “the pedagogic and instructional effect for promoting educational change” through the medium of Indigenous studies. We need Indigenous bodies in the academy as a question of knowledge and representation. In the meantime as we pursue educational transformation, we can engage an inclusive politics of “and/with,” and not binaries of “either/or.” We can work with ideas of Indigenous knowledge to benefit from the multicentric ways of knowing without being bogged down with the important question of the “bodies and their knowledge.”

I agree with Gregory Smith (personal communication, fall, 2009) that beyond creating “educational processes that make a place for the knowledge and cultural practices of Indigenous peoples within formal educational settings we must be bold and courageous and re-invent schools that help all students become [to some extent] Indigenous—of a place—acquainting them with the characteristics of their home places and cultivating in them the willingness to be responsible members of the human and natural communities that support and nurture them.” While this may suggest to some that we need to move beyond the history of colonization and work with a knowledge that people, where they are, need to regain a sense of what it means to be tied to the land and specific human communities in the hopes of creating genuinely sustainable and just societies, it ought not to be so. It is neither a liberal nor a pluralist rhetoric. We can still center history of colonialism, colonization, and decolonization in discussions of Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge. Again I share Smith’s (2009) sentiments that it is important to create a truly transformative educational process aimed at developing the experience of being Indigenous—of a place—for more students. Thus, how our educational efforts can be aimed at connecting young learners to their places in ways that lead to civic participation, engagement and environmental stewardship. I argue for the need to cultivate “Indigeneity” as a means for counteracting “placelessness” and the forms of alienation and environmental carelessness so often encountered in contemporary societies (Smith, 2009, personal communication).

## POSITING AN INDIGENOUS DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK

Here I put forward some tentative ideas in the search for an Indigenous discursive framework (see also Dei, 2008). I am working with the idea that there are culturally distinctive ways of knowing. Humility of knowing is about a respect for the sacred and transcendent (i.e., spiritual sense of existence) and the axiological imperative for us to evaluate the cultural, spiritual, and ideational beliefs, values, practices in the history and contexts of communities as they search for their own moral tone. Each society has rewarded core values (e.g., rights/responsibilities; individual/community) and knowledge that reflects local capabilities, priorities, and value systems of peoples/communities.

The following twelve interrelated principles (by no means exhaustive) provide some conceptual and analytical clarity on what constitutes a critical Indigenous discursive framework:

1. Indigenous ways of knowing as a body of epistemology connect place, spirit, and body (see also Meyer, 2008). The spiritual is embodied.
2. Spiritual identity is a way of knowing. Land and spiritual identity are in fact salient/fundamental analytical concepts offering an entry point in understanding the lived experiences of those who are Indigenized.

3. Indigenous knowledge is spiritually driven or anchored. Such knowledges are embedded or imbued with the spirit. The spiritual becomes the axis on which Indigenous knowledge rests, that is, the substructure or foundation for understanding the social, cultural, economic, material, and political. Therefore, understanding the spirit constitutes an important basis of Indigenous epistemological knowing.
4. Although "land and spiritual identity" (i.e., land-based spirituality) have a special salience that salience should not lead us to a discourse of reductionism or the idea of irreducible/essentialized difference. This is because history, culture, and spiritual identities are sites and sources of asymmetrical power relations structured along the lines of difference (race, class, gender, sexuality, [dis]ability, etc.).
5. Indigenous as place-based knowledge reflected through land, history, culture, and identity has powerful explanatory powers in contemporary communities and socio-political encounters. In the politics of claiming Indigenous knowledge production we must center self, identity, representation, and history. How the self and community are represented and practiced through time, history and culture is an important source of epistemological knowing. The understanding here is that experience and practice constitute the contextual and analytical base of knowledge.
6. Indigenous knowledge is about searching for wholeness and completeness. This wholeness is a nexus of body, mind, and soul, as well as the interrelations of society-culture and nature. To understand is to have a complete, holistic way of knowing that connects the physical, metaphysical, social, material, cultural, and spiritual realms of existence.
7. Within Western cultures knowledges exist in hierarchies of power. Such hierarchies of power are themselves only meaningful in a competitive culture. The competitive nature of these communities itself helps produce "Othered subjects." Claiming local cultural resource knowledge as specific knowledge has broader implications for subverting dominance of Euro-colonial knowledges and Euro-modernity. Indigenous epistemology sees difference as embodiment of knowledge, power, and subjective agency. Creating an "Otherness" is about power and control.
8. A critical Indigenous discursive framework brings three conceptual understandings to Indigeneity: (i) colonialism, in its deep-reaching denial of history and identity, has created unequal outcomes for groups in terms of their histories, engagement of culture and traditions, and spiritual identities; (ii) there are situational variations in intensities of different identities given the effects of colonization and re-colonization; (iii) central to decolonization for Indigenized and colonized communities is the urgency of regaining our spiritual power and strength.
9. It is through a nurturing of opposing stances informed by our relative subject positions and experiences that the dominance of Westernity and Eurocentricity can be subverted. In fact, the Indigenous discursive framework claims the intellectual agency of the Indigene to define oneself. It affirms the epistemological relevance of the Indigene to set the terms of our engagement in dominant culture.
10. A critical Indigenous discursive framework is necessarily anti-colonial. It is about resistance, subject[ive] agency, and collective politics. It centers the agency, the authenticity of voice and political and intellectual interests of Indigenous and Aboriginal subjects in accounting for and resisting oppression and domination. The politics of knowledge production for

