The Responsibility of the Academy:

A Call for Doing Homework

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Look, you're an academic. Do your homework.

If I weren't supposed to teach you something, why are you in the class?

(Spivak and Harasym 1990: 93)

In this paper, I examine the responsibility of the academy particularly in relation to indigenous epistemes or worldviews. I start by contextualizing my work within a larger framework of contemporary indigenous scholarship and research ethics what I call the philosophy of 'scholarly give back.' Second, I briefly discuss the concept of responsibility from two perspectives, that of indigenous epistemes and western philosophical tradition. I then argue that one of the most important responsibilities of the academy toward indigenous epistemes is the responsibility for doing homework. I conclude with a consideration of what this homework might entail in contemporary university settings.

Scholarly 'Give Back'

A central principle of indigenous philosophies, that of 'giving back,' forms the backbone of current research conducted by many indigenous scholars and students. It expresses a strong commitment and desire to ensure that academic knowledge, practices and research are no longer used as a tool of colonization and a way exploiting indigenous peoples by taking (or as it is often put, stealing) their knowledge without ever giving anything back in return (cf. Smith 1999: 1). After centuries of being studied, measured, categorized and represented to serve various colonial interests and purposes, many indigenous peoples now require that research dealing with indigenous issues has to emanate from the needs and concerns of indigenous communities instead of those of an individual researcher or the dominant society.[1] Indigenous research ethics assert the expectations of academics –

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[1] The objectifying colonial research discourse characterized by the salvage paradigm and practices of categorizations and measuring indigenous peoples alongside the flora and fauna or in zoological terms do not belong to the past (cf. Allen 1998: 12; Smith 1999: 8, 59). Linda Smith, for example, outlines ten ways how indigenous peoples continue to be colonized by research (1999: 100-3).

both indigenous and non-indigenous – to 'give back,' to conduct research that has positive outcome and is relevant to indigenous peoples themselves.[2]

The principle of 'giving back' in research – whether it is reporting back, sharing the benefits, bringing back new knowledge and vital information to the community, or taking the needs and concerns of the people into account when formulating research agendas – is part of the larger process of decolonizing colonial structures and mentality and restoring indigenous societies. Other central elements of scholarly responsibilities include distribution and sharing of the research results in an appropriate and meaningful way while recognizing that the process of sharing knowledge is a long-term responsibility involving more than sending the final report back to the community. Linda Smith makes a critical distinction between 'sharing knowledge' and 'sharing surface information' and points out the necessity of sharing "the theories and analyses which inform the way knowledge and information are constructed and represented" (1999: 16).

The participation of the community, acknowledgment of traditional genealogical and other organizing structures, relevance of research and culturally appropriate research practices and codes of conduct, capacity building as well as the commitment to eradication of the detrimental structures and elements resulting from colonization have become the hallmarks of what is today commonly known and recognized as 'indigenous research.'[3] Today, the majority of methodologies and theories elaborated and established by indigenous people are constituted in the principles of reciprocity and responsibility which derive from cultural protocols and traditional values of a society and often incorporated into formal guidelines of ethical research.

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[2] Beatrice Medicine, however, problematizes the common ideal of 'wanting to help our people' by asking: "When we hear this utterance of benevolence, is it an echo of an often-articulated caveat of the expectations of members of the larger society, or do we truly believe that this is the most basic motivating factor in our lives?" (Medicine 2001: 84). She suggests that this kind of benevolence might be a reflection of 'new ethnocentrism' based on tribal chauvinism and tribal rivalry which ultimately has a detrimental effect on Native education.

[3] According to a commonly shared understanding within contemporary indigenous scholarship, 'indigenous research' refers to research conducted by indigenous people according these principles while other type of research by indigenous scholars is often considered to fall outside this category. The main reference point of indigenous research is self-determination.

What is Responsibility?

Responsibility is a concept often heard in the academic discourse and regularly employed by a variety of individuals and sectors ranging from those who challenge the neocolonial, hegemonic structures of the academy to administrators who are seen as representatives of those structures and paradigms. Very rarely, however, one hears an elaboration of what is actually meant by the concept; what is expected and envisioned when we speak of responsibility. Besides the rhetoric of responsibility, there has emerged, since the early 1990s, a relatively new trend of demanding accountability of universities to the government and society at large.[4] This includes new schemes and models of accountability, performance indicators and task forces pushing forward a "trend that sees 'ultimate responsibility' for an institution reside in a board of governors that monitors the universities' adoption of objectives set by outside political appointees" (Emberley 1996: 129). This kind of accountability, Peter Emberley argues, "becomes little more than means to bring universities more under the direction of government" (1996: 129). Articulated this way, accountability appears to be a code for further consolidation of the market solutions to the operation of universities, and therefore, has nothing to do with the responsibility called for in this book.

