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Privilege, Decentring and the Challenge of Being (Non-) Indigenous in the Study of Indigenous Issues

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There are acceptable ways of studying Indigenous issues as a non-Indigenous scholar. Still, the role and identity of the scholar is important and debated within the study of Indigenous issues. The purpose of this article is to accept, but explore the premise of a distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous. I claim the possibility of taking a *decentred* space within Indigenous studies and move towards a methodological and theoretical foundation that is informed by scholars with different stances and backgrounds. A key approach is the intersectional approach to privilege. Neither privilege/oppression, Indigenous/non-Indigenous, nor insider/outsider are binary relations. From Indigenous methodologies such as kaupapa Māori, I emphasise, in particular, the local starting point, arguing that this is the way to transfer relevant issues to a bigger context.

■ **Keywords:** Indigenous studies, intersectionality, methodology, privilege

Who you are matters. Who you are as a researcher and teacher matters. This is a rather basic statement following the last three decades of reflexive research. Doing Indigenous studies, it seems to matter even more. The ways Indigenous people have been the objects of research throughout history is a sad chapter in the history of research. Thus, Indigenous people have good reasons to be sceptical towards non-Indigenous scholars in the field of Indigenous studies. Still, there are quite few scholars with non-Indigenous and/or mixed ethnic identity doing research on Indigenous issues. This is, of course, also a good thing. It would be a lot worse if only Indigenous issues were the interests of Indigenous people.

Being a non-Indigenous scholar and teacher within Indigenous studies, I struggle with what Pease (2010) has termed the 'privileged position'. This might seem a contradiction, which is the starting point of an excursion into the challenge of being non-Indigenous in the study of Indigenous issues. The empirical starting point for this discussion comes from reading scholarly texts from (authorities within) the field of Indigenous studies. Thus, I look to scholars using different approaches or perspectives in their studies of Indigenous issues. This article is the fifth in a series of articles directed towards issues of methodologies in Indigenous studies (see Olsen, 2014, 2015, 2016).

I look into different expressions of Indigenous methodologies, primarily from Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Margaret Kovach and Shawn Wilson, to see how research can and should be decolonised and how the voices of the Indigenous can be made the privileged ones. Looking into decolonisation also calls for an excurse into postcolonial theory even though it will not play a major in this article. Further on, I look into outsider approaches of advocacy, alliances and solidarity. I ask, rhetorically, if such approaches suffice. Following the work of Greg Johnson, Clare Land and Alison Jones, I ask if this is as far as you can get as a non-Indigenous scholar. This leads to the last issue of privilege and politics. Bob Pease challenges all scholars — no matter the personal identity — to be critical towards their own position. Using an intersectional approach, Pease argues that power relations of oppression and privilege are more complex than a simple insider/outsider dichotomy. This is easily transferred to the field of Indigenous studies.

Thus, the purpose of the article is to accept, but explores the premise of a distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous. It is further to argue that there are acceptable ways of studying Indigenous issues as a non-Indigenous

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scholar, and that many of the challenges are directed towards the whole spectrum of scholars. Hence, I claim the possibility of taking a space within Indigenous studies through a movement towards a methodological and theoretical foundation that is informed by scholars with different stances and backgrounds. A possible stance or field is the term *cultural interface,* suggested by Martin Nakata to describe the space for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons living in the border zone between different identities. This relates, I would argue, to *intersectionality* as a fruitful approach to address the complexities of insider/outsider relations. Social identities can both coincide and contest one another. This goes both for the scholar and for the community or society with which the scholar works.

Personal Narrative

To focus on reflexivity is a common approach for the scholar to locate and position herself. A scholar telling her story about herself is a set of statements consciously chosen by the author to articulate her identity or identities. Some things are highlighted; some things are taken for granted. Some things are left out. A potential pitfall is to make the narrative an awkward confession or an apologetic anecdote (Land, 2015: 22–23). I will try to avoid this, when I tell my story.

First and foremost, I am a father, living in a heterosexual partnership. I am from a small town in the north of Norway. Even though this is an area with a strong Indigenous presence through the Sámi, and even though my ancestors are of mixed heritage, I come from a family that today has a non-Indigenous identity. Professionally, I have a position as a teacher and scholar in the field of Indigenous studies at the University of Tromsø, The Arctic University of Norway. I belong to the middle class. All these personal characteristics point towards defining me in a privileged position. I do not deny that. I am most certainly privileged and a carrier of power and position representing a powerful institution.

