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"They Talk, We Listen": Indigenous Knowledges and Western Discourse

Abstract

Since the beginning of Native Studies in the late Sixties and early Seventies North American Aboriginal writers and intellectuals have, again and again, demanded that we unplug our ears and minds and listen to their voices (Deloria, Forbes), but it seems hard to overcome the Eurocentric notion that "all knowledge worth knowing … was created in Europe", and that before their colonization non-European Indigenes had been "sitting on [their] thumbs waiting for enlightenment" (Episkenew). Using a variety of Indigenous interventions, the presentation will focus on some of the possible reasons for the centuries-old European and Euro-American inability to listen to and take seriously Indigenous philosophies and empirical scientific knowledge. Apart from the prevalent European cultural hubris that the achievements of the enlightenment eclipsed, once and for all, any other forms of scientific insight, the inability to listen also hinges on the way in which such insights are conveyed, and on the ethics they entail. If, as J. Armstrong maintains, "science is nature's intelligence", it makes no difference if that intelligence is expressed "through [written] scientific formulae or [spoken] words." Following Armstrong's logic, and acknowledging that Aboriginal oral traditions record, store and transmit centuries and millennia of empirical knowledge about how to live well with the land and all its creatures, we have to acknowledge that empirical knowledge which is conveyed as "theory coming through stories" (Maracle) must be read on a par with such abstract scientific formula as the periodic table.

Résumé

Depuis le début des études autochtones à la fin des années soixante et au début des années soixante-dix, les auteurs et intellectuels autochtones nord-américains ont continuellement demandé que nous débouchons nos oreilles et nos esprits pour commencer à écouter leurs voix (Deloria, Forbes). Or, surmonter la notion euro-centrique selon laquelle « toute connaissance méritant être connue … fut créée en Europe » semble jusqu'à ce jour être très difficile, tout comme sa conséquence, à savoir qu'avant leur colonisation les autochtones non-européens « tournaient leurs pouces en attendant les Lumières » (Episkenew). En se basant sur divers interventions autochtones, cette présentation focalisera sur diverses tentatives d'explication pour élucider l'incapacité centenaire des européens et des euro-américains d'écouter et de prendre au sérieux les philosophies autochtones et les savoirs scientifiques empiriques. Cette incapacité de pouvoir

écouter exprime non seulement l'arrogance culturelle européenne selon laquelle les acquis du siècle des Lumières ont éclipsé, une fois pour toutes, toute autre forme de connaissance scientifique, mais affecte aussi la manière dont ces connaissances sont transmises et les normes éthiques qu'elles comportent. Si, comme J. Armstrong l'exprime, « la science est l'intelligence de la nature », peu importe si cette intelligence est exprimée par « des formules scientifiques [écrits] ou par des paroles ». En poursuivant la logique d'Armstrong et en soulignant que les traditions orales autochtones enregistrent, emmagasinent et transmettent du savoir empirique centenaire et millénaire sur la meilleure manière de vivre avec la terre et toutes ses créatures, nous devons admettre qu'il faudra lire toutes les connaissances empiriques, aussi appelées « théorie à travers les histoires », de manière égale à des formules scientifiques aussi abstraites qu'un tableau périodique.

Introduction

On 21 August 2014, the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* carried a small report by Swiss-Canadian author Bernadette Calonego entitled "Sanfte Wölfe" ["*Gentle Wolves*"]. In it, she reported biology professor Chris Darimont's research findings, that certain wolves inhabiting islands along the coast of British Columbia were thriving on sea food and had developed more gentle social behaviour than their more aggressive relatives on the mainland. In its last paragraph Calonego's article mentions that Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia, Canada, had known this difference between what they called "coastal wolves" and "timber wolves" for a long time, and that the Heiltsuk (Bella Bella) hunter Chester Starr had alerted professor Darimont of Simon Frazer University to this phenomenon. The article concludes: "So now the attentive observations by Indigenous people have found a scientific confirmation by Darimont's studies."[1] Calonego's report is just one example of how Western scientists are beginning to use Aboriginal knowledge, especially in the field of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). But why is it – as her report exemplifies – that Indigenous knowledge apparently needs to be accredited by Western science?[2] Why does expert knowledge that is gained empirically by extended periods of observations of, and permanent interaction with, nature, have to be corroborated by a Western scientist's field studies?

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1 The original reads: "So haben nun aufmerksame Beobachtungen von Eingeborenen durch Darimonts Studie eine wissenschaftliche Bestätigung gefunden."

2 I use "Western" here as it is used by North American Aboriginal scholars to denote "European, European derived, Eurocentric" etc., as opposed to Indigenous. Originally, I believe, Western was used in the sense of "European" as opposed to "Oriental" (*abendländisch* v.s. *morgenländisch*). "Western" the way I use it entails the whole weight, hubris, shameful colonial legacy and continuing arrogance and complacency of European and European derived "white"/White academic traditions and claims to intellectual supremacy.

In this essay I shall try to share my thoughts about the relationships between Indigenous knowledges and Western discourse, and I shall try to find answers to three questions. Firstly, why have we as Europeans or Westerners apparently been unable to listen to and learn from Indigenous knowledges? Secondly, what is it that we seem to have failed to learn from Indigenous knowledges? Thirdly, why do Indigenous knowledges seem so vitally important to us today? In groping for answers to these questions, I am quite painfully aware of the fact that I am neither a trained philosopher nor a qualified historian, but that I approach them as one individual scholar in literary and cultural studies with a lifelong interest in Aboriginal peoples of the Americas. I am also aware that the answers to my questions are all interrelated and simultaneous. They touch upon the essential interconnectedness of Indigenous ontology, epistemologies, axiology and methodologies – an interdependence explored and emphasised persistently in Shawn Wilson's study *Research is Ceremony* (20-137) – , and the theoretical divisions implied by the three separate questions are mere abstractions to accommodate the unavoidable consecutiveness of language and the linear logic of Western discourse.

But first of all, and following a widespread Indigenous protocol, I will begin by locating myself in relation to the topic that I am trying to address.