Winona LaDuke notes that in many indigenous worldviews and philosophies, "reciprocity or reciprocal relations define the responsibilities and ways of relating between humans and ecosystem" (1994: x). These responsibilities and reciprocity are often enacted by gift giving practices to the land. In indigenous worldviews that foreground the multilayered and multidimensional relationships with the land, the gift is the means by which this order is renewed and secured. The gift is the manifestation of

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[4] Derek Bok discusses some of the social responsibilities the university is considered to have to the larger society and state. While the 'social activists' generally support the role of the university in providing services to society, traditionalists promote academic instead of social responsibilities and argue that "the wholesale effort to serve society's needs has exposed higher education to pressures and temptations that threaten to corrupt academic values" (Bok 1982: 67). For Bok, the academic responsibilities include basic scientific inquiry, humanistic scholarship, the analysis of society and its institutions; i.e., "contributions of lasting importance" (Bok 1982: 69).

reciprocity with and responsibility toward others, whether other human beings or the natural environment.[5]

It is important to note that when we talk about indigenous peoples' relationship with their lands, it is not a question of whether an individual may or may not have a relationship with her or his environment. Obviously, it is important to distinguish between a philosophy or a worldview and individual thinking and behaviour which may not always reflect or comply with the former. Moreover, my intention here is not to evoke the stereotype of 'ecological Indian' or any other variety of the Noble Savage, but to consider how certain aspects of indigenous life philosophies can inform us rethinking the notion of responsibility and how that could be applied in endeavours of decolonizing and transforming the hegemonic academy characterized by sanctioned epistemic ignorance. In the context of rapid corporatization of the academy, there is a pressing need to envision alternatives that oppose the destructive agendas affecting all of us. The pervasive nature of neoliberal corporate mentality is also reflected in the (willy-nilly) adoption of its values such as the externalization of social responsibility by many academics. It seems that the corporate ethos according to which social responsibility is considered a distortion of business principles (Bakan 2004: 35) is increasingly influencing the academy, where even 'revolutionary scholars' prefer to point fingers rather than start examining their own roles in espousing new forms of social responsibility. As Sandy Grande contends:

In this context, the voices of indigenous and other non-Western peoples become increasingly vital, not because such peoples categorically possess any kind of magical,

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[5] Mainstream analyses of responsibility in indigenous societies are often characterized by assumptions grounded on foreign worldviews and values, remaining blind to other ways of knowing and relating to the world. For instance, Pierre Bourdieu contends that the circulation of gifts is nothing more than "mechanical interlockings of obligatory practices" (Bourdieu 1997: 198). While it is not incorrect to suggest that giving to nature is one of the many forms of socialization whereby an individual learns to conform certain cultural norms and rules, it is however extremely reductionist and dismissive to interpret indigenous (or any other) gift practices as merely rules which are blindly obeyed and conformed to out of duty. Such views lack an understanding of different ethics and ways of being in the world and thus deny them also to other peoples and cultures. Instead of being mechanically observed practices, giving to the land is the basis of ethical behaviour and a concrete manifestation of worldviews which emphasize the primacy of relationships and balance in the world upon which the well-being of all is contingent.

mystical power to fix countless generations of abuse and neglect, but because non-Western peoples and nations exist as living critiques of the dominant culture, providing critique-al knowledge and potentially transformative paradigms. (2004: 65)

What is more, elaborating a different logic what I call the logic of the gift in and for contemporary contexts is different from the trend of evoking (often undefined) 'traditions' and formulating action plans grounded on cultural authenticity, nationalism or separatism. An uncritical reinscription of tradition is problematic for many reasons but particularly because of the real dangers of further excluding already marginalized groups such as indigenous women (Green 2004; LaRocque 1997).

However, the reality is that contemporary indigenous peoples generally continue to be culturally, socially, economically and spiritually more directly dependent on their lands and surrounding natural environments. This thinking is still a central part of indigenous philosophies while for many other peoples, this previously existed connection and relationship with the physical surroundings started to erode generations ago as a result of modernization, colonization and other developments since the Renaissance and Enlightenment which continue today in the form of neocolonialism and patriarchal global capitalism.