Nonetheless, there are also aspects of my personal narrative that complicate the story. My parents and ancestors come from a number of small villages in the north of Norway. Thus, my story is also a story about and from the periphery. The north has more or less always (probably mainly the last 150 years) been seen, talked of and acted upon as marginal and of less value compared to the south of Norway. I remember clearly sensing this when I grew up. Both the media and school textbooks were all from the south and providing stories, pictures and cases from the south. They were alienating to young people and students from the north. Starting university, I soon discovered that scholarly texts, too, ignored the north. My main textbook on the history of Norway did not mention the Sámi with more than one word. I felt devaluated. Sometimes I identify stronger with the Sámi than with the Norwegians from the south of Norway. Sometimes it is the other way around.

My own family history is not a history of privilege. On my father's side, the keywords are small-scale fishery and coastal villages. On my mother's side, the keywords are inland villages, small-scale merchants, farms and migration. In both cases, the villages were multiethnic. Even before colonisation, Norwegians and Sámis lived alongside both each other and the occasional Finns and Swedes. They cross married. My great–great grandfather on my mother's side was Sámi from the north of Sweden. On my father's side, the ethnic identities are at best blurry. Some were clearly Norwegian, others Sámi and others were something else. Or a mix. The Norwegian state's assimilation policy worked quite hard in the area. Nonetheless, we came out as Norwegians. My main identity is as a northerner and a villager. Thus, now I talk of and from a position with an outspoken lack of privilege.

My reasons for emphasising also the lack of privilege are not about disclaiming my privileged position. It remains. However, I wish to show the complexity and relationality of privilege. In addition, following Pease (2010: x), I wish to name privilege from within as part of the process to avoid othering and to articulate the often-unsaid incentives of research.

Indigenous Methodologies and the Voice and Interests of the Indigenous

Since Māori scholar, Smith (2010) released her landmark book *Decolonizing Methodologies* in 1999, the area of Indigenous methodologies has become a field of its own. The need to challenge the established research practices alongside the urge and ability to articulate a new paradigm or framework of doing research changed the research on Indigenous issues. The voices and interests of the Indigenous have become defining and necessary.

A distinction needs to be made: First, Indigenous methodologies are reflections on how to do research as an Indigenous person. It is a way of challenging and reflecting upon how you, if you are an Indigenous person, can use and take as a starting point your own tribal or local belonging, identity, worldview and epistemology. If this more particular starting point can be used also in other Indigenous areas than your own is up for debate. Second, Indigenous methodologies are reflections and claims on how to do research in Indigenous areas or related to Indigenous issues regardless of your ethnic identity and background. If this is possible at all is also up for debate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 5). In part, this two-sidedness is related to the concept of 'Indigenous', which is given meaning in its contextual relations. People who are seen and see themselves as Indigenous will in their home regions most often rather talk of themselves as Sámi, Māori, Inuit and so on. The concept and label 'Indigenous' belongs first and foremost to another sphere and context (Dahl, 2012: 4). And scholars use it.

A long line of scholars has contributed to Indigenous methodologies or the Indigenous research paradigm within different disciplines. This diversity makes it difficult and perhaps far fetched to talk of Indigenous methodology as if it were one defined paradigmatic line of thinking. Indigenous scholars from all over the world have taken part in this articulation and development of a way of doing research that does not transgress Indigenous protocols and ways of knowing (e.g. Bishop, 1996; Smith, 1997; Deloria, 1998; Porsanger 2004; to name but a few). Torres Strait Islander scholar Martin Nakata shows how indigenisation of research and of academic work has meant to make a recognisably Indigenous space within universities in Australia, a space that work to culturally affirm Indigenous people and practices (Nakata, 2006: 269).

The texts in focus, in this article, are also expressions of an outspoken indigenisation: Cree scholar Wilson (2008) talks mainly to Indigenous scholars and educators. In what he terms a new, uniquely Indigenous paradigm, Indigenous people themselves should decide which areas are to be studied. Hence, the research needs to be done according to Indigenous people's distinct way of viewing the world. The methodology needed to do research on Indigenous issues must be based on their (our) cosmology, worldview, epistemology and ethical beliefs (Wilson, 2008: 15). Wilson underlines the problematic potential of non-Indigenous scholars doing research on Indigenous issues. This points towards an important aspect of Indigenous methodology: The dichotomy between what is western and what is Indigenous, or between what is Indigenous and what is not Indigenous.

