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Introduction: Theorizing Indigenous Knowledge(s)

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Abstract

This article examines strengths, challenges, and limitations in the practice of theorizing Indigenous knowledge(s) as a scholarly practice. Our overall aim is to contribute to the discussion on theory in Indigenous studies. Theorizing Indigenous knowledge engages critically with local concepts and ideas that draw from different experiences and standpoints. These often point to place-based knowledge as well as diverse ways of regenerating Indigenous knowledge(s), both orally and nonverbally. This article also discusses objectivity in theorizing Indigenous knowledge(s) and the limitations in knowledge-production when it engages with a collectivity and nonhuman actors. It shows how theorizing Indigenous knowledge(s) within Indigenous paradigm has to be looked at critically: the knowledge of diverse historical processes, oppression, power relations, as well as the ownership of Indigenous knowledge are a crucial part of this analysis. The article argues that over-generalizing or essentializing Indigenous knowledge can only weaken its legitimacy and validity, and instead research on Indigenous knowledges should work within Indigenous paradigm.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge(s), plurality, Indigenous standpoints, place-based knowledge, endangerment and revitalization, Indigenousization, Indigenous studies

Introduction

In 2014 Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith published an edited compilation, *Theorizing Native Studies*, which underlined the significance of theoretical thinking drawing from Indigenous historical situations, their epistemologies and theorizing creatively with Indigenous concepts. Earlier, Martin Nakata (2007) pointed out the significance of the “Indigenous standpoint,” which allows one to critically address how ideas and truths become historically and contextually produced. Theorizing Indigenous knowledge(s) critically engages with local concepts and ideas that draw from different experiences and standpoints (see Nakata 2007, 214–215). However, neither Indigenous nor non-Indigenous knowledges can be considered independent systems or categories (Nakata et al 2012).



It is often argued that it is characteristic of Indigenous knowledges that they are not necessarily validated by a written form, but are evident and revealed in diverse other practices and ways of communication, such as arts, stories, craftwork, dance, music, practices, resource management, customary law, livelihoods, place names, cultural landscapes, governance, social organization, and spirituality and healing. The role of personal relationships, language, the environment, age, place, and gender are crucial in the production, regeneration, and transmission of Indigenous knowledge (see e.g. Cajete 1999, 2005; Agarwal 1995; Meyer 2008; Battiste 2013; Battiste & Henderson 2012; Pugh et al. 2019). Furthermore, Indigenous values related to education, conservation practices, and land management practices are crucial to understand the knowledge related to them. Yet, Indigenous knowledge is not only about arguing for a truth value of different individual experiences, as Nakata (2007, 214) points out. Trust and belief are crucial conditions of knowledge, but we do not have enough space here to elaborate on philosophical notions of ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth.’

This introduction aims at investigating the strengths, challenges, and limitations of theorizing Indigenous knowledge(s). As scholars carrying our cross-disciplinary research, we position ourselves in this article as researchers aiming at dialogue with different fields of science. The first author has carried out research especially with Amazonian Indigenous peoples, while the second is Sámi and gives her examples from Sámi society. Our overall aim is to contribute to discussions on theory in Indigenous studies.

The attempts to regard Indigenous knowledge as integral to scientific knowledge and approaching both of them critically have contributed to important discussions on power hierarchies and epistemic capacities based on ideas of gender and cultural or ethnic background (e.g. Wylie 2003). Indigenous, feminist and Black scholars, as well as anthropologists have made crucial contributions in diverse fields of science and, among other things, introduced new ways of thinking about history and have contributed to the development of novel methods. This special issue includes contributions that examine how to theorize with Indigenous knowledges. It invites one to think theoretically from different perspectives about Indigenous knowledge and to examine what kind of issues should be taken into account when discussing its validity. Questions about how and where Indigenous knowledge is produced and on whose terms still needs more attention (see also Nakata 2007, 182–186). The contributions of this special issue deal with case studies from different parts of the world, such as the Arctic, the Pacific, and

Latin America. Their common ground is the celebration of epistemological pluralism in an approach that embraces place-based knowledge production and consequently aims at looking beyond generalizations on Indigenous knowledge in the singular (see also Kuokkanen 2007, 72 on stereotyping and homogenization).