In cultures and societies that foreground reciprocity, individuals are brought up with an understanding and expectation of acting for others. In other words, the notion of responsibility is an integral part of being human and inseparable part of one's identity. Okanagan writer and educator Jeannette Armstrong articulates her identity and thus, her responsibilities, as follows:

I know the mountains, and by birth, the river is my responsibility: They are part of me. I cannot be separated from my place or my land. When I introduce myself to my own people in my own language, I describe these things because it tells them what my responsibilities are and what my goal is. (1996: 461)

By recognizing her responsibilities, Armstrong knows her location and her role in her community; in short, she knows who she is. This notion of responsibility stems from a perception of interrelatedness of all life forms, according to which it is her responsibility to ensure the well-being of the mountains and river because it is directly related to her personal as well as to her community's well-being. Nuu-chah-nulth hereditary whaling

chief and the founding Chair of the World Council of Whalers Tom Mexsis Happynook elaborates this understanding as follows:

When we talk about indigenous cultural practices we are in fact talking about responsibilities that have evolved into unwritten tribal laws over millennia. These responsibilities and laws are directly tied to nature and is a product of the slow integration of cultures within their environment and the ecosystems. Thus, the environment is not a place of divisions but rather a place of relations, a place where cultural diversity and bio-diversity are not separate but in fact need each other. (2000: n.p.)[6]

In western philosophical tradition, responsibility is considered a complex concept discussed and theorized by numerous scholars. Rodolphe Gasché, for example, argues that "[t]here is perhaps no theme more demanding than that of 'responsibility'" (1995: 227). A normative definition in this tradition views responsibility "as a mechanical application of a framework of rules that simultaneously relieves the subject of the onus of decision and, hence, of all liability" (Gasché 1995: 227). On the other hand, however, responsibility implies a responsible response which can take place "only if the decision is truly a decision, not a mechanical reaction to, or an effect of, a determinate cause" (Gasché 1995: 227). Gasché further notes that considering responsibility involves a number of risks and thus, "[a] responsible discourse on responsibility can indeed only assert itself in the mode of a 'perhaps'" (1995: 228).

For Heidegger, responsibility is "a response to which one commits oneself" (qtd. in Gasché 1995: 228). This idea of responsiveness or respondence is further explicated by Gayatri Spivak whose notion of responsibility reflects Bakhtin's articulation of 'answerability.'[7] She proposes that response "involves not only 'respond to,' as in '*give*

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[6] Happynook observes how in the colonial context, these cultural responsibilities have been forced into a framework of 'Aboriginal rights' to be defended usually "in an adversarial system of justice." These rights are, however, at their root first and foremost responsibilities(2000: n.p.). Interestingly, also Spivak talks about the difference between right-based and responsibility-based ethical systems and the "constitution of the subject in responsibility." She notes: "When so-called ethnophilosophies describe the embedded ethico-cultural subject being formed prior to the terrain of rational decision making, they are dismissed as fatalistic" (Spivak 1999: 18).

[7] Bakhtin elaborates his philosophy of answerability in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and *Art and Answerability*. Bakhtin's concept is discussed, for instance, in Nielsen's *The Norms of Answerability*. Central to this concept is the creative dimension of action and the question, how should we act toward other cultures? Nielsen notes that for Bakhtin,

an answer to,' but also the related situations of 'answering to,' as in being responsible for a name (this brings up the question of the relationship between being responsible for/to ourselves and for/to others); of being answerable..." (Spivak 1994: 22). Responsibility signifies the act of response which completes the transaction of speaker and listener, as well as the ethical stance of making discursive space for the 'other' to exist. For Spivak, "ethics are not just a problem of knowledge but a call to a relationship" (Spivak, Landry, and MacLean 1996: 5). If responsibility cannot be merely mechanical expectation to answer, what does it mean, then, to call for a willingness to give a response and for ability to response (i.e., response-ability)?

