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There's a simple reason why I want a huge "Yes" vote on the Aboriginal question at next Saturday's referendum: *I want to be accepted by white Australians as a person.*

For Dixon, the referendum was not an exercise in constitutional reform, but an affirmation by white Australians that he was a human being.

RESHAPING THE UNIVERSITY: RESPONSIBILITY, INDIGENOUS EPISTEMES, AND THE LOGIC OF THE GIFT

Rauna Kuokkanen

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Rauna Kuokkanen prefaces her book with a description of the river Deatnu and the lives of her Sami people, who live beside the river. The river forms a link between people as well as being a border between Norway and Finland that artificially divides Sami people into different citizenships. She takes a deconstructive approach to exploring the relationship between coloniser and colonised, that she finds reflected in the fluidity of the Deatnu. Moreover, she takes seriously Jacques Derrida's idea that deconstruction is hospitality, a way of welcoming the other and acting responsibly toward the other. The scholarship here is vast and meticulous, generously sympathetic and critical. Kuokkanen engages with Indigenous, postcolonial, feminist, literary, and continental discourses. Short literary excerpts are also placed in the text as another mode of theorising for the readers to reflect upon. She writes that she is "interested in Spivak's notions of productive crisis and interruption: the idea of bringing various, even opposing discourses together in such a way that they critically interrupt one another" (p. xiv). Furthermore, her experience and the experiences of other Indigenous people are essential to her construction of theory. Although she acknowledges myriad differences between Aboriginal peoples, Kuokkanen argues that "whatever their historical, political, social, economic and geographical differences, the world's indigenous peoples share certain experiences of colonialism as well as certain

fundamental values and way of viewing the world" (p. 11). The project in the book is to sketch an approach that will interrupt dominant academic discourses. Kuokkanen's own experiences of finding it difficult to speak and be understood when expressing Indigenous epistemes outside Indigenous studies courses stimulated her to write.

For Kuokkanen, the core issue is "the sanctioned ignorance of the academy at large" (p. 1). This ignorance is both sanctioned and, in a sense, a willful ignorance as even well-meaning people avoid discovering more about Indigenous philosophies. She makes a distinction between epistemologies – views concerning the nature of knowledge – and epistemes, which include these views, worldviews in general, ontologies and ethics. Unlike Michel Foucault, she believes that epistemes can be concurrent (p. 58) and argues that Indigenous epistemes based on an engagement with the world must be embraced by the university. These epistemes differ from Eurocentric ones in being "relational, participatory, and narrative modes of being in and knowing the world" (p. 121). Epistemic ignorance may take the form of not knowing at all or the form of devaluing Indigenous knowledge, such as relegating Native American literature to the anthropology department (p. 69). Central to the book is an examination of Derrida's work on the impossibility of the gift (1992). Kuokkanen, while finding Derrida's analysis of the gift extremely useful, criticises Derrida and develops her own understanding of the logic of the gift. This discussion of Derrida on the gift is extremely productive in providing a critical perspective on his work. For Kuokkanen, the gift as such is only impossible within a non-Indigenous framework and the gift of Indigenous philosophies is only impossible because of the epistemic ignorance of the academy (p. 7). If Aboriginal worldviews are taken seriously, Kuokkanen argues, the gift is possible and even more, it is necessary. Although the gift enables a critique of the logic of exchange, she concedes that her conception of the gift does not entirely undermine the exchange paradigm (p. xiv). Kuokkanen sees the gift as a way of understanding how institutions could exemplify a greater openness or hospitality to Indigenous epistemes. For her, "The logic of the gift foregrounds a new relationship – one that is characterized by reciprocity and by a call for responsibility to the 'other'" (p. 2). This new relationship has to be one that profoundly alters the western and European orientation of universities, which is reflected in intellectual traditions and disciplinary boundaries.

The gift is both practice and paradigm, and Kuokkanen explores both these aspects of the gift in her work. To develop her critique of Derrida, Kuokkanen describes examples drawn from her own experience, that of Native Americans, the Indigenous people of British Columbia in Canada, and others.