Plains Cree scholar, Kovach (2010), follows up on the dichotomy. She presents Indigenous methodologies on one hand as a subcategory of a western constructivist approach, on the other hand, as being guided by tribal epistemologies that are strictly different from western knowledge (Kovach, 2010: 30). Kovach centres Plain Cree knowledge in her methodology, but recognises the difficulty of turning that into a homogenising pan-Indigenous approach, as well as the potentially critical questions from nontribal people that can be raised with regards to this (Kovach, 2010: 37). Still, she argues that Indigenous people can understand each other across geographical boundaries, sharing worldview and beliefs about the world (Kovach, 2010: 37; see also Kuokkanen, 2007: 59).

I would argue that there is a certain amount of essentialism carried within the outspoken dichotomy. Essentialism claims that Indigenous communities are fundamentally different from non-Indigenous communities. In Indigenous *politics*, this might (and have proven to) be a useful strategy (Smith, 2010: 74; Land, 2015: 102). However, it is a problematic premise for research on Indigenous issues (Anderson, 2009: 82). Metis scholar Chris Anderson argues that density, rather than difference, is a better way of talking about Indigenous communities and identities: Numerous subject positions together form a complex and multifaceted picture of indigeneity both on a local and a global level (Anderson, 2009: 92).

The term cultural interface describes a similar space of relations that an individual person (and community) lives by and with. This space is multi-layered and multidimensional, and shape how you speak of yourself and of others (Nakata, 2007: 199). When Torres Strait Islanders deal with the Indigenous past and traditions, they have to be seen as active agents in their own present. The collective Islander narrative consists of a collection of complex narratives rather than a singular narrative. Notions of continuity and discontinuity may provide good ways for understanding Indigenous people's relation both to other groups of people and to the past (Nakata, 2007: 204–211). Thus, cultural interface, and the idea of numerous subject positions, seems a constructive alternative to simplistic dichotomies or dichotomism (Olsen, 2016).

Kaupapa Māori and the Cultural Interface

Kaupapa Māori has, since it was first explicitly spoken of as education, research, and theory in the 1980s and1990s, become an important approach or movement — also outside Aotearoa/New Zealand (cf. Smith, 1997; Pihama, 2001; Bishop, 2008; Smith, 2010; Hutchings & Lee-Morgan 2016). Linda Tuhiwai Smith, when talking about kaupapa Māori in 2011, kept a lot in the open in her definitional framework: 'It was what it was, it is what it is, and it will be what it will be. It is more than, and less than, other comparative terms. It is more than a theory and less than a theory: it is more than a paradigm and less than a paradigm, it is more than a methodology and less than a methodology' (Smith, 2011: 10). This surely describes well the value, importance, beauty, fluidity and boundaries of kaupapa Māori.

An important aspect of kaupapa Māori, as claimed by Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2010: 186), is the local theoretical positioning. As such, kaupapa Māori belongs to a specific historical, political and social context. Or perhaps more correctly, what kaupapa Māori is will vary from one context to another. The researcher will need to take the particular local community, iwi or context as a starting point for the research. The localising perspective of kaupapa Māori is shared by and often connected to critical theory, especially in being grounded in a particular time and place, and in the politics and circumstances of that time and place (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 9).

For the scholar this calls for getting to know and to use local terms and perspectives regardless of her own ethnic identity. The questions remain: What does 'local' mean? What does it take to be able to use this knowledge? Is it at all possible for the outsider to do local community research at this level? Even though it is easy to support politically the aims of the global movement of Indigenous people, it does not necessarily constitute a precise analytical term, as diversity is one of the main characteristics (Dahl, 2012: 4–6). The question of Indigenous knowledge carries the same dilemma: There is no singular Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous knowledge is always in flux. At the same time, Indigenous people worldwide seem to share the experience of their knowledge being put under pressure and scrutinised by mainstream educational and financial institutions (Battiste, 2008: 498–500). With regards to the local and the global approach to Indigenous studies, some care should be shown. Conflating 'Indigenous' and 'local' practices is not the way to go. Indigenous practices are neither locally bounded nor easily transferable to an international or transnational field (Coombes, Johnson, & Howitt, 2014: 846).