Locating Myself

I am a German born two weeks before World War II ended in Europe, and three months after the liberation of Auschwitz – and that has influenced every day in my life. I grew up in a small formerly Danish-German border town which had doubled its population in 1945 due to the influx of refugees, displaced persons and expellees from the east. My family roots stretch along the Baltic rim from Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg and Pomerania to what was formerly East Prussia. In my childhood and youth I was exposed to the usual German romantic infatuation with "Indianer," and I developed a strong interest in Indigenous North America. After a PhD in English Literature in Tübingen (Lutz 1975), I returned to my previous preoccupation again, and I have been involved in Native American Studies and later Canadian First Nations, Métis and Inuit Studies for four decades. My research was first culturally self-reflexive, investigating which historical influences shaped our motivations and epistemological framing of "Indianer" (Lutz 1985) and trying to understand the phenomenon I came to call "Deutsche Indianertümelei" or "German Indianthusiasm" (Lutz 2015, 157-174). After that I began to read, teach and publish about Indigenous literatures and cultures. Eventually, my research interest took me to the Universities of Osnabrück, Greifswald and Szczecin, but in the process also to a number of guest professorships at Indigenous universities and departments, including a year at DQU (Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl University) and Tecumseh Center at the University of California at Davis, a year at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now: First Nations University of Canada), a year at the University of Ottawa, and a term each at

Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, and the University of Calgary in Alberta. I also enjoyed repeated research visits to the En'Owkin Center at Penticton, BC, the University of Saskatchewan (SUNTEP) in Saskatoon, the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, and several other Native Studies centres. These experiences provided me with the incredible privilege and joy to learn from Indigenous researchers, authors, editors, teachers, students and elders. Looking back at my experiences from the vantage point of a 70-year old retiree, I feel that I have been truly blessed, and I am deeply grateful.

In the process of collaborating with Indigenous colleagues I often encountered what I would call "connecting moments" in which things fell into place in such remarkable coincidences that my Western "enlightened" and rational self began, after decades of denial and doubt, to humbly and gratefully accept the notion that, indeed, things are all connected. When (re-)reading for this article a number of studies by Indigenous scholars on Indigenous epistemologies and research paradigms (Armstrong, Atleo, Deloria, Episkenew, Forbes, Kovach, Kuokkanen, McLeod, Wilson), I found that all of them seem to agree on what was so hard for me to accept, namely that reality appears as much more complexly and intricately interrelated than my materialist convictions had been able to accommodate. In Margaret Kovach's study *Indigenous Methodologies* I stumbled across a passage, which I can fully empathize with and subscribe to:

> I still do not understand these experiences fully. I have tried to analyze, theorize, and rationalize, but there are some things that you cannot deconstruct. As an Elder said, some knowledges you cannot know. What I am left with is an acceptance that these knowings matter to me inwardly, and because I allowed them they impacted my research path in a good way. (Kovach 2009, 182)

1. Why have we as Europeans or Westerners apparently been unable to listen to and learn from Indigenous knowledges?

The European inability to learn from Aboriginal American epistemologies is indeed striking, because after all, we have taken so much material wealth in what Alfred W. Crosby in 1972 called *The Columbian Exchange*. This exchange profoundly altered both the Americas and Europe, and in the process the Atlantic became a *mare internum* between its adjoining continents, or indeed a "Red Atlantic", as Jace Weaver so aptly called it quite recently (2014), thereby echoing Paul Gilroy's foundational 1993 study of the "Black Atlantic." These scholars show that Native Americans and Africans, respectively, were key players in this exchange. In their studies Weaver and Gilroy debunk euro-centrism and reveal the white supremacist hubris of earlier transatlantic histories, which had served to obliterate the achievements of non-European participants in the post-Columbian drama. While the silencing of women's

voices and Black voices has often been revealed and criticized over the past forty years, it is only more recently that scholarly attention is being turned to the decisive material and cultural input and the civilizing achievements of Indigenous peoples. Scholars like Warren Lowes (1986), Jack Weatherford (1988, 1991) and Ronald Wright (1992) have described the enormous and fundamental transfer of material wealth and agricultural practices from the Americas to Europe, which facilitated the astounding demographic and economic growth of the post-Columbian West (Lutz 2015, 142-153). Jack D. Forbes has tried to turn the tables on Columbus even more radically, in his investigation, *The American Discovery of Europe* (2007). Today, it is time to have another look at the exchange and study the transfer not only of material wealth and technologies, but also of Indigenous knowledges per se. Or rather, it is high time to begin to study the obstacles which prevented the acceptance of Indigenous ontology, epistemologies and axiology in Europe and North America, in order to overcome colonialist one-way-communication, so that, finally, we may become ready to learn from centuries and millennia of Indigenous scholarship.

For me as a then young academic, the Bavarian journalist Claus Biegert was the most influential German author to rekindle my childhood interest in Native American affairs. In 1976 he published, together with Carl-Ludwig Reichert, a translation of parts of Vine Deloria's seminal 1970 study *We Talk, You Listen*, in which the Lakota lawyer and philosopher demanded that, after centuries of one-way communication between Europeans and Native Americans, the process be reversed. For the German title of his translation Biegert chose *Nur Stämme werden überleben* [*Only Tribes Will Survive*], thus arguing for re-Indigenization as a sustainable way of life. While I have long tried to make Deloria's demand "we talk, you listen" paradigmatic for my approach to Native American Studies (Lutz 2005, 81f.), I have more recently come to re-examine and re-acknowledge Biegert's statement, realizing that his claim "only tribes will survive" is no less profound and truly prophetic, especially when read alongside with Jeannette Armstrong's doctoral dissertation, in which the Syilx Okanagan scholar argues for the re-Indigenization of all peoples, lest we perish (2009). So I took up Deloria's imperative in the title of this article, and I shall return to Biegert's prophetic statement towards the end.