Indigenous scholars is to claim our agency through self-actualization and collective empowerment.

11. The Indigenous discursive framework highlights an ontological lineage to communities and a “spiritual ontology” that shapes the politics and forces of social change. This approach to Indigenous praxis cannot be viewed simply as a project of decolonization and the unraveling of the power relations of knowledge production, interrogation, validation, and dissemination. It is about social transformation.
12. Finally, the Indigenous discursive framework critiques the independence of “scholarship,” “politics,” and “activism.” It does not subscribe to the luxury of the independence of scholarship from politics and activism. But the framework is also mindful of not prescribing a particular politics. The learning objective is to create a space to legitimize politics in the intellectual/academic realm.

In effect, an Indigenous discursive framework ought to promote actively living Indigenous ways and spiritualities and the validation of the concomitant embodied knowledges that come from those experiences. It is a framework for both intellectual engagement and day to day living.

## THE FUTURE CHALLENGE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE STUDIES

The examination of the structure and logical coherency of Indigenous knowledge must be matched by an engagement with the moral, ethical, spiritual, cosmological dimensions of such knowledge. Addressing the question of complicity, implication, and responsibility to Indigenous knowledge, means bringing to the foreground struggles for self-determination, cultural survival, land rights, and decolonization. The idea of a discourse of Indigeneity is among other things about the resulting material and spiritual consequences of the “processes of dispossession in a colonial world” (Johnson 2009, p. 2). Indigenous knowledge speaks to the responsibility of knowledge to promote social change. We know that decolonization is an on-going painful process. It calls for engaging discomfort and de-stabilizing knowing. It is about going where we have not been before and asking new questions. Decolonization is also about contesting futures and there are no guarantees with a decolonization project.

For Indigenous scholars we have a particular responsibility to produce, validate, protect, and defend the legitimacy of Indigenous philosophies as legitimate ways of knowing. The power of such Indigenous philosophies lies in the basis of their political and academic discussions and negotiations of identities, representations, rights, sovereignty, citizenship, and nationhood. The challenge still remains in terms of a simple question: Turner (2006) asked whether such Indigenous philosophies are articulable in the dominant’s language, English (p. 116). Two domains of dissemination of knowledge in the form of translation and teaching Indigenous languages deserve special attention in responding to this question. The revitalization of Indigenous languages is key to the success of Indigenous knowledge. Colonial languages have failed miserably to articulate and frame Indigenous knowledges. However, for inter-knowledge transfers/sharing some sort of translation needs to take place. The responsibility for translating Indigenous knowledges lies in Indigenous bodies or bodies that utilize an Indigenous discursive framework. There also ought to be a protocol and ethics root-



ed in Indigenous ways of knowing to guide the translation of Indigenous knowledges. We only have Indigenous knowledges if we continue to teach our Indigenous languages to the younger generation. How have our school systems and our communities fared in this exercise?

What can we say about the pursuit of science when such knowledge excludes and imposes knowledge and interpretations (Wilcox, 2009)? Where and how does the whole idea of a search for a complete/holistic understanding of the history of ideas and events that have shaped and continue to shape human growth and development implicated in what we take as scientific knowledge? What is the place of identity (race, class, gender, sexuality, [dis]ability, etc.) in the construction of knowledge about a people and their past? As noted in the beginning of this chapter, I am always wary about any attempts to downplay the importance of the link between identities (racial, class, gendersexual, disability, religious, etc.) and knowledge production. As Indigenous peoples we must seek to construct our identities outside of that which has often been constructed within Euro-American epistemic hegemony. We must claim all of our identities, inclusive of racial and spiritual identities.