A critical question is of course related to the identity of the scholar. Are there limitations regarding the identity of the scholar doing Indigenous methodologies? Smith argues that even though kaupapa Māori, surely, is mainly for Māori scholars and students, it does not necessarily *exclude* Pākehā (non-Māori newzealanders) scholars and students. Still, kaupapa Māori came out of a particular struggle over the legitimacy of Māori identity and ways of knowing and doing things (Smith, 2011: 11). And kaupapa Māori surely requires the scholar's willingness and ability to use Māori concepts, ways of knowing and worldviews. Lastly — and I would say this is the key to understanding kaupapa Māori — it is not coined for Pākehā. Kaupapa Māori is primarily for Māori.

Education scholar and Pākehā Jones (2012) writes about the challenges related to being a non-Māori doing research on Māori issues. She refers to Māori scholars stating that kaupapa Māori is defined by Māori for Māori and that a non-Māori cannot be involved. In order to be able to do so, they would have to have their authority conferred by whānau (community) or whakapapa (genealogy). This kaupapa Māori principle of being *for Māori, by Māori*, is primarily a political statement of inclusion. It is easy for Pākehā to interpret this as a way of excluding them from kaupapa Māori approaches. However, kaupapa Māori scholars are not primarily addressing Pākehā, but other Māori scholars. Hence, as a non-Indigenous scholar you need to be able to *decentre* yourself in order to be truly informed by kaupapa Māori. This de-centring may be hard to handle for non-Māori scholars who may find it unfamiliar and unsettling (Jones, 2012: 100–102). Still, it is an important dimension of Indigenous studies. What is Indigenous ought to remain in the centre. Looking at the history of research on Māori issues, the suspicion towards the scholars is easily understood. Neither category of the hyphen or dichotomy Pākehā–Māori is fixed or homogenous. There exist important differences within both groups. Still, it remains a necessary distinction (Jones, 2012: 106). To try to dissolve or erase the indigene/coloniser hyphen and replace it with an idea of a unified 'us' is not possible (Jones, 2008: 475).

From the perspective of an Indigenous scholar, Martin Nakata states that not only the non-Indigenous scholar is to be faced with suspicion. The same goes for an Indigenous intellectual. Nakata goes further to clarify that it is the ontology of the western knowledge systems, through the established disciplines, which is the mediator between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understanding. Indigenisation, in such a setting, is about making a recognisably Indigenous space without being limited to plain comparison between two worlds (Nakata, 2006: 266–271). Non-Indigenous scholar Colleen McGloin argues that Nakata's term cultural interface is useful to describe also this situation of academic mediation. The cultural interface is a site of contestation where Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars engage. As such, it represents a space of tension that enables the possibility of a multitude of positions in between (McGloin, 2009: 37–39).

The cultural interface goes well along the idea of decentring. To some extent, the two concepts articulate, clarify and change my perception of Indigenous methodologies. To see the practice of doing research on Indigenous issues as a space consisting of many contested positions opens up the idea of the identity of the scholar. To read kaupapa Māori theories and other Indigenous methodologies as being addressed to someone else but me implies a different reading. It reminds me of how important a decentring of my own position is. Here, I turn normative: Pākehā and other non-Indigenous scholars or students within the fields of Māori or Indigenous studies would just have to accept that the aforementioned theories are written from and by Indigenous scholars and writers to other Indigenous scholars and writers. The rhetorical and polemic statements are not directed towards us/you. That being said, this does not make it irrelevant for us/you. On the contrary, knowing this and having this as a premise reading the literature opens up and makes it relevant.

Outside Looking in: Advocacy and Solidarity

There are quite few non-Indigenous scholars and teachers working on Indigenous issues. They (we) chose different strategies in their (our) relations to different Indigenous communities. They (we) might (want to) be 'allies', 'friends', 'advocates', or 'activists'. Or they (we) may choose to do participatory research or showing solidarity. Concepts like reciprocity are important to describe the relations between scholars and communities (Chilisa, 2012: 174; Clifford, 2013: 249; Olsen, 2016). Non-Indigenous researchers and teachers dwell in a highly contested space. Despite good will and academic skills, they can be seen as symptoms of the colonial aftermath. Even positions like postcolonialism, decolonisation and settler studies can be seen as having mostly recreated colonial residues and relations (Puch-Bouwman, 2014: 408–410). It seems the possibilities for non-Indigenous researchers are few. They (we) remain colonisers.