1.1. Colonialism/Racism

One possible answer to the question "Why we as Europeans or Westerners have apparently been unable to listen to and learn from Indigenous knowledges" seems to reside in the fact that our relationship to Indigenous cultures is profoundly colonial – even if Austria, Germany or Switzerland never had any colonies in North America. Indeed, Germany developed a colonial mindset along with other European nations through its colonial engagements in Africa and Micronesia (the Pacific). A colonialist mindset is racist and denigrates and dehumanizes the colonial 'objects', thereby making it easier for the colonizer to abuse, exploit or even kill the subal-

terns. Thus, the colonial relationship is paradigmatic of what the Norwegian peace researcher Johan Galtung (1969) described as the subject-object relationship in personal and structural violence.[3] But racism also retards the mind of the ruler, i.e. the colonial master himself, by framing his perception into clichés, denials, and exclusions, and thus *un*-enabling him to recognize the humanity of the subaltern, the colonized object. Someone whose perception remains stunted by "Indianthusiasm," and who has learned to expect First Nations people to be *Indianer* like Winnetou, the most popular fictional "Indian" in German speaking countries, is *un*-enabled to meet Indigenous people as complex human beings. Inuit scholar Karla Jessen Williamson says much the same about "Eskimos:"

> A substantial amount of the writing about the Eskimos omitted real Inuit perspectives and was uncritically predicated upon assumptions directly stemming from Eurocentric, paternalistic, patronizing and belittling paradigms; it was, at the very least, colonialist. Furthermore, the Christian doctrine played a great role in discounting other ways of being. (2000, 127)

The colonial axiom "protects" the colonizer against acknowledging complicity, and it blocks his capacity to accept Indigenous epistemologies.

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3 I have always been surprised by, and somewhat disappointed about, how little impact the Norwegian scholar's theoretical discussion of "violence" seems to have had in English language academic discourse, even though his most fundamental article is available in that language (Galtung 1969), while his 1975 book *Är fred möjlig? Studier I fred och imperialism* was never translated into English. Galtung's very encompassing definition of violence as any situation in which a person is not allowed to develop to her fullest intellectual, psychological and physical potential has far reaching social consequences. His differentiation between personal and structural violence entails an ethics of pro-actively working to overcome, or at least mitigate, the social structures which "violate" human development, whereas his definition of personal violence clearly shows how individual "violators" are complexly implicated and "violate" their own humanity by being victimizers of others. His definitions are equally pertinent for post-colonial studies, anti-racism and anti-sexism. The German scholar Jörg Becker (1977) has taken Galtung's theories a step further by defining racism as a form of violence in the Galtungian sense, and showing how racism not only violates the victims most fundamentally but at the same time stunts and violates the racist himself in his perceptions. A corresponding extension of Galtung's definition pertinently shows that patriarchy and hetero-sexism not only violate women and those who transgress hetero-normativity but that these forms of violence also impede the victimizers' developments to their full human potentials. The most important implications of Galtung's definition remain for me the ethics to overcome any social and political systems that are based on and impose structural violence.

1.2. Christianity

It seems obvious also that monotheism, and in the European case Christianity, has a lot to answer for when it comes to our inability to learn from Indigenous knowledges. A Christian axiom claims that there is only *one* true god. Most churches seem to insist that there is only one correct way of worshipping, and that there is only one religious truth. Such hubris forecloses listening to and learning from Indigenous knowledges with an open heart and mind – otherwise, I am certain, we would have learned about more conversions going in the other direction.

1.3. Enlightenment

The Enlightenment comes to mind as another mental obstacle to our learning from Indigenous knowledges – and in saying that, I feel a bit like a traitor to the epistemological place I come from, and of the emancipatory impact the Cartesian shift entailed for Europeans. But for Aboriginal scholars, the Enlightenment's complicity in colonialism is all too clear. Jo-Ann Episkenew expressed the dubious role of "enlightenment" very poignantly in her award-winning book *Taking Back our Spirits* (2009), from which I quote:

> In my second year as an undergraduate student, I had an epiphany. I realized that all knowledge worth knowing – or more specifically, knowledge that my university considered worth teaching – was created by Greeks, appropriated by the Romans, disseminated throughout western Europe, and through colonialism made its way to the rest of the people of the world, who apparently were sitting on their thumbs waiting for enlightenment. (1)

Similarly, the Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen, in her immensely well researched and theorized doctoral dissertation *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift* (2007) aims her critique at the heart of Western epistemology, i.e. the Enlightenment, when she contends

> The empiricism of the Enlightenment marked a radical break from participatory, respectful relations with the world. The Cartesian view of the world became characterized by hyperseparation as well as by the fantasy that the world can be measured. (6)

By contrast, I remember when as a high school student I first heard the Cartesian notion *Cogito, ergo sum* ["I think, therefore I am"]. I was fascinated by the existentialist radicalism of this axiom. But after four decades of learning in Indigenous Studies I am not so certain any more. *Cogito ergo sum* is a statement that is entirely isolation-

ist and shockingly solipsistic. It constructs the thinking subject as removed from any relations with the surrounding world, from time or place, from social relations and the ecosystem, and even from his or her own physical being. The *ego* ["I"] in *Cogito* ["I think"] needs no body (nobody!), no land, no emotions, no others, regardless of whether they are finned, winged, scaled, rooted, four legged or human. Would not statements like "I have a mother, therefore I am" or "I eat and defecate, therefore I am" or "I live on this place on earth, therefore I am" be equally pertinent, less ego-centric and certainly more life sustaining? The exquisite Cartesian logic and rationality of the enlightenment estranges us from the physical world around us, on which Indigenous knowledges are intricately based.

1.4. Literacy vs. Orality

A fourth obstacle in our reception of Indigenous knowledges is both epistemological and methodological, contingent on modes of knowledge acquisition and dissemination. For us, literacy is a *sine qua non* [indispensable]. Western academia – and my focus here is in philology and cultural studies – privileges printed texts presenting heuristic conclusions in impersonal language, and substantiated by massive readings of secondary sources – and that is fine, and particularly important in Europe.[4] We all know that objectivity in qualitative research is a fallacy, but at least in our academic rhetoric we tend to strive for and uphold an aura of impartiality.