The making of knowledge relating to the past for all cultures is filled with ancestral knowledges, myths and superstitions, spiritual claims, and bits of romanticism (e.g., like what is unfairly attributed solely to Indigenous peoples' past sacred histories embedded in origin place and origin myth rooted in traditions [see also Johnson, 2009]). Understanding the past is to construct knowledge about a people and their past that is holistic. But more importantly, it is to acknowledge that "a discourse of Indigeneity is among other things, the outcome of processes of dispossession in a colonial world" (Johnson, 2009, p. 2). Universal claims to a shared past or collective knowledge are often Eurocentric. The universal is also presented as natural, neutral, and reasonable to deny local variability. As Michael Wilcox (2009) also notes in another context, this "search for *universal* narratives of human cultural evolution has at times obscured historical narratives of the more recent past, that the study of this past is of limited value and that this lack of scholarly interest has led many to believe that contemporary Native Peoples have nothing to contribute to archaeological method or theory" (p. 4). Indigenous knowledge is about past, present, and future and suggests a continuum, and our understanding of the past must be rooted in local cultural knowledges of such past which offers a connection of material, physical, metaphysical, and cultural and moral concerns. The best challenge to Eurocentricity continually masquerading as universal knowledge is to posit multicentric ways of knowing.

Today, the challenge for Indigenous scholarship is more than a challenge to the "representational authority" of dominant scholars and social science disciplines and the humanities. The question of who has "discursive authority" is very much on the table. Indigenous communities are often dispossessed of their land, culture, and knowledge and tend to or are presented to have no voice. It behooves us to acknowledge the discursive authority of Indigenous peoples in speaking about/interpreting their cultures and knowledges in their perspectives "through dialogues with living subjects" (see Wilcox, 2009, p. 5 in another context).

How can an anti-colonial reading help address the intellectual quagmire of post-colonial musings over identity? The Indigenous idea of shared/collective histories, experiences, and identities was never meant to imply these histories, experiences, and identities were or are singular. I agree in part that resistance to colonialism helped foster the sense of shared/collective identities. I also concede that Indigenous identities, "like all ethnic identities are generated through a dialectical process of comparison and differentiation" (Wilcox 2009, p. 6; citing Barthes, 1969). But I would argue for an intellectual agency of the Indigenous. Africans knew who they were before the coming of Europeans. For

Indigenous communities part of knowing the “authentic self” (i.e., who one is) is through a reclaiming of the spiritual self. Why do I say this? Because Indigenous peoples resisted the colonization of their spirits despite all attempts otherwise. Our spirits have never been broken.

## CONCLUSION

As we pursue a decolonizing project through claims of Indigeneity we must expect critique. But critiques should not stop us from doing this work. Resistance read simply as a reaction to colonialism/oppression removes the agency of the oppressed/minoritized/colonized. This, in our ongoing challenge to colonialism, we must work on our own terms, identifying, respecting, and working to sustain a longer historical trajectory, one not rooted in a colonial moment but in our cultural foundation. Essentialism as a practice among the oppressed is a product of European colonialism and oppression. There are historic essences we can point to advanced by the colonizer (e.g., the ranking of racial groups, community knowledges, and making claims using markers of authenticity and the inauthentic). So let us understand history and what challenges we are dealing with. Among the colonized the search for qualifying characteristics of a community does not necessarily mean a search for essences. Indigenous peoples do not only live in the past but also live in the present. There is a code of silence around the epistemic injury/violence that is being caused by colonized bodies being forced to validate their knowledges in standards set by dominant Eurocentric knowings or Western science. Such violence also plays out in both the mis-recognition and non-recognition of Indigenous knowledges.

We must open up the epistemological tool-box and situate ethics within intellectual and scientific work. This will be a recognition of how ethics and epistemology are tied. There is a danger of epistemic insularity, and it must be replaced with epistemic openness based on shared and mutual respect and recognition of multiple knowledges. We must expand the explanatory power of science and subvert the ethnocentrism of Western science. Indigenous people’s mistrust of Western science is grounded in the dominant constructions of truth, validity, and rationality. These constructions are only partial stories. These have also largely been through Eurocentric and sometimes racist tropes. We must challenge the one trick pony of Western science. It must be asked: what standards are being used to validate Indigenous knowledges as science? Objectivity is culturally defined, informed, and based. Practice and experience as contextual basis of knowledge means Indigenous knowledge is lived and practiced. It is not simply based on feeling.

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