The relation between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous is a contested one. Postcolonial theory has provided necessary critique towards scholars and research since the 1960s. Hybridity and the place in-between have been important concepts used in order to question binary positions (Bhabha, 2004). Feminist and postcolonial theorist Ahmed (2000) talks of 'strange' and 'colonial' encounters to describe the meeting between (actors from) different groups. As the conditions of meeting are not equal, hybridisation can involve differentiation and the reproduction/reconstitution of dominant identities (Ahmed, 2000: 12–13). For the scholar of Indigenous studies, this thought raises a warning sign — despite the intentions behind the research.

Those having a privileged position doing research on issues related to people in less privileged positions are in danger of reproducing privilege and lack of privilege despite their good intentions: 'The very act of writing a book on privilege is itself a form of privilege' (Pease, 2010: 32). However, it is not that common that privilege is being interrogated. Oppression and the situation of the oppressed are more often chosen topics both by authors coming from the oppressed groups and by authors coming from the privileged groups. Whiteness studies are an exception to this (see, for example, Moreton-Robinson, 2011).

Non-aboriginal social work scholar Clare Land warns against the many pitfalls of non-Indigenous activists and scholars working for Indigenous rights. Patronising and paternalistic treatment from the outside is a common experience for aboriginal communities. Land calls for a solidarity that is directed towards decolonisation, and for a decolonisation of the way solidarity is undertaken (Land, 2015: 4–7). The non-Indigenous scholar and student should also be warned against believing that they will be gratefully and enthusiastically welcomed. Instead, they may experience being held in suspicion by Indigenous communities (Land, 2015: 117). Non-Indigenous academics may experience the interface of their practice as a site of struggle, wherein a number of power relations is working (McGloin, 2009: 41). In this era of suspicion and struggle of a more or less righteous kind, it is the time to seek dialogue (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 6).

For non-Indigenous scholar of religion and Indigenous issues, Greg Johnson, the question of advocacy, has been acute in his research on Hawaii and in North American Indian repatriation cases. Johnson explains advocacy as being implicated, and to be implicated is to compromise critical distance, and moves on to give a definition of advocacy in the context of academic work: 'Any intentional action taken by the scholar that in some way — however maximal or minimal — facilitates the political goals of an individual or group, whether directly or indirectly [. . .] Thus construed, advocacy can range from highly visible performances to off-stage actions that are often quite mundane' (Johnson, 2014: 3). The main principle in his advocacy is to keep it 'off the stage', that means out of his published scholarship. The boundaries are not clear here, and Johnson admits that his work is located within shades of grey when it comes to advocacy and neutrality (Johnson, 2014: 7). Central here is the claim to make explicit what you are doing and on behalf of whom when you are doing your research. This goes also for the scholar doing research on Indigenous issues — no matter your Indigenous or non-Indigenous identity.

In my research, my starting point is being careful about taking a stand. Nonetheless, there are cases and issues that require doing this. On issues of education and Indigenous peoples, I aim for my research to address the way the Sámi have been treated in the educational system (Olsen, 2016). I also take a stand against monolithic and simplifying presentations of history and society, no matter if they come from Indigenous or non-Indigenous storytellers (Olsen, 2014). In the field of gender, a certain advocacy is called for. Gender tends to be downplayed in research on Indigenous issues. My take is to search for blindness and bias, and thus to add gender to Indigenous studies and indigeneity to gender studies (Olsen, 2016). In my series of articles on issues of methodology, the stand is clear: I advocate for issues of gender and power issues to be integrated parts of Indigenous studies.

Good intentions and aspirations of reflexivity aside, I do get a wee bit uncertain when it comes to the relation between the researcher and the research participants/communities, or between the teacher and students from Indigenous/non-Indigenous communities. Non-Indigenous scholars and teachers who seek dialogue must construct stories embedded in the landscape through which they travel (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 6). Such a metaphor sounds plausible, but I worry slightly about the difference between traveling through and dwelling. Research seems to have a tendency both to base its actions on and to reproduce the social distinctions between the researcher (I/We — the travellers) and the researched (You/The Other — the dwellers). With reference to Indigenous peoples' experience of colonisation, I remain uncertain of the connotations of the unforeseen implications of research done by non-Indigenous scholars. This calls for an even more careful approach to the many strange encounters happening.