Indigenous epistemologies vary from nation to nation, and in recent years, there is a growing insistence that Native Studies be tribal specific. At the same time, all approaches to Indigenous knowledges conducted by Indigenous researchers which I have read so far share the methodologies and axiology of the oral traditions, which lie at the heart of Indigenous cultures. As early as 1991 Lee Maracle explained that Indigenous knowledge is "Theory Coming Through Stories" (172). Indigenous re-

4 It may be an idiosyncratic pedantry, but I do read bibliographies per se as important documents providing information about the scholarly acumen and positioning of an author. When reading fairly recent studies about Indigenous knowledges conducted and published by Indigenous researchers in North America (mostly PhD-theses), I was struck by what seemed to me to be a surprising shortness of most of their bibliographies. While this apparent dearth of published written sources was often (assumed to be, or in reality) compensated by the amount of scholars, elders, and fellow academics the researchers had consulted in the process – following an oral methodology – their bibliographies tended to be markedly shorter than those I found in comparable theses by Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers who were trained at or had submitted their theses at European universities. A comparative count of four bibliographies for each group showed that the bibliographical entries of "European"-originated or -submitted studies which I consulted eclipsed those of the North American theses at a ratio of 365 to 115. Since three of the scholars counted here under 'European PhDs' were in fact Indigenous themselves and had also widely used oral informants, the difference may perhaps be attributed to idiosyncrasies of the researchers, but seems more prominently to be related to structural differences – epistemologies, methods, and traditions – between the respective universities in North America and Europe.

searchers I read all privilege story over formula, experiences over abstract learning, and orality over literacy. These are procedures which our Western academia has a hard time recognizing, accommodating or validating, let alone accepting.[5]

2. What is it that we seem to have failed to learn from Indigenous knowledges?

Relationality, accountability and land-locked Indigeneity are complexly interconnected, but again, I will try to present them consecutively.

2.1. Relationality

One of the first phrases anybody approaching Indigenous North American cultural practices will hear is "All My Relations," a phrase that translates the Lakota "Mitakuye Oyasin," a formula by which they end their prayers, and a transcultural "amen" used by many different Indigenous individuals and nations.[6] It expresses "a tribal sense of relation to all being" (Lincoln 2), which seems central to Indigenous epistemology and axiology. In his 1973 study *God Is Red*, Lakota scholar Vine Deloria says that even the "possibility of conceiving of an individual alone in a tribal religious sense is ridiculous" and would constitute a "terrifying loss of identity" (Deloria 201). More recently, Nuu-chah-nulth scholar Umeek or Richard Atleo explained that in "the Nuu-chah-nulth worldview it is unnatural, and equivalent to death and destruction, for any person to be isolated from family or community" (Atleo 2004, 27).[7]

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5 I do not want to bash Western academia here. I think that our system of documenting evidence is pertinent and well grounded. Detailed bibliographies not only document the acumen of the researchers' learnedness based on reading, but they also acknowledge and honor, name by name, the acumen and reading of those who went before her or him. A good bibliography gives the lineage of the scholar's learning. While Indigenous research protocol generally puts the self-locationing of the speaker in relation to her/his sources (dreams, elders, talking circles, visions) at the beginning, Western academic conventions put the "genealogy" of research (readings) at the end. Both explain and demarcate where the scholar and the study come from, and they acknowledge relationships, each contextualizing their referential universe. While some Indigenous studies I have read lack in the Western form of bibliographic contextualization – see footnote 3, above – nearly all Western studies I know, lack in the Indigenous form of personal contextualization, almost obliterating the researcher's ideological whereabouts and ethics, and lacking axiological accountability.

6 There are various spellings of this well-known Lakota phrase. I take this spelling from Kenneth Lincoln in his *Native American Renaissance*, 2, and from a chapter heading in Kenneth Lincoln's and Al Logan Slagle's *The Good Red Road*, 247.

7 To demonstrate the interrelatedness and mutual dependency of all creatures on earth, Jack D. Forbes once explained the human dependence on the ecosystem by comparing humans and trees, and how they are related. Trees have roots that go into the soil, which is composed of the dead bodies of "all our relations", i.e. all organisms that went before us. Humans, like trees, have roots, too, but ours do not go into the earth through our feet, but into the air through our nostrils and mouths. The air holds the oxygen produced by trees and other plants. Our mouths take in food. The earth holds the bones, composted flesh and feces, which nourish the trees. No mat-

Individualism and egocentrism run counter to the relational worldview by which Aboriginal people traditionally locate themselves in relation to and as part of all of creation, not as masters of nature but as members of it, on equal terms with all other forms of life, all of whom must and do network together to sustain life on earth. Goodness invests in sustaining life, evil in its destruction. A transcultural Indigenous episteme based on sharing and collectivity perceives the individual not as self-perpetuating individual per se, not as *Cogito ergo sum*, but as constituted by an infinite web of spatial, physical, social, psychological, spiritual and mental relations, without which the individual could not and indeed, does not exist. Cree scholar Shawn Wilson contends that Indigenous research "is the knowing and respectful reinforcement that all things are related and connected" (2008, 61). He explains later:

> An Indigenous paradigm comes from the foundational belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, not just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. […] Who cares about those ontologies? It's not the realities in and of themselves that are important; it is the relationship that I share with reality. (Wilson 2008, 73-74)

In such a context, *Cogito ergo sum* sounds ridiculous or even lethal.

Relatedness extends into all realms of human and non-human existence. In the material it is manifest in what Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen explained in detail as "the gift economy" (2007, 23-24). Atleo describes giving as "a general community practice," and as an "economically feasible principle" (2004, 39). A gift economy cherishes giving as much as receiving, not in the sense of bartering or exchange, because a gift expecting a return is not a present given but a trade, but giving as an essential mode of interaction. It seems modelled on the boundless generosity of Mother Earth herself, who has nourished and supported us all (and our relations) since life began. Mother Earth continues to give, even while being exploited and raped increasingly by rampant capitalism and the neoliberal race for the global availability of resources for those fewer and fewer who can afford to pay for them. A system based on the maxim of *Consumo, ergo sum* ["I consume, therefore I am"] is diametrically opposed to Indigenous axiology. In a gift economy, a recipient who has learned to accept gifts in a respectful and unselfish way will "think with the heart" and will also give of herself, while gratefully respecting the source and net of

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ter how powerful we may consider ourselves vis-à-vis nature, if our nose-and-mouth roots are cut or sealed shut, we die like a tree dies when its roots are severed from the soil (personal recollection).

relations that make all gifts possible. This has far-reaching social, psychological, economic, and above all ecological implications.