These discussions are relevant for various reasons. First of all, even if the space for scholars drawing from Indigenous paradigms has enlarged, articles published in Indigenous Studies journals were rarely widely cited,¹ as the field of Indigenous Studies is still small, and thus its impact factor is lower than that of other mainstream journals. However, in other fields of science, such as environmental sciences, education, and law, the contributions based on Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous research paradigms have in recent years gained more space that have made Indigenous theorizing, methodologies, and research ethics more visible and impactful. In fact, Indigenous studies has been a field of science for decades, and its first academic journals and conferences were already established in the 1970s. Many philosophers of science have argued that the scientifically recognized peer-reviewed journals among a group of scholars are the foundation of disciplines (see e.g. Longino 1990, 2002; Koskinen & Mäki 2016). Indigenous studies is still an emerging field, and it can make important contributions to science and innovations. It is continuing the ongoing work of the decolonization of education and academia (see e.g. Battiste 2000, 2013; Smith 2003, 2005; Mihesuah & Wilson 2004; Kuokkanen 2007).

Secondly, this special issue also addresses the methodological and ethical issues that are raised in the study of Indigenous knowledge. Its two contributions in particular advance discussions on the researcher's positionality and the situatedness of research and a researcher, which are at the core of the Indigenous paradigm (see e.g. Ermine 2007). It is known that Indigenous peoples' knowledges are today needed for a renewal of science and the creation of new understandings, theories, methods, and practices. These are not only necessary in a time of environmental change and climate crisis, but also for many other fields of science, such as

¹ Such journals include: *American Indian Quarterly*, *American Indian Culture and Research*, *American Indian Law Review*, *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, *Journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association NAIS*, *Alternative: International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec*, *Indigenous Law Journal*, *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, *Sámi dieđalaš áigečála*, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, *Dutkansearvi dieđalaš áigečála*, *Native Studies Review*, among others.



healthcare, life science, and many other human and social sciences. But when Indigenous knowledges are met with growing interest, how can we ensure that they are discussed fairly? What if in this process Indigenous knowledges are essentialized or explained in terms that are often part of a dominant discourse and might thus be perceived as colonizing?² As we will argue in this introduction, the objectivity and validity of Indigenous knowledge can be critically discussed if a plurality of Indigenous knowledges is also taken into account.

Place-based theorizing

Various studies have noted that Indigenous knowledges are produced in interaction with traditional knowledge, local knowledge, technical knowledge and academic knowledge from different fields of science (e.g. Nakata et al. 2012). These are all negotiated and applied and constantly translated in diverse ways. The continuous presence of Indigenous peoples over several generations and their experience in specific locations are elemental for place-based knowledge (see e.g. Grande 2004; Cajete 2005; Meyer 2008; Battiste & Henderson 2012; see also Ingold 2000 on dwelling), which is gained by seeing, sensing, smelling, and hearing things by being in forests, on paths, on a river or lake, or on an ocean coastline. This offers experiential and embodied knowledge that offers a valuable basis for other types of knowledges produced by other methods. As an example of embodied knowledge, we share here a story by the second author, who comes from a small Sámi reindeer herding village on the border of Norway and Finland. She adds here her reflections on learning in that particular place:

My kin settled in Gáregasnjárga area nearly three generations ago. I can reflect on my personal experiences of my childhood place. For me it is a beautiful place between clean rivers, with a view which opens towards a sacred fell, Áilegas, and below there are lakes called Creation lakes and a Holy river which never gets frozen. I was lucky to grow up in a big extended family; I was told traditional stories which had been passed on from generation to generation; I used to wander and ski in the forests and fells, swim in the rivers, pick berries.

² We also discussed these issues in the UNPFII side event *Production and Transmission of Traditional Knowledge in Indigenous understandings*, organized by the University of Helsinki's Indigenous Studies program in New York in 2019.



What was best was that I learned to trust and respect nature and to be thankful to nature for all the resources we received there. I felt a unity and reciprocity with the world, its holistic nature, focusing on the Sámi local dialect and place, and on values and relationships. They are all bound by relations. Sámi identity is continuously reflected in my close relationship with my first home through the kin still living there and the Sámi language, and this childhood landscape has been with me as an actual lived experience throughout my whole life.