The concept of the gift itself is important to many Indigenous epistemes “which emphasise individual and collective responsibility for preserving the balance of the socio-cosmic order” (p. 7). The gift provides a way of thinking about human relations with each other and with nature. This means that it is beyond mere relations of exchange between human beings. Kuokkanen shows how Pierre Bourdieu’s account of the gift as symbolic violence ignores the genuine giving and sharing in Indigenous gift-giving. There are gifts known as “threshold gifts” or “gifts of passage” such as Sami “grave gifts” where the dead are given food, tobacco and other gifts. She writes: “The purpose of this kind of giving is profoundly social and spiritual: it is to ensure an ongoing good relationship between the deceased and the surviving relatives” (p. 27). Gifts may also be given to gods and nature as an expression of gratitude. She is not suggesting that the gift does not exist in other contexts, but that the caring and co-operative nature of gift-giving is devalued in capitalist, patriarchal economic systems.

Furthermore, the gift reflects an episteme “characterized by the perception that the natural environment is a living entity which gives its gifts and abundance to people provided that they observe certain responsibilities and provided that those people treat it with respect and gratitude” (p. 32). Gifts are not given in order to receive something in return but to preserve the balance of the natural world and thereby social relations. Kuokkanen discusses the Sami *sieidi*, or places where gifts are given as thanks to spirits and to ensure fishing and hunting luck (p. 35). While such gifts are often interpreted as sacrifices, she argues that they are better understood as expressions of respect and a close relation to land. These kinds of gift are not an exchange as they involve a circulation that is not meant to increase wealth but to care for members of the community. The responsibility involved in the gift is for Kuokkanen a model for ethical relationships and for research practices. The *potlatch*, which Western colonists in Canada found so threatening they outlawed it, also provides a way of interpreting the threat universities can find in Indigenous epistemes.

Kuokkanen distinguishes her concerns from an exclusive focus on race and ethnicity issues, which she argues do not capture the specificity of Indigenous issues; analysis has to include “colonial history and contemporary colonial, capitalist and patriarchal relations that extend beyond racism and racial discrimination” (p. 63). Furthermore, this analysis should consider the effect of these relations on marginalised philosophies. Kuokkanen is clear that although Indigenous philosophies involve alternative worldviews, they are views relevant to non-Indigenous people (p. 25). Thus far they have not been properly welcomed. She discusses the limited ways in which the University of British Columbia (UBC) has recognised the Musqueam people of

British Columbia through the First Nations House of Learning or Longhouse which is a gathering place for First Nations Students, the First Nations language program and programs and internships offered by the UBC Museum of Anthropology. While Kuokkanen respects these efforts, she argues that they do not affect the university’s general assumption of the role of host. Nor do they take the responsibility of receiving Indigenous philosophies.

For Kuokkanen, the problem is not just one of Indigenous people being allowed to speak, as they often are, albeit in tokenistic ways, but of others being prepared to listen and hear. The first step to doing so is acknowledging the limited nature of Western philosophies and the ignorance of and indifference to Indigenous worldviews that pervades the academy. Universities should also acknowledge and express gratitude for the gifts of the land. Kuokkanen’s use of the concept of hospitality to explain her view is both interesting and nuanced. First, she describes how Indigenous people in Canada, for example, welcomed colonists as guests with an unconditional hospitality, but the guests, like the academy, became guest-masters who transform “a welcome into a politics of finite hospitality” (p. 131). In Derrida’s work, unconditional hospitality is an unquestioning welcome, whereas conditional hospitality is limited and restricted, based on an invitation. Kuokkanen argues that the academy must practice an unconditional hospitality to Indigenous epistemes that assumes the risks of this openness.

While the gift is beyond reason in the sense of calculation and the determination of borders, it is possible in the academy: “The ideology of imperial rationalism and the logic of colonial hierarchies must be replaced by the logic of the gift, which is characterized by principles of reciprocity, recognition, and responsibility toward others” (p. 87). These principles point to the way that a gift is not only given, but is also received; thus the responsibility of universities is to receive the gift of Indigenous philosophies properly. This gift becomes possible when the logic of exchange is not in operation. Kuokkanen argues, contra Derrida, that recognition makes the gift possible in relation to indigenous epistemes. Her use of recognition is distinct from more familiar forms. She sees it as involving Indigenous peoples’ relationship with the land – “a form of reciprocation and participation, not just among humans but among all living beings” (p. 95). Living beings and the land are recognised when people act on their responsibilities, showing respect and gratitude.