2.2. Accountability

Another fundamental principle of Indigenous epistemology and axiology seems to be accountability. It is connected to relationality and orality, and also contingent on the land-relatedness, discussed hereafter. Wilson states that in his understanding "[a]n Indigenous research paradigm is relational and maintains relational accountability" (2008, 71). More so than in literate cultures, where lies, plagiarisms, misquotations or other frauds can be uncovered and exposed by objective and impersonal research, the recipients of knowledge in oral cultures have to depend on the wisdom and personal integrity of the ones who provide information, the more so because oral stories and knowledges live and die with their keepers. They are not preserved in libraries and archives, but are always only "one generation from extinction" (Johnston 1990, 10). Each speaker is responsible for the truthfulness and the lasting effects of her own words, which, once she has spoken, she cannot call back, burn or send through the shredder. The speaker is accountable to the past and the coming generations in what the Cree storyteller and knowledge keeper Alexander Wolfe called "a copyright system based on trust" (1988, xiv). Thus, orality needs and does have an inbuilt ethics that I would like to call "Wahrhaftigkeit" in German, because: "Der Sprecher haftet für die Wahrheit seiner Worte" – the speaker is liable for the truth of his words – and that truth clings to and is attached to the speaker's life and honour. Cree scholar Margaret Kovach puts it like this: "It is about standing behind one's words and recognizing collective protocol, that one is accountable for one's words" (2009, 148).

In Western academia, we traditionally shirk personal exposure (and accountability), and we try to hide idiosyncrasies and experiential subjectivity by feigning objectivity and using "neutral" language. Fortunately, this denial of individual experience has gradually changed since feminist scholars demanded to expose the political in the personal, and the personal in the political, thus validating subjectivity, experiential learning and the emotional. Nevertheless, "to think with the heart", as Indigenous elders and scholars have often encouraged me to do, is not usually understood or accepted as a workable modus operandi in competitive Western academia, but often misunderstood and interpreted as a weakness, of which others can – and often would – take advantage. In the many speeches by Aboriginal orators I have listened to, and in the Indigenous research studies I have read, the speakers or writers usually begin by locating themselves, not to self-indulge or draw attention to their own persons, but to give credit to the participants in the web of their learning processes.

2.3. Land-embedded Indigeneity

Inuit scholar Karla Jessen Williamson writes about the Inuit relationship to *nuna*, the land:

> On our land we found peace, contentment, and a good life. Obviously, this can only be gained by a deep understanding of the reciprocal relationship with the land and its riches. For us the land is a soul enriching totality, which by its own integrity has allowed human existence. The allowing of life on *nuna* is premised by a strong sense of affinity with all other beings. A relationship with the land, the animals, and their souls has assured the Inuit a sustainable way of life over the last four or five millennia. This relationship has given us a strong sense of identity, one solidly bonded with the land. The sense of belonging to the land of our birth remains remarkably significant and very few Inuit have contested this by moving away from their place of birth. (2000, 127-128)

Indigenous scholars seem to agree that belonging to specific places in the land constitutes the most important paradigm of Indigenous ethnic identity. It is by their millennial trans-generational collective relationship with the land – something we do not have in Europe, due to almost incessant warfare and ethnic cleansings – and because of their observance of the obligations, which that relationship entails, that Indigenous scholars and elders tend to explain an Indigenous episteme (Armstrong, Kuokkanen).[8] While Indigenous relationships to the land are complexly diverse, they are at the same time tribal specific to a paradigmatic degree.

As stated earlier, contemporary Indigenous researchers often follow a cultural nationalist agenda by refraining from "pan-Indianism" and focussing on specific cultures and nations in their research. However, when facing Western ontology and epistemologies it seems apt to also generalize certain aspects of Indigenous worldviews and ethics vis-à-vis the European and Western worldviews and knowledge systems. With that caveat in mind, let me generalize just what I mean by "land-embedded Indigeneity". It seems to me that all Indigenous creation stories stress geographic relationality to specific places and regions, while also stressing life's dependence on the land and its ecosystem, and the human accountability such dependence entails. Perhaps the internationally best-known example would be the Haudenosaunee creation myth of Sky Woman's fall towards the waters below and the efforts by all other creatures to create some ground for her to live on, which

8 I have grappled with and tried to fathom this profound relationship, especially with regards to place, language, nationality and literature, again and again over the past decade (Lutz 2007, 2011, 2015, 105-153), and I am still pondering the issue and learning about it on a daily basis, while living in the country at the outskirts of a tiny village in North Eastern Germany, surrounded by agriculture and a historically determined landscape full of wildlife and stories.

resulted in Muskrat's earth-diving sacrifice and the creation of Turtle Island, i.e. North America – a narration which is also echoed in the creation myths of nations neighbouring the Iroquois confederacy.[9] Similarly well known may be the West Coast tradition "How Raven Stole the Light."[10] Less well known is the Syilx-Okanagan story of "How Food Was Given," a traditional *captikʷɬ* [story] on which the Okanagan scholar Jeannette Armstrong focuses much of her doctoral thesis.[11] All of these creation stories maintain that those processes, which facilitated the beginnings of human life on earth, are not singular acts by an omnipotent creator, but rather the outcomes of collective processes of interdependent actions by a network of organisms/agents learning from experiences of interacting with their land. Or, to put it in a more abstract Western format, humans cannot exist in opposition to, or as masters of nature, but only as integral parts of it. It follows, therefore, that all humans are obliged to keep the ecosystem intact.