These people and other people who live close to nature know the names of all the fells and mountains, lakes and rivers and other nature elements very well. They know the surroundings and how to communicate with natural elements and beings and with each other when moving in nature. They don't use written knowledge, e.g. Western maps, but instead use oral knowledge that has been transmitted from father to child, in story-telling and narrative or through actions. In the earlier days, it was necessary for the Sámi to be able to talk about places connected to hunting, fishing, journeys and reindeer herding.

I remember more than thirty years ago following three reindeer herders who were monitoring and herding their reindeer to fells in the winter. The landscape seemed to me to be of the same white everywhere. I have often wondered how reindeer herders managed to find their way over cold winter fells, to meet each other in the middle of wide white fells when driving snow mobiles coming from different directions without making any special verbal plans beforehand. Without talking much the men just started their snow mobiles and each of them suddenly began driving in different directions. After driving in the fells for some time we suddenly met high on the fell, and looking around I couldn't recognize any differences, it all looked the same. The reindeer herders looked around, smoked their cigarettes and then drove off again, each of them taking his own way. They could make accurate observations of the environment because they knew it as well as they knew the movement of reindeer. I couldn't communicate with the environment as accurately as the reindeer herders because I didn't have the same experiences as they did. However, I experienced strong feelings and a sense of unity with the environment.



Feelings and experiences relate the human beings to the environment and this is also a way to make relationships with animals and non-humans.

This reflection shows how Sámi knowledge arises from their own experiences with their place; this is why e.g. name-place stories and yoiks (chanting and singing) matter; places are repositories of information, they tell about relationships, reveal history, and hold people's identity (see also Helander-Renvall 2016; Snively & Williams 2016; Pugh et al. 2019). Producing Indigenous knowledge is often place-based; it is connected to practical and everyday actions, livelihood and management. Overall, Indigenous knowledge(s) often emerge from such an intertwined relation with a place: it is located and situated knowledge – a knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society and it is often deeply ingrained in an Indigenous language and nonverbal communication. Transmission of this kind of traditional knowledge is a continuous process that occurs both consciously and unconsciously. Locally produced knowledge can be expressed in various forms. In this special issue, Tuija Hautala-Hirvioja discusses how Sámi artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää used Sámi knowledge in rock paintings, duodji and literature as an inspiration for his art. Place-based knowledge is regenerated in diverse forms of communication, story-telling, and doing. It can be used in theorizing and as a method. Several Indigenous people share interrelationships with particular territories. Such interconnectedness with a place is what usually differentiates Indigenous peoples from settler societies; place gives identity, place links present with past, and personal self with kinship groups. Theorizing place-based knowledge has been influential for the actual practice of land-based education (e.g. Tuck et al. 2014). In fact, several studies have shown that land-based education and the long-term relationship between Indigenous peoples and the lands they inhabit and manage, have revealed a large range of positive impacts on their natural environments, notably in preserving both species variety and carbon storages that today are the world's global biodiversity “hotspots” (Maffi 2001). Not only at a global level, but also at national, regional, and local levels the benefits of Indigenous knowledge can be substantial for well-being and for environmental and conservation issues. In this special issue, Rani-Henrik Andersson discusses how Indigenous knowledge can be used in inclusive Indigenous management strategies in protected spaces. He analyzes especially national parks in Canada and the United States and the theoretical model of re-indigenization, which can be used within the context of nature protection. He shows that just a few national parks have so far reached the highest stage of re-

indigenization: Indigenous peoples can manage them on their own terms. Most national parks established in Indigenous ancestral lands, however, are still colonized spaces.

Overall, several Indigenous communities in different parts of the world have resisted unsustainable development in their regions, as well as the use of natural resources only for utilitarian purposes. Indigenous communities' relational social structures can value the sustainability of local ecosystems over short-term benefits of increased economic capital. In order to theorize place-based Indigenous knowledge, it is crucial to understand how knowledge is used locally, what kind of spaces and time it needs to be sustained, and how and when it can be invested in. Place-based knowledge can connect both Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants with rivers, mountains, and specific places (Tuck et al. 2014).