Responsibility necessitates knowledge. It requires knowing how to respond but also act in a responsible manner. Derrida suggests that "not knowing, having neither a sufficient knowledge or consciousness of what being *responsible* means, is of itself a lack of responsibility" (1992: 25). If knowledge is a prerequisite for responsibility, ignorance presents a serious threat to responsible, response-able behaviour and thinking. Moreover, responsibility demands action:

if it is true that the concept of responsibility has, in the most reliable continuity of its history, always implied involvement in action, doing, a *praxis*, a *decision* that exceeds simple conscience or simple theoretical understanding, it is also true that the same concept requires a decision or responsible action to answer for itself *consciously*, that is, with knowledge of a thematics of what is done, of what action signifies, its causes, ends, etc. (Derrida 1992: 25)

Responsibility as action beyond theorizing poses a possibility of an interruption: "there is no responsibility without a dissident and inventive rupture with respect to tradition, authority, orthodoxy, rule, or doctrine" (Derrida 1992: 27). Responsibility as a rupture of tradition may sound at odds with indigenous perceptions and practices of responsibility which emphasize the *continuance* of tradition. However, no tradition is static, remaining unchanged throughout history, as indigenous people also repeatedly stress particularly when confronted by irresponsible demands for authenticity. There has always been a rupture, both inventive (usually from within) and intrusive, interventionist (usually from

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"[a]ction is more than an intelligent reasoned response to a problem or situation. The act or deed has the two-sided form of answerability" (Nielsen 2002: 136-7).

without).[8] In the context of the academy, responsibility with an inventive rupture implies, first and foremost, the ability of interrupting the self, of moving beyond the 'I' as the ethical subject (Derrida 1997: 52).

Although the academy is prone to list its responsibilities in its lofty vision statements and to call for the responsibilities of students and researchers, we frequently witness the unwillingness of the institution *itself* to respond, to be answerable and take action. Instead of opening up toward the other, the representatives who feel implicated become defensive or remain silent. As Derrida notes in the above quote, responsibility links consciousness with conscience. It is inadequate to merely know one's responsibilities; one also has to be conscious of the consequences of one's actions. Without conscience, there is a risk of the arrogance of a 'clean conscience.'

Derrida (1983) further calls for "new ways of taking responsibility" in the academy which go beyond and are critical of the professionalization of the university. These new ways would signify rethinking the university institution, examining its disciplinary structures and in particular, "a new way of educating students that will prepare them to undertake new analyses" (Derrida 1983: 16). Moreover, the "new responsibilities cannot be purely academic. If they remain extremely difficult to assume, extremely precarious and threatened, it is because they must at once keep alive the memory of a tradition and make an opening beyond any program, that is, toward what is called the future" (Derrida 1983: 16).

New ways of taking responsibility in the academy is linked to the question, What constitutes a 'good' university? If the new responsibilities cannot be purely academic, the answers cannot be always found there either. One has to make an opening beyond the academy. I suggest considering the Okanagan concept of *En'owkin* that signifies a process of group commitment to find the most appropriate solutions through a respectful dialogue. *En'owkin* is a collective process that seeks to find ways to include those voices that are in a minority. *En'owkin* recognizes that these voices are most needed and that understanding these voices is critical for meaningful, good governance. Practiced in community and extended family circles, the idea of *En'owkin* is not to make decisions

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[8] There are also indigenous traditions that are in need of revision. See, for example, (LaRocque 1997; Eikjok 2000).

but to hear all the voices. The premise of *En'owkin* is that nobody alone can have the answers and that if somebody arguing for his or her point, there's no need to listen. The most important aspect is not to stage an argument but to ensure that every perspective and view is being heard. In other words, *En'owkin* implies that one is not participating in the process in order to debate or enforce one's own agenda but to try to understand the most oppositional thinking to one's own and recognize its importance so that the difference becomes diversity. If these aspects of listening and dialoguing are not taken into account and followed, there are no rational outcomes and as a result, people are taking serious risks for the next generations.[9] Like with the logic of the gift and gift giving practices, it is not difficult to see how the principles of *En'owkin* could be practiced in the academy in the name of a 'good' university that is ready to take its responsibilities in a new way, beyond the academy.

Responsibility for Doing Homework

Spivak, who has discussed the necessity of doing one's homework in various contexts, links it with unlearning one's privilege and the notion of 'unlearning one's learning.' She urges academics to learn "how to behave as a subject of knowledge within the institution of neocolonial learning" (Spivak 1993: 25). This requires, first and foremost, addressing one's privilege and the prevailing 'ideology of know-nothingism' in a way that would make various forms of elite racism visible. It necessitates critically examining one's beliefs, biases and assumptions and understanding how they have risen and become naturalized in the first place. Unlearning one's privilege also implies an analysis of the commonplace 'moves of innocence' which claim the right to *not* know.