An abstract rendering of how life originated on earth is also found in Inuit traditional knowledge:

> Rather than believing in human-like gods, we believe in non-identifiable forces that create life and life-forms. The word *pinngortitaq* [the earth, H.L.] suggests that creative life forces came together. The fact that these forces became integrated may be coincidental, but each of these forces is life ordaining and in combination the creative possibilities are enormous. We believe that all beings in this world are manifestations of these integrating, life-ordaining forces, and each one of them is to be respected for its own engagement of these forces. They deserve to be recognized for their distinct, mystic quality ordained by the life-forces. (Williamson 2000, 130-131)

In their relatedness to the land and in their coming together, the life-forces Williamson writes about here appear strongly reminiscent of what Armstrong describes

9 There are many versions of this tradition. For two versions published in English by members of the Haudenosaunee confederacy see a Seneca version originally told by Jesse J. Cornplanter in 1938, "Legend of the Sky Woman, A Creation Myth," (Tehanetorens 9-14), or a Mohawk version told with his own pictographs by Tehanetorens – and with beautiful illustrations by Kahonhes (John Fadden) – in 1976, "The Creation," (15-22). For a discussion of a vernacular version by the Delaware scholar, playwright and poet Daniel David Moses, comparing it to Genesis, see Lutz (2014, 156-161).

10 For a Nuu-chah-nulth version told and interpreted by the Nuu-chah-nulth scholar Richard Atleo (Umeek) see "How Son of Raven Captured the Day" (2004, 6-10).

11 Jeannette Armstrong's dissertation is available online from the library of the University of Greifswald. An official bilingual English and Okanagan version of the foundational story "How Food Was Given" was published by the Okanagan Tribal Council (2004). Two years later Jeannette Armstrong told it in English at a conference in Greifswald, and it is now available in the conference proceedings (Lutz 2007, 31-32) as well as in Lutz (2015, 148-149).

as *tmix*^{w}, "the life force of the land," in the Syilx Okanagan tradition (Armstrong 2007, 30).

Jeannette Armstrong once said that her father told her that the land is a teacher, and she explained in individual essays as well as in her doctoral dissertation how her Syilx Okanagan people, during millennia of living and flourishing in the same region, developed a vast and comprehensive, yet nuanced and detailed understanding of their regional history and ecosystem. This empirical knowledge, she explained, came to constitute their very being as an Indigenous people. The land-gained knowledge was transmitted from generation to generation through songs, rituals, and stories. It must be considered at least on par with any scientific ecological knowledge gained by Western empiricism and expressed in scientific formula. Her dissertation shows how traditional stories, *captik*^{w}*ɬ*, entail and convey environmental knowledge and ethics that ensure survival, and constitute and determine Syilx Okanagan ethnicity. If Western science ever matures to learn from Indigenous epistemes, academia will have to respect and utilize Aboriginal stories and rituals on a par with the periodic table, because both *captik*^{w}*ɬ* and the periodic table convey the same complexity identified as "nature's intelligence" by Armstrong:

> Science is the human ability to observe, understand and explain nature. Whether through the use of microscope, quantum or abstract theory, the fact remains that science is nature's intelligence being translated into the human mind. Organizing what appears as chaos into cognizant patterns is no less critical to human intelligence whether through scientific formulae or through words. The fundamental difference between the two as method is that words constructed into story provide open access to societal members through intellectual and emotional intelligence while access to science is limited to those schooled in its language. (Armstrong 2009, 330-331)

But land is not only a teacher to help us understand the ecosystem. Land is also an episteme for learning, structuring, and understanding history. Colin Calloway, in the prologue of his ground-breaking history of the Native American West before Lewis and Clark, *One Vast Winter Count*, states "[m]ythic tales linked to specific places contained morals and teachings that enabled people to live as true human beings" (2003, 7). Specific mountains, lakes or rocks provide mnemonic formations, inscribed by experiences and events as Bakhtinian chronotopes (Basso, 62) and palimpsests (Lutz 2015, 107-120), which constitute Indigenous historiography in a non-linear but place-related structure. Rather than plotting history chronologically as a retrospective teleology, Indigenous cultures tend to see history as structured within

a network of relations tied to places, as non-Indigenous researchers like Basso, Calloway, and Nabokov (2002, 126-149) show in their studies.[12]

3. Why are Indigenous knowledges of paramount importance to us today?

Since first contact there have been offers by Indigenous people to teach the newcomers their ways. Almost a 100 years ago, Hiamovi, High Chief of the Tsistsistas and Dakota peoples, wrote in his foreword to Natalie Curtis' monumental *The Indian's Book*: "I want all Indians and white men to read and learn how the Indians lived and thought in the olden time" (ix). And eleven years later the Lakota actor, author and educator Luther Standing Bear wrote in an often-quoted passage:

> Our annals, all happenings of human import, were stored in our song and dance rituals, our history differing in that it was not stored in books, but in the living memory. So, while the white people had much to teach us, we had much to teach them, and what a school could have been established upon that idea! (Standing Bear 1978, 236)

In the 1920s Deskaheh, the highest official of the Haudenosaune, tried in vain to address the League of Nations in Geneva about his confederacy's grievances with the British Crown and Canada (Weaver 2014, 182-188), and since then there have been a series of interventions by Mohawk and other Iroquois, as well as Hopi knowledge keepers, to warn the Western world against its self-destructive abuses of Mother Earth. Repeatedly, Indigenous scholars and elders have tried to enter the dominant discourse in Europe to share what they had acquired and stored for mil-

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12 I have written about this elsewhere (Lutz 2015, 118), but let me just share with you one example, where I came to perceive history in a totally different way, while learning from an Indigenous scholar. We tend to say "we see the future before us" and "leave the past behind." Then my colleague, the Nez Percé linguist and historian Dennis Runnels, saw this as a heuristic fallacy, when he said in a personal conversation at Dartmouth College in the fall of 2001:
Europeans believe in progress. You say you leave the past behind, you see the future and you move on into the future. In our understanding that's a fallacy. The past is not behind! The past is right before us, right under us. We stand on the bones of our ancestors, on the bodies of plants and animals that went before. Even the buildings we see right in front of us are from the past. Everything we see is history. It is from the past. It's right there in front of us. But: the future? The future is behind our backs, unseen. So, we don't believe the past is behind us, and the future before us. Quite to the contrary, the past is right before us. Everything, all the history, is in the land (Runnels 2001).
Often our daily language contains knowledge, which we may not even be aware of when using it. Such seems the case when in English we say "history takes place" (and not time), or likewise in German, when we say "*ein Ereignis findet statt*" [an event takes place] – in both cases, the languages on the lexicological level seem to insist on a semantic that events are *located* at a geographical space, not at an abstract point in time. That perception literally puts history "in its place."