Privilege and Politics: Undoing Unearned Privilege as a Scholar

The different outsider perspectives are all based on a relation of difference between the researcher and the researched. As a scholar and a teacher, you need to be aware of power asymmetry and critical of the role academics historically have played. Still, the issues and relations of privilege and dominance are rarely dealt with, to any extent, in relevant research.

As a result of working — and siding — with the marginalised and oppressed, non-Indigenous social work scholar, Bob Pease has reflected critically on his and his fellow researchers' role. He argues that his own position, identity and belonging — who he is — become part of the problem (Pease, 2010: viii). This is easily transferred to the field of Indigenous studies as shown in the discussion on decentring and the cultural interface. The encounter between scholar and field/community is an issue here. How symmetrical and/or asymmetrical is this encounter?

This is part of the scholarly reflection not only on the nature of oppression and the situation and position of the oppressed. Emphasis also needs to be put on the nature of privilege and the situation and position of the privileged. This is not a call for the privileged only to research privilege. Rather, there is a dynamic relation between the privileged and the oppressed. It may be easier, though, to identify the experience of subordination or oppression than it is to recognise how you belong to a privileged group whose thoughts and actions oppress others (Pease, 2010: 21). Geonpul scholar Aileen Moreton–Robinson claims the need to do (and the lack of) research on the intersections of Indigenous sovereignty, whiteness and race. She calls for a critical view on how whiteness functions as the invisible norm against which others are judged in the construction of identity and representation (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Moreton-Robinson, 2015: 129–130). At the same time, whiteness and nonwhiteness, indigeneity and nonindigeneity, are not binaries. There are spaces in between – in the cultural interface.

The intersectional approach opens up for the spaces in between, for the recognition of differences between women and between men, not only between women and men. Using an intersectional perspective, regardless of how you term it, enables you to understand people as belonging to a diversity of contexts and/or identities at the same time. It stops you from looking away from other social identities and conditions in the understanding of the expressions of Indigenous identities. Within one particular Indigenous community, there can be a whole line of differing and different kinds of Indigenous identities – decided by gender, class, profession, age, religion, ability and other social dimensions. A main point is that people's lives are affected/governed by more than one social identity, as race, class and gender (Brunn-Bevel, Davis, & Olive, 2015: 3–4). Intersectionality is, in particular, used within women's and gender studies related to postcolonial perspectives. It is well known how black feminists criticised white feminists for not seeing the race dimension of oppression. White feminist women have privileges through their whiteness despite being oppressed as women. In the work with privilege/oppression relations, there is a great need to move beyond static categories. Gay men may take part in the oppression of lesbians, black heterosexuals in the oppression of black gay men, working class men in the sexist oppression of women, and so on (Pease, 2010: 21–23).

Related to Indigenous communities, it is easy to see the same pattern. Aileen Moreton–Robinson's main case in *Talkin up to the White Woman* is how white feminist women have been unable to see and understand Indigenous women (2000). Within Indigenous communities, there is diversity and difference. Even though Indigenous people are seen as belonging to marginalised and vulnerable communities, there are differences in power as well as internal relations of privilege and oppression. Sexism and the general oppression of women is a huge problem in First Peoples communities in Canada. There is a need for developing an Indigenous feminism to address these issues. So far, such claims have been met with silence, ridicule and harsh criticism. Some aboriginal elders and leaders even have argued that feminism is alien to and opposing Indigenous politics (Green, 2007: 15). Ideologies of race, gender and class are also said to have interacted in complex way to suppress Māori women (Pihama, 2001: 257). An intersectional perspective can constitute a shared ground for scholars and students from different disciplines doing Indigenous studies.

Coast Salish scholar, Hunt (2012), describes how research participants in the Coast Salish community encountered the concept of intersectionality as something already known: The interconnectedness seemed well known despite the non-Indigenous background of the concept. The emphasis of intersectionality on the complex system of individuals and structures does make a good argument.