With regard to indigenous epistemes, the critical examination of one's assumptions remains largely undone, even among some of the most savvy advocates of critical pedagogy and theory. If the 'indigenous' has entered in their analytical consciousness at all, it usually lingers in the margins almost like an afterthought, raised

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[9] This understanding of *En'owkin* is based on a talk given by Jeannette Armstrong at International Conference on the Gift Economy, 13 November 2004, Las Vegas, Nevada. She has kindly allowed me to use the notion of *En'owkin* as an example in my work.

perhaps only after somebody in the audience pointed out its absence. Therefore, the academic responsibility for doing homework on indigenous epistemes has to begin from even a more elemental level than examining one's beliefs, biases and assumptions. It has to start from acknowledging the existence of 'the indigenous' whether the peoples, their epistemes or how they are configured both in the geo-political past and present. This necessarily includes recognizing how the global political economy is fuelled by accumulation of capital extracted from indigenous peoples' territories.

It is remarkable how, even in most academic circles, uttering the word 'indigenous' regularly elicits either audible gasps of silence, averted gazes or elusive responses so obvious in their ignorance and indifference that they would be better left unsaid. Despite the radical shifts that have taken place in the field of anthropology in the past several decades, the persistent anthropological bias (supported by popular culture and media representations) continues to link 'indigenous' to the past only, or worse, nostalgia for the past. The present is conveniently ignored although, or perhaps because of, our current global political economy acutely needs those indigenous territories and although in many places of the world (certainly in the entire Americas), we inhabit, live, walk and talk on and from those lands. If it is literally the ground beneath our feet, why is it so difficult to acknowledge it? The recognition of how this represents ignorance and indifference at its worst, and how it is sanctioned not only in the academy but in society at large, generation after generation, thus represents the very first and most urgent step in doing one's homework.

Instead of disavowing responsibility by simplistic breast-beating that allows business to go on as usual, Spivak urges 'the holders of hegemonic discourse' to "de-hegemonize their position and themselves learn how to occupy the subject position of the other rather than simply say, 'O.K., sorry, we are just very good white people, therefore we do not speak for the [other]'" (1990: 121). Instead of taking a position of the 'politically correct' dominant who argue that they can no longer speak, one has to examine the historical circumstances and articulate one's own participation in the formation that created this and other forms of silencing (Spivak and Harasym 1990: 42-3). One simply has to take a risk since "to say 'I won't criticize' is salving your

conscience, and allowing you not to do any homework" (Spivak and Harasym 1990: 62-3).

The sense of responsibility is and must be grounded in the academics' commitment to their profession (cf. Derrida 2002: 260). Instead of considering hospitality and the gift of indigenous epistemes as threats to the foundations of the university, they should be conceived as in full agreement with the commitment of the academy to its inquiry for knowledge (cf. Smith 2000). If the academy assumes the role of the host as it appears to do, it must do it properly, appropriately. It cannot claim to be a host without unconditionality and responsibility for the other – this is the very subjectivity of the host (cf. Derrida 1997: 55). Jane Flax suggests: "To take responsibility is to situate ourselves firmly within contingent and imperfect contexts, to acknowledge differential privileges of race, gender, geographic location, and sexual identities, and to resist the delusory and dangerous recurrent hope of redemption to a world not of our own making" (1995: 163).

For Spivak, doing homework is a continuous practice that includes, for example, finding out as much as possible about the areas where the academic takes risks. In teaching, this would mean knowing the field as well as possible and familiarizing oneself with the main texts and arguments of the area (Spivak 1996).[10] While absolutely necessary, familiarizing oneself with the areas one knows little about, it, however, remains deficient if we do not engage in the 'home' part of the homework.

The call for scrutinizing the historical circumstances and articulating one's own participation in structures that created various forms of silencing (including self-censorship) represents a radical shift from fieldwork to homework. Whereas fieldwork is more often than not elsewhere and 'out there' – not least because for so many academics, it does not even cross their minds that universities and campuses are in fact physical places – homework starts from where we are, from our homes, academic and otherwise.

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[10] While this may sound obvious to teachers and educators, it should not be taken for granted. bell hooks, for instance, argues that educators are poorly prepared to confront diversity. "This is why so many of us stubbornly cling to old patterns" (1994: 41).