lennia, but we never listened. Jack D. Forbes published his study of the whiteman's greedy and disastrous exploitation of our globe, *The Wétiko-Disease*, in 1981 – deliberately in Europe, a decade before the study came out in book form in the U.S.A. in 1992.[13] In the 1970s pan-Indigenous delegations repeatedly visited Europe to talk to the United Nations in Geneva and local NGOs to protest resource extraction on Indigenous lands and the increasing destruction of our planet.[14]

When Biegert and Reichert entitled their translation of Deloria's *We Talk, You Listen* in German *Nur Stämme werden überleben*, their title expressed a realization that seems evident to Indigenous people and others who are concerned about the lethal vulnerability of our ecosystem, and who know that we are accountable for taking care of *all* its relations. This is a question of an epistemological change to effect a root-going (meaning radical) shift in our entire political and economic system, implementing an axiology and ethics that is fundamentally opposed to our linear progress of "more and more today (and to hell with tomorrow!)." Jeannette Armstrong concludes her doctoral dissertation by stating that to halt and heal the further destruction of *all* our lives, we need to re-indigenize – but be it noted that her definition of Indigeneity is based on learning and place, not race! Armstrong says about the role of Indigenous scholars:

> Clearly, necessary towards re-Indigenization is the need for Indigenous scholars to contribute the level of quality research and dialogue required to reconstruct into contemporary context the underlying precepts of Indigeneity which foster strong environmental ethics common

13 Jack D. Forbes' study, *A World Ruled by Cannibals: The Wétiko Disease of Aggression, Violence, and Imperialism,* has an unusual transatlantic publishing history. The manuscript was first produced in a "DQU Pre-Print Series" (Davis, CA.: D-Q University Press, 1979), which my students and I used for our translation. The German version then came out in 1981 under the title *Die Wétiko-Seuche: Eine indianische Philosophie von Aggression und Gewalt* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag 1981; title transl.: "The Wetiko-Epidemic: An Indian Philosophy on Aggression and Violence"), and was reprinted in 1984. When Jack Forbes re-edited his manuscript for the Columbus centenary, Dr. Uwe Zagratzki, a former Osnabrück student and participant in the original group of translators, re-edited the translation, and this new version came out as *Columbus und andere Kannibalen: Die indianische Sicht der Dinge* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1992: title transl.: "Columbus and Other Cannibals: The Indian View of Things"), and it was only then that the first book publication in English appeared in the United States: *Columbus and Other Cannibals: The Wétiko-Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism and Terrorism* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992).

14 It is impossible here to list all these initiatives by Indigenous speakers and delegates to Europe. As exemplary, I would like to refer you to *A Basic Call to Consciousness*, first published in Geneva, Switzerland in 1977 with illustrations by Kahonhes, then copyrighted 1978 and often reprinted by *Akwesasne Notes*, its third (revised) printing showing a photograph of Philip Deere (Muskogee Creek, AIM spiritual leader), Hopi elder David Mononghye, and the Haudenosaunee Tadodaho walking in front of the Indigenous delegation, holding the Hopi elder by the hands. There was regular reporting on such delegations and issues by the "Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker/Survival International" in their journal *Pogrom*, and among German journalists it was, again, Claus Biegert who reported most persistently on these issues.

> to Indigenous peoples and now largely absent in non-Indigenous society. (2009, 323)

To me, this statement echoes what Hiamovi, Luther Standing Bear, Vine Deloria and Claus Biegert, Jack Forbes and many others have said repeatedly throughout the last century. It also underlines and corroborates the importance of what contemporary scholars like Armstrong, Atleo, Episkenew, Kovach, Kuokkanen, Wilson and others have stated in far greater theoretical detail, namely that the western world is in dire need of Indigenous knowledges in order to survive.[15] While such re-Indigenization as an episteme may be the only chance we have to survive, this does not mean that we should return to the Stone Age. Rather, we have to address in a more complexly encompassing and relationally accountable way our own givens here and now, to develop an ethics and an axiology of survival. In this process, I believe, Indigenous knowledges provide a guiding paradigm.

Nowhere in the world does the dire need to heed Indigenous knowledge seem more obvious and more important than in the Arctic, where climate change is wreaking such havoc. Mary Simon, director of Tapriirisat Kanatami, called Arctic Inuit people "the 'canary in the mineshaft' with respect to the regionalized impact of global climate change" (2011, 884). She explains:

> We have the vocation to be the frontline environmental watchdogs and police. This does not make us hostile to new forms of development or locked into a kind of paralyzing nostalgia for the days of old. It does, however, make us a critical force in ensuring that the development of

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15 Now, nothing that I have said here is new to scholars in Indigenous Studies. In her pioneering book on Aboriginal Literatures from a German immigrant Canadian perspective, *Travelling Knowledges,* the late Renate Eigenbrod clearly marked that we need a new epistemology and ethics when approaching Indigenous literature, and by extension, I would conclude that a radically altered ethics is needed if we are to survive on this planet together. But given the fact that Christian axiology in its 2000-year effort has failed so abysmally to make way for goodness, I am not too optimistic, but I know that the ethics and epistemology of re-Indigenization are direly needed to unsettle the globalized rampage of unleashed capitalist greed. In my conclusion to Jack Forbes' *Columbus und andere Kannibalen*, I wrote more than twenty years ago – and there is nothing new I can add:
The cannibalism of Western-Christian culture is expressed merely in symbolic terms in wine and bread turning into the flesh and blood of Christ. But whoever has witnessed the gaping wounds and cancerous growths on our Mother Earth, does see in concrete terms how right Jack Forbes is in his challenge that we are greedily consuming life itself in a cannibalistic manner. But the fact that he decided to rewrite and republish the book once again for us Europeans in 1992, five hundred years after the Columbian Exchange began, is evidence of the fact of his and other Indigenous people's hope to find allies in Europe, because it depends on all of us whether racism, fascism, sexism and ecological insanity will continue to spread, or whether we will succeed in leaving the straight road of our linear "progress" towards death and re-enter the circle to which we all belong, and which is called 'life' (179; translation H.L.).