Especially in the field of education, Indigenous knowledges have contributed to the development of Indigenous pedagogies and they have become important for Indigenous peoples themselves to reflect and advance their schooling practices (e.g. Grande 2004; Stucki 2012; Keskitalo et al. 2013; Cram et al. 2014). Nationally and globally, one of the aims of the Indigenous movement has been to enable the teaching and learning of Indigenous knowledge and languages in schools both inside and outside of Indigenous territories, from preschool to higher education systems (see e.g. Hirvonen 2004; Jannok-Nutti 2018 on the Sámi). This includes differentiated Indigenous teacher education. In this special issue, an example of this is given by Levi Marques Pereira and colleagues who discuss Kaiowá and Guarani knowledge systems within teacher education in the Indigenous Licentiate program at the Federal University of Grande Douradis, Brazil. Their article also shows how Indigenous appropriation of academic knowledge and technologies also resulted in cosmological revisions and strategies for claiming rights. Brazilian Indigenous appropriations enabled new forms of articulations between different knowledge systems. Besides the Indigenous pedagogies and education that have been developed in the last few decades, also in environmental science, law, and many other fields Indigenous theorizing has gained considerable space. Even Indigenous futurity has been discussed (see e.g. Initiative for Indigenous Futures in Canada). Digital technologies, the integration of new elements, and novel allies and relationships are also crucial to advance and strengthen Indigenous knowledges and languages.

Indigenous languages, terminologies and language structures for a novel theorizing

Language endangerment has received much attention over the past few decades, and as a result a wide range of people are now working to revitalize and maintain local/Indigenous languages. It is not possible to give an exact number of the world's languages, but typical estimates are approximately 7,000 languages. A great many Indigenous languages have disappeared before they were documented, while there are still many languages whose existence is not even known. About a half of the world's languages are small, having a maximum of 10,000 speakers. There are only 8 languages with more than 100 million speakers, while 347 languages have no more than a million or so speakers. There are approximately 4,000–5,000 speakers per language. (Unesco 2020.)³

Indigenous knowledges can be expressed in specific terminologies and language structures. In Sámi contexts specific terminologies have been studied as related to snow and reindeer herding (e.g. Eira 1994; Jernsletten 1997; Sara 2009; Gaup Eira et al. 2018). Furthermore, language structures are windows to different understandings of the world, especially Indigenous knowledge, as pointed out by Porsanger (2007, 2011) and Sillitoe (2010, 13). Language is an instrument for thoughts and the community, and it supports culture holistically. It embeds knowledge and strong emotions related to culture, identity and land. Thoughts are connected to a language, and they are even born in a certain language (Fishman 1989, 1991; Seurujärvi-Kari 2013, 59; see also Whorf 1956). For example, in different Sámi languages there are different terms for the cardinal directions depending, for example, whether people live in the south or the north. For South Sámi speakers north is towards the sea and not towards the North Pole; north for them is East. The South Sámi do not call themselves as the North Sámi do 'lulli Sámit' (South Sámi) but 'oarjiel Sámi,' which means Western Sámi in North Sámi.

There is a close connection between lifestyle, land, culture and language (see also Cavanaugh & Shalini 2017 on language materiality; Fishman 1989, 1991). In linguistics the relations between language, culture, and cognition have been much debated, drawing from the works of Sapir (e.g. 1921) and his student Whorf (e.g. 1956) for whom language also creates the world, and they have been regarded as relativists. Among other things, it has been argued against the

³ Moreover, the very problematic distinction between dialect and language is relevant here.

Sapir-Whorf tradition that thoughts and meanings can be presented in diverse ways and, in some cases, language can even be a very limited way of understanding different cultures and their epistemologies (Severi 2014). The foundation of good reindeer herding among the North Sámi, for instance, is to know how and what the environment communicates. Words are not necessarily used at all or only a little because there are various ways of communicating, including nonverbal. Instead of talking, the reindeer herders use silence, which can tell one how to act. Nonverbal communication is more like symbolic communication. Symbols tell us something. They say, for example, when it is time to go and do something; they create a trust in relationships that is very strong.