Academics tend to attempt to justify ignorance of Indigenous epistemes by expressing worries about appropriating Indigenous knowledge and this being another form of colonialism. Nevertheless, there are genuine concerns that Indigenous epistemes will only be treated in imperialistic ways, as when indigenous

people are regarded as “native informants” for non-Indigenous projects (pp. 82-85). Kuokkanen takes an optimistic view that the alternatives can be navigated: beyond exclusion and institutionalization lies the possibility of a change in the mainstream based on accepting the gift of Indigenous epistemes. It also involves an ethics of openness to the other that in the university context means learning rather than knowing a series of facts. She sees this in terms of ethical singularity or a recognition of the distinctness of the other. She writes “Ethical singularity requires not only patience but also acceptance that there will always be gaps, that the ‘other’ can never be fully known, that there will always be something that has not got across” (p. 118). Acceptance of this limitation to learning helps to deal with the fear of appropriation.

However, as Kuokkanen notes, there are difficulties in convincing academics in the current university environment to be open to the logic of the gift she outlines. That environment is less open in certain respects than in previous decades “because of the pressures of corporate accountability, we are in fact witnessing an opposite development: cut-throat individualism and academic anxiety for excellence are now precluding the possibility of ethical singularity as well as any commitments we might feel to engage with others in non-exploitative terms” (p. 119). This environment is an extreme expression of the very exchange logic that Kuokkanen wants to replace with the logic of the gift. This gift logic is one that involves sharing and giving back but not something of equal value to what has been given or to the same people who originally gave. Giving in this sense is a form of circulation rather than exchange (p. 145).

As Kuokkanen recognises, there is a temptation to expect very specific, concrete recommendations as to how to be open to the gift of Indigenous epistemes, that would involve policies, curricula, and reading lists. She avoids this approach as this misconceives the gift, which involves an on-going process and commitment. If lists were provided, this would obviate the need for an active concern with overcoming ignorance. That said, the book itself is an enormous resource and some suggestions are made. What Kuokkanen is calling for is not just inclusion of Indigenous “content” in university curricula but examination of and change in interpretation and analysis. The teacher has to learn from others in order to be able to teach. Universities need to examine their own practices of domination and share power by having Indigenous representatives involved in decision-making (p. 150). Academics need to reject epistemic arrogance and claims to academic disinterestedness and impartiality as well as engaging in dialogue on numerous levels (p. 154). Another reason a concrete approach cannot work, as Kuokkanen notes in her afterword (p. 164) is that each specific place has its own unique Indigenous philosophies and practices and so the process of overcoming ignorance will be

specific to that place, rather than one that can be established for all.

Although Kuokkanen supports Indigenous universities and separate Indigenous programs, she does not believe that these enable the gift of Indigenous epistemes to be given. The gift of Indigenous epistemes is one that non-Indigenous academics and students should accept. In order to accept this gift, people have to “do their homework”, a phrase Kuokkanen borrows from Gayatri Spivak to express both the need to learn more about Indigenous epistemes and the need to focus on the place one is working to understand the relations that characterise it (Spivak, 1990). One example is environmental philosophy and education, where Indigenous peoples’ relations with the land and understanding of the land have received attention. However, Kuokkanen is critical of much environmental discourse as it does not explore the history of colonialism and elaborate the connections between the degradation of land and the impoverishment of aboriginal people (p. 124). A more promising example is the development of “indigenous humanities” which aims at the decolonisation of knowledge both through critique of Eurocentric humanities and through “reclaiming and validating indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and research questions” (p. 143). The contrast between these two approaches gives some sense of the practical implications of Kuokkanen’s work. This book is immensely readable and an important text for those interested in Indigenous education and for those who are open to the gift of Indigenous epistemes.

References

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THE SOUNDSCAPES OF AUSTRALIA: MUSIC, PLACE AND SPIRITUALITY

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The last few years have seen a number of dramatic public engagements with place and spiritualities through