> Arctic resources is done in ways that are measured, informed, transparent, and accountable, and that make the wellbeing and cultural continuity of Inuit necessary and central considerations. (2011, 889-890)

The signs read by Inuit knowledge keepers as "environmental watchdogs and police" are indeed more than alarming, and the messages provided by Indigenous experts are precise and articulate, yet hard for Western science to accept. Focusing on Inuit epistemology, Kerstin Knopf explored in a recent article how even TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) is still often dismissed by non-Indigenous academia, and with her permission I take my last example from her paper.

The Inuit film-maker Zacharias Kunuk is best known for his ground-breaking all-Inuktitut feature epic *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2002), but eight years later he released a documentary together with Ian Mauro, *Qapirangajuq: Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* (2010), based on extensive interviews with Inuit elders sharing their observations of fundamental changes in their arctic homelands. Based on their own truly empirical lifelong day-to-day observations, for example, they reported that the Arctic appears out of kilter, because according to their astute observations today the sun rises in a place different from where it rose when the elders were children. Now, Western science had a hard time accommodating that knowledge, let alone accepting it as valid, because NASA contends that there is no shift in the earth's axis that could explain such a fundamental dislocation. Ian Mauro, Kunuk's non-Inuit scientist collaborator, has suggested that changes in the directions of ice and water flows in the Arctic may affect the reflection of light and thus account for the change in perception. Today, the jury is still out on what causes the sun to rise and set in a different place (cf. Knopf, "Indigenizing Science?!").

Maybe we really are beginning to listen after all. The 2014 Canadian Studies conference at Grainau, Bavaria, focused on "Indigenous Knowledges and Academic Discourse." It shows that we are attempting to do what Tatanka Yotanka (aka Sitting Bull) suggested more than a century ago: "Let us put our minds together, and see what life we can make for our children."

An Afterthought

It may seem almost a paradox, but a more complex understanding of, and a greater affinity with, Indigenous knowledge systems, may not come from cultural studies or other "soft" sciences first, but from the most hard-core scientific discipline Western academia has to offer: quantum physics.[16] Without being scholarly equipped, unfortunately, to go into greater scientific detail, I would like to point to what appears to me a striking congruity on the iconographic level, between two epistemological frames or metaphors to capture the relational interconnectedness

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16 This is a connection Richard Atleo already pointed to in *Principles of Tsawalk* (2011, 37).

of life's phenomena. The first is from the doctoral dissertation of a Cree scholar in education, the second from a German physicist.

Aboriginal scholar Shawn Wilson describes how in a dream he came to experience and visualize the interconnectedness of himself with all of creation, by perceiving in a surrounding darkness just one spot of light, and then very slowly discovering another spot of light, and then another, and another, and consecutively an ever expanding amount of more and more individual knots of light, which all became connected by a filament of shining threads of light between all these knots, creating an ever expanding and ever accelerating growing web of relations and all-connectedness. He continues:

> Now as you open your eyes, you can see all of the things that are around you. What you see is their physical form, but you realize that their physical form is really just a web of relationships that have taken on a familiar shape. Every individual thing that you see around you is really just a huge knot – a point where thousands and millions of relationships come together. These relationships come to you from the past, from the present and from the future. This is what surrounds us, and what forms us, our world, our cosmos, our reality. We could not be without being in relationship with everything that surrounds us and is within us. Our reality, our ontology is the relationships. (Wilson 2008, 76)

The late German physicist Hans Peter Dürr published in 2012 a collection of essays under the title *Physik und Transparenz: Die großen Physiker unserer Zeit über Begegnungen mit dem Wunderbaren* [*Physics and Transparence: The Great Physicists of our Time about their Encounters with the Wondrous*], with contributions by some leading 20th century physicists including Niels Bohr, Max Planck, and Werner Heisenberg. In his preface to the 2012 republication of the collection Dürr recounts the development of quantum physics after Niels Bohr and he reads Heisenberg's *Kopenhagener Interpretation* as marking a radical departure from traditional physics and an opening of the discipline to epistemologies far beyond the material. He also visualizes reality as constituted by a web of relations:

> Anstelle einer primär unverbundenen materiell-mechanistischen Ausgangsbasis, der alles Übrige wie Form und Bewegung an zweiter Stelle folgt, tritt nun ein immaterielles, unauftrennbares Beziehungsgefüge an die vorderste Position, mit den uns geläufigen Eigenschaften wie Materie und Energie als sekundäre Erscheinungen. (9)
> [Instead of a separate and primary base that is material and mechanistic, and to which all other properties like form and movement are contingent and secondary, there is now a non-material, inseparable web of re-

> lations as primary, to which such familiar properties as matter and energy are secondary phenomena. transl. H.L.]

Such an approach, it seems to me, would accommodate Indigenous epistemologies, methods and possibly also axiologies, and it came as no surprise to me when I found that Dürr's metaphor to explain his model for this "Beziehungsgefüge" [relational web] closely resembles that which Wilson saw in his dream.

> Wenn wir uns den Geist als Beziehungsgeflecht von Fäden vorstellen, so ergeben dessen Knotenpunkte eine Art räumliche Bündelungen wie bei einem Fischernetz oder Pullover. Doch das sind alles nur Gleichnisse, die uns helfen, in unseren Vorstellungen näher an das Unbegreifliche heranzukommen. Wir dürfen sie nicht als Erklärungen für ein beweisbares Verständnis missbrauchen. (10)
> [If we visualize the spirit as a relational web of threads, then its knots will constitute a form of spatial ties as in a fishing net or sweater. But these are simply metaphors which may help us to get nearer the unfathomable. We must not misapply them as explanations for an understanding that can be proved. transl. H.L.]

Please do not get me wrong. I am not quoting Dürr to endorse Indigenous knowledges. Far from it. They do not need that. Yet, this is an instance where Western and Indigenous knowledges seem to come closer in their interpretation of our surroundings. And in the light of such epistemological parallels, I would like to express my hope that Western scientists, who are studying nature's intelligence, just like those Inuit elders in Kunuk's documentary, may discover windows which open vistas towards relationality, accountability and re-Indigenization.

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