Language is also rooted in a place, even if the speaker is imaginary. Indexical, iconic, and symbolic relations, as defined by Charles Sanders Peirce, are affected by social positions, particular places and histories, which can all alter (Gal & Irvine 2019, 88). For Eckert (2008, 462), “Local identity is never an association with a generic locale but with a particular construction of that locale as distinct from some other. Local identity claims are about what it means to be from ‘here’ as opposed to some identified ‘there.’” Gal and Irvine (2019, 102–108) talk about perspectives that are constituted by indexical social roles, personal experiences and conventional conjectures and affect frameworks of knowledge.

Indigenous languages are not only the instruments of communication, they also provide a theoretical starting point for understanding and reconstructing Indigenous knowledge. Therefore, efforts to revitalize languages are needed. A language community can form an epistemic community, because it connects people through participation to a common environment and shared feelings. For academia and for the benefit of the Indigenous communities, it is crucial to use Indigenous concepts and ideas, and to incorporate them into theoretical thinking and into dialogues with the dominant society’s science. Understanding different concepts and their translations require hard work, long field work and reciprocity with local communities. There can even be a radical difference between the concepts, and the use of these concepts, such as the ideas of humanity and agency, as they are understood in different societies, among others in Indigenous Amazonia (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 2004, 9; Virtanen & Honkasalo 2020; see also Bird-David 1999; Holbraad 2009). These ideas can be useful for novel thinking, such as ways to approach sustainability (see Virtanen et al. 2020).



When theorizing Indigenous knowledge in academia and for the benefit of the communities, it is crucial to use Indigenous concepts. In this special issue, Carl Mika addresses *wai* – the Maori concept for water, and how it in fact goes beyond ‘water’ in conventional Western thinking. In a similar way, Mere Kepa discusses the concept of *hau* for the Maori and how this concept is understood as the whole relationship between the body and the spirit, the individual and the collective, the people and the place and how that can guide the revitalization of social-ecological landscapes in Aotearoa New Zealand. Mere’s article is a critical reflection and narration on rural Maori landscapes that have dramatically changed owing to the new materialism in Aotearoa. Conservation in Aotearoa would not succeed without the strength of volunteers and their organizations who are sharing their *hau* with each other and with the landscapes. The article by Hanna Guttorm, Lea Kantonen, and Britt Kramvig in this special issue also addresses engaging and learning the Indigenous concepts *gulahallat*, *nierika* and *forfar* through personal stories.

Concepts, terms, and their semantic meanings embody specific ideas. However, these notions can become narrower, extinct, or become dormant (Unesco 2020; Krauss 1992; Nettle & Romaine 2000). Over the last few decades, several Indigenous or minority speakers have taken back their languages and reversed the language shift. Language has been and is a crucial tool to obtain and maintain power, but it can also change power relations (cf. Foucault 1977, 1980). Among other things, Indigenous peoples’ claims for equality as well as their linguistic and cultural rights have led to a change towards a recognition of their rights and a better understanding of their epistemologies.

In this context, revitalization can have different meanings for linguists and Indigenous peoples. What is actually endangered and what needs to be revitalized? Does it mean for linguists the endangerment of grammar, lexicon or the structure of language? Or is it more than this? The linguistic aspects of knowledge and culture are also very relevant because they contain several things, such as the transmission of histories, oral traditions, philosophies and literature to the future generations as specific contents, including languages and writing systems as means that transmit these contents (see also Porsanger et al. n.d.; Porsanger & Virtanen 2019, 294–295). Indigenous researchers emphasize that languages have a central meaning in Indigenous knowledge and its protection (e.g. Battiste & Henderson 2012). Among others, Angela Cavender Wilson (2004, 80) has noted: “One aspect of Indigenous knowledge recovery integral

to Indigenous survival is the resuscitation of our languages.” As has been pointed out in discussions on language ecologies (see e.g. Siragusa 2017), once we figure out what is endangered, then researchers may better understand what needs to be revitalized and require attention.