An important and complex matter also regarding privilege and oppression concerns the question of individuals and structures. Even though structural levels of privilege are sustained and reproduced by more or less conscious beliefs and practices of privileged individuals, privilege is not predominantly an issue facing individuals. Instead, privilege is located in institutions, policies and normalised cultural practices (Pease, 2010: 170). Changing privileged people will not necessarily abolish privilege. This, of course, clearly has implications for the scholar or student of Indigenous studies reflecting on her own position and personal identity. The issue of privilege and oppression is primarily an issue of structure and system more than an individual issue. No one can escape her being part of a privileged or an oppressed side in a complex power relation. Being a non-Indigenous student or scholar, you can reflect openly on what kind of privilege that impacts you and what kind of privilege you carry with you into your research.

Undoing Privilege and De-centring the Scholar

As a non-Indigenous scholar of Indigenous studies, I follow in colonial footsteps. Despite the intentions I might have, my scholarly positions are symptoms of the colonial aftermath. I cannot claim legitimately to do kaupapa Māori or other kinds of truly Indigenous research paradigms or methodologies. As a non-Indigenous scholar, I can only go so far as my limitations of being non-Indigenous carry me. These are important insights. Towards the end of the article, I will move towards articulating a methodological and theoretical foundation consisting of (1) the need to privilege the Indigenous; (2) an intersectional approach to the different encounters; (3) the use of critical (and disharmonical if necessary) perspectives; and (4) decentring as an approach to avoid all kinds of othering.

Privileging the Indigenous and the Indigenous Privilege

In the study of Indigenous issues, there are some fundamental difficulties related to language and knowledge. This can be about epistemological access. Not all — not even every Indigenous person — have access (Kuokkanen, 2007: 59). Margaret Kovach argues that the Indigenous perspective, to a great extent, is to have privilege, and that it is also a question of resistance, resilience and language. Indigenous knowledge resist the culturally imbued constructs of the English language. From this perspective, western research and Indigenous inquiry can walk together only so far (Battiste, 2008; Kovach, 2010: 30). I would say this is fully acceptable, even for the non-Indigenous scholar. The non-Indigenous scholar is and should accept to be more limited. I still do not think we have to part ways. Rather I would suggest that more or less Indigenous and more or less non-Indigenous scholars could travel and dwell together albeit sometimes in different ways.

Collaboration remains a challenge. It is quite easy to understand the scepticism from the Māori scholars to their Pākehā colleagues, as Pākehā have not been able to integrate into Māori society in the last 200 years. How can Pākehā researchers expect to work with Māori successfully on Māori terms? An important step towards achieving this is the acceptance of the fact that the western assumptions about the ultimate knowability of things not always (or rarely) are in line with Māori ideals of how knowledge is shared or given (Jones, 2012: 107–108).

As a non-Indigenous scholar and student, it is important to be able to de-centre and put oneself outside the privileged position of defining what counts. Part of the western legacy is the claim to name and define. This must be resisted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 5). Similarly, it is of huge importance to acknowledge the Indigenous privilege and right to define terms and to set the agenda. Consequently, there are issues that a non-Indigenous scholar or student has to be careful not to step into. There are issues and agendas that are defined and set by others. The researcher should seek to be informed by and promote an Indigenous research agenda (Land, 2015: 27). I would even like to see agendas talked of in plural. There is not one single Indigenous research agenda. There are numerous subject positions available (Anderson, 2009: 92). There are several ways of arriving somewhere or at a particular standpoint (Johnson & Pihama, 1995: 83).

The Complexity of Insider/Outsider Perspectives

That being said, I would be equally careful when it comes to setting strict boundaries between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous. Such a divide — when holding a premise of purity on each side — is ridiculous, impossible and colonial (Land, 2015: 85). There are many issues that contribute to make this relation more complex. One is the unsolved tension between talking of Indigenous as a local term and talking of Indigenous as a global term. Still, one meaning of the word continues to have an impact on the other. For the insider/outsider debate, this leads among other to the question of whether or not an Indigenous person from one part of the world can (claim to) be an insider in the understanding of an Indigenous community in another part of the world.