Accountability, objectivity and its limitations

The dominant practices of evidencing Indigenous knowledge has often lessened its truth value in academia. Meantime, Nakata has noted that, for various reasons, it is crucial to integrate scientific knowledge with Indigenous knowledge, one reason being that the latter can introduce “the theoretical underpinnings of the practice” (Nakata 2007, 187). Both scientific and Indigenous knowledge are products of cultural histories, ideas, and change, and therefore to be addressed as different sources of knowing and evidence-making. Yet, people very often lack knowledge of the historical processes, oppression, and power relations that are related to Indigenous knowledge production (Simpson & Smith 2014). Encountering this diversity can create new understandings and even theoretical models. In this special issue Hanna Guttorm and colleagues discuss how they want to make space for storytelling as a relevant way to share knowledge and create encounters between different worlds. By telling their own stories they also show how storytelling is an ethical choice and an effective methodological way of including different knowledges into their research.

The critical study of legitimate sources of knowledge also involves the question of the ownership of knowledge. In several Indigenous communities knowledge can be considered something that is beyond individual human possession, and is instead the result of several actors’ contributions, both human and nonhuman. For instance, in Amazonia, children and youth become learners through their contacts with different nonhuman subjectivities in the forest, and learn through their personal contacts with them, as guided by their adults and elders (Virtanen 2012). Learning is then a relational process. Consequently, learning in several Indigenous communities is about teaching about relations rather than about independent actors (see e.g. Cajete 2005). It takes into account both collective and individual aspects, as well as the aims of learning (such as who it considers and who are part of the learning process). Furthermore, for several Indigenous communities, knowledge is not about owning, but being able to use it. Thus, knowledge is not solely about being able to express it in speech and writing,



but about governing knowledge: only after governing knowledge in practice and with others can one say that one owns something (see e.g. Mohawk 2011, 5).

The practical issues that are related to Indigenous knowledge are a crucial part of its truth value. Furthermore, considering the validity of Indigenous truths has to be understood in the context of power relations and epistemological hierarchies (Simpson & Smith 2014). We wish to point out that theorizing Indigenous knowledge(s) within the Indigenous paradigm has to be looked at critically: the knowledge of diverse historical processes, oppression, power relations, as well as the ownership of Indigenous knowledge are crucial parts of the analysis. Meanwhile, in theorizing Indigenous knowledge, it is good to be reminded what Nakata has strongly argued (2007, 214–215): experience alone cannot legitimate a theory, but it can form a point of reflection for a study of the truths as presented in academia. Personal experiences should be discussed with others and thus be open for collective reflections. This is also how Indigenous environmental knowledge has been tested and taken in communities in the long-term: it is based on experiences of generations (see e.g. Berkes 2012[1993], 4–5).

An important part of considering the limitations of objectivity is that all knowledge is produced relationally within often agreed cultural conventions that can be dynamic in form. Relational and collective ownership of knowledge, as well as a type of ownership that goes beyond the human also raises ethical questions for research with and in Indigenous communities. These questions have to be considered by researchers regardless of whether the researcher is an Indigenous person or not. Understanding the importance of research ethics and ethical guidelines is fundamental for any research. The key ideas are then what are the impacts, risks, and benefits of the research for the researcher and his/her interlocutors. Relating to research with Indigenous peoples especially, Shawn Wilson (2008) has underlined the diverse relations and issues that a researcher is accountable to. These include being accountable to the self, the community involved in the research, previous generations, and the environment. Another ethical question that needs to be considered to obtain a better level of research is who is the owner of the research results? Is it the researcher, the research community, research collaborators, the land or previous generations? These are important questions during the research, when publishing the results, as well as archiving the data – especially at this time of environmental crises when an increasing number of people have become interested in Indigenous knowledge. Some Indigenous knowledge is considered to be shared only within the

communities. A researcher and learner then needs to know what should remain inside the community. The limitations in such research are those borders that define what can be shared with others, and they can also make research a safe place for interactions.

Consequently, a researcher's positionality has to be consciously and continuously reflected upon, and the knowledge-production process need to be transparent for others (see e.g. Ermine 2007). This is crucial for evaluating how Indigenous knowledge has been theorized. When a researcher is an insider and a member of an Indigenous community, the issue of positionality raises new horizons. Peter J. Mataira and Grace I-An Gao (Wasiq Silan) in this issue address this question and engage with the concepts 'insider' and 'outsider' and the definitions of these concepts among Indigenous researchers; also examine what situatedness, reflexivity, indigenization and decolonization mean to them. In this special issue, ethical concerns are also discussed by Francett-Hermes and Helena Pennanen, whose focus is on positionality as a core element of research ethics when carrying out research with Sámi communities in Finland. They reflect on their own fieldwork experiences as early career scholars in Sámi/ Indigenous research, where official ethical guidelines were only in the process of being developed.

Conclusions: beyond dichotomies, engaging with a diversity

The pluralism of Indigenous knowledges has been shown by various studies in the last few decades, even if there are certain similarities, such as the interconnectedness of knowledge with certain places. Indigenous knowledges have long been produced, regenerated and transmitted by different oral and nonverbal methods, such as art, practices, governance models, landscapes, spirituality, healing and so forth. They embrace connectedness and relationality with diverse actors. Discussions on Indigenization and decolonization, however, have often been set within bounded categories and Indigenous versus non-Indigenous dichotomies, even though epistemological plurality, multiculturalism and multilingualism is typical for Indigenous knowledges. There is remarkable diversity among Indigenous peoples in terms of their livelihoods, their languages and their cultures. Even among one Indigenous people (such as among the Sámi, see e.g. Kulonen et al. 2005), there can be great linguistic diversity as well as diversity in terms of livelihood, cultural heritage, geographic locations, and so forth. Consequently, even if we refer to an Indigenous people by one ethnic name, knowledges differ,



and hence we speak about Indigenous standpoints in the plural. Over-generalizing Indigenous knowledges or making them into a closed system is harmful for a discussion of their validity.

Since the 1970s, decolonizing research has required an inclusive study of Indigenous knowing, social systems, epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies from Indigenous perspectives in academia. Decolonizing efforts have opened up space for new debates integrating the Indigenous paradigm. We want, however, to also shed light on the limited plurality within Indigenous Studies, a limitation that is created by dominant academic environments and their restricted openness towards difference. It is crucial to understand that only through the opportunities that Indigenous scholars have had to participate in higher education have their ideas become shared, written about, published, and incorporated into academic debates. Yet, we want to point out that globally this has occurred at universities in countries where Indigenous rights and sovereignty have become guaranteed and implemented, as well as where Indigenous scholars become university researchers and tenured professors, and consequently contributed to the development of the Indigenous paradigm. In these countries documentation and revitalization projects on Indigenous knowledge and languages are also more funded.

There are still too few African and Latin American scholars in Indigenous Studies debates. On the other hand, non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers from the Global North who are engaging with the Indigenous paradigm are crucial partners and collaborators with those Indigenous peoples whose voices are not heard in academia. In order to create more space for Indigenous researchers from the so-called Global South, translation services and more multilingual journals, for instance, are needed. Overall, globally there are too few spaces for scholars drawing from the Indigenous paradigm, especially for Indigenous scholars. Indigenous knowledges theorized for them are crucial for the local communities, and therefore we need much more research that focuses on these issues. In this special issue, only a few cases were included in the analysis, and many more studies on environmental practices, sustainability, and adaptation to climate change should be carried out. Such studies are urgently needed in the current environmental situation. The goal should be to increase research that supports and strengthens different knowledges at a global level.

Indigenous studies should not be seen within narrow confines but should be advanced on many fronts. Linguistic documenting, developing new vocabularies and grammar studies, for

example, are not in themselves enough, as language is a crucial vehicle and an agent for taking back, regeneration, transmission and advancing (traditional) Indigenous knowledge and its theorizing. Language endangerment and revitalization is not only about developing a language, it also reflects culture, lifestyle, and ecological locations and reconstructs them. The year of indigenous languages, announced by the UN, was celebrated in 2019. It will be followed by the decade of Indigenous languages, which will be launched in 2022. A decade of Indigenous knowledges is also urgently needed. Much more still needs to be said about what counts as ‘knowledge’ and how different knowledges can be theorized.

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