The development of global indigenism has opened a lot of doors leading Indigenous people to experience companionship across geographical boundaries (Dahl, 2012). I acknowledge this. However, despite the obvious importance of the concept of Indigenous peoples from international treaties and from the discourse(s) of global indigenism, I am not sure that this concept works as an analytical category. All scholars need to clarify which hat they are wearing in all scholarly situations (Tafjord, 2013: 231). This means that the Indigenous scholar or student from one part of the world can be an insider in studies related to the global community of Indigenous people. However, she cannot necessarily be an insider in a study of a local community different than her own. She can — of course — *choose* an insider's approach in both cases. As can the non-Indigenous scholar and student — with all the challenges related to this approach (Olsen, 2016). Scholarly suspicion — understood as suspicion towards scholars — goes both ways (Nakata, 2007).

The use of intersectional perspectives also points towards a complex matrix of insider/outsider relations. Having as a starting point that social identities can both coincide and contest one another, as a scholar or student you will have to look at both people and communities (and texts, for all that matter) as being multivocal and multidimensional. There is a constant need to contest exclusionary and/or one-dimensional approaches to research, no matter the research focus (May, 2015: 7). A person is never only Indigenous or non-Indigenous. An Indigenous person can be a woman who is young and from a big city and with a middle class background and Protestant and a non-lesbian and with a disability. This surely blurs the issue of being an insider. Some situations may lead to one aspect of her identity contesting or strengthening or hiding other aspects of identity. If she is the one studying, she can ask how her different aspects of identity impact her research in different situations.

The issue of critique has been a difficult one. Most often the current critique is directed towards colonising tendencies in past and present. Kovach (2010: 37) gives a warning note on raising questions to a pan-Indigenous methodology: Such questions have primarily come from nontribal people. Shawn Wilson goes one step further claiming from what he has been taught from the elders that research should focus primarily on the positive and on harmony. To do research on the negative will give more power to disharmony and create alienation or lack of relationship (Wilson, 2008: 109). Claims like these have a double edge. They are surely about respect and protocol in the encounter with actions and words that matter to people. On the other side, they can be seen as part of a tradition, from which there is a potential consequence of silencing what is outside the Indigenous mainstream. Issues of women, class and sexual minorities are quite often not that harmonious. Male Indigenous leaders have been known to try and actively silence issues related to gender, in particular, violence towards women and the representation of women in politics and organisation, (Green, 2007). A potential pitfall of the emphasis on harmony is the reproduction of marginalisation (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008: 56). Intersectional approaches can be a way to avoid unwanted silencing. The different arguments for using intersectional perspectives share one important aspect or idea. They open up for power, conflict and potentially negative aspects of culture or community, and part way with more harmonising approaches.

No matter the identity of the scholar or student, problematic topics need to be addressed in research. Nakata (2010), Smith (2010: 10), Land (2015), McGloin (2009) and Olsen (2016) give valuable advice of the importance of raising critical questions regarding the ownership of research, the danger of one-sided approaches and the need to remain respectful also when being critical.

De-centring Research: Personal Narrative Revisited

Who you are matters. I could turn this around: Who I am matters. But as human beings, You and I are multifaceted. I bring onto the table not only my primarily non-Indigenous identity. I bring my male identity, my being a father, my being from a family of northern villagers. All matters. I still find it important not to make my research being primarily about me. That would be counterproductive and not very interesting. What I need is to be able to decentre myself through the reflection on what I bring to the table.

Decentring is about escaping or trying to avoid all kinds of othering. In Indigenous studies or in relation to Indigenous communities — yours own or someone else's — to reach an understanding means coping with cultural differences. This is about learning *from* the other more than learning *about* the other (Jones & Jenkins, 2008: 471; see also Land, 2015: 119). Such a statement or ideal implies a paradigmatic change within Indigenous studies' neighbouring fields. It demands work. I recognise the difficulties of this change. Alongside the local perspective and starting point, these are for me the keys to do Indigenous studies properly and beyond the encounters' initial strangeness.

At the end of the day, this is the lesson I, as a non-Indigenous scholar, have been taught reading the literature on Indigenous methodologies from kaupapa Māori to Plains Cree philosophy: It is about decentring. It is about the scholar not being the centre of attention, not being the centre from where legitimation comes from, not being the measure of what is right and wrong regardless of her Indigenous or non-Indigenous identity. It is about not defining what is normal or natural. And it is about not resting all knowledge on the scholar's own experience. Decentring is undoing privilege. So I read the texts and listen to the stories on Indigenous methodologies as not written primarily to me. I read them as texts that can inform me in the cultural interface that constitutes the practice of doing Indigenous studies.

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