In this context, home is a broader concept than just one's house or apartment (or office and classroom, for that matter).[11]

Setting to do homework thus compels us to look at that reality. What and where are our academic homes? What are their historical circumstances and our participation in them? The responsibility of academics cannot be limited to somewhat neutral description of who we are, as it has become the common practice at least in the more self-reflective, critical academic circles, but also link that in the concrete, physical locations of our enunciation. Fieldwork is not elsewhere but always starts from here, from one's homework.

Some indigenous scholars have criticized the tendency of universities to conveniently forget or ignore the fact that they, in many cases, are located on land which continues to belong to an indigenous people (Marker 2000; Smith 1992). There is also a paradox represented by the presence of those indigenous students on a university campus who are local to the area. As Michael Marker notes, these students have "a unique sense of the history of the institution and the community" but nevertheless remain the most profoundly problematic outsiders for and in the institution where "[t]he often unseen – or hidden – aspects to the history of Indian-white relations can present the most obstinate and puzzling barrier to both the Native student and the administrator striving for change" (2000: 404).

In short, the academy's homework starts from examining its complicity in historical injustices that continue to create contemporary conditions of dispossession, political, economic and social marginalization and poverty. The questions that need to asked include: What is the academy's responsibility in creating the conditions that are required to make the indigenous peoples' rights and self-government agreements meaningful? (cf. Irlbacher-Fox 2005) What is the academy's responsibility with regard to various forms of racism created by historical and existing power relations, including its own elite racism manifested as 'studied ignorance and privileged innocence'? (cf. McIntyre 2000)

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[11] For example, the traditional Sami concept of home knows no walls but encompasses the surrounding environment with which one interacts on a regular basis and without which one would not be fully human. See, for example Valkeapää (1994; 1998).

Further, 'starting from here' involves a subtle but radical shift from 'knowing the other' to learning, and more specifically, learning to learn. Instead of thinking that 'we must know' or even 'we are entitled to know' – positions that, by retaining the sense of ownership as well as distance, allow very little room for hospitality, the gift or reciprocity – we need to draw a difference, however provisional, between knowing and learning (cf. Spivak 1995). Spivak argues that the production of 'elite knowledge' effaces and forecloses the subaltern who is inscribed as the native informant by the West (Spivak 1999: 66-7). One of the results of this practice is that in the academy, indigenous people (among others) often become 'stand-ins' for contentious issues such as the colonial relations, economic marginalization, land claims, racism and cultural genocide. Once seen as 'representing' the 'traditionally marginalized,' the 'dominant' is let off the hook who no longer is required to address these issues (cf. Spivak 1996; Spivak 1999; Razack 2001).

Instead of multicultural 'appreciation of the other,' Spivak calls for ethical singularity and a recognition of the agency in others. This recognition of agency is different from a distorted version of liberal multiculturalism embedded in and determined by the demands of contemporary transnational capitalisms (Spivak 1995). She elaborates:

We all know that when we engage profoundly with *one* person, the responses – the answers – come from both sides. Let us call this responsibility, as well as 'answer'ability or accountability.... Yet on both sides, there is always a sense that something has not got across. This is what we call the secret, not something that one wants to conceal, but something that one wants desperately to reveal in this relationship of singularity and responsibility and accountability. (Spivak 1999: 384)

To establish ethical singularity with the subaltern requires painstaking effort that goes beyond speaking for the 'oppressed.' For Spivak, it is an intimate, individual engagement with the 'other' which occurs in non-essential, non-totalizing and non-crisis terms. I would add that is also has to occur in non-salvage terms – the responsibility toward the other must not emerge from hierarchical relations that assume 'rescuing' the 'other' or knowing what is best for the 'other.' In short, ethical singularity must remain vigilant of not being co-opted in the service of benevolent imperialism such as diverse practices of native informant that characterize much of the academy.

Moreover, ethical singularity requires not only patience but acceptance that there will always be gaps, the 'other' can never be fully known: "there is always a sense that something has not got across." The scrupulous process of learning to receive seeks to avoid the temptations of the colonial containment – whether arrogant or benevolent – of the 'other' and remind the learners to guard against superficial and stereotypical cultural representations and constructions.

The idea of 'ethical singularity' is not new for indigenous people. It is embedded in their epistemes and takes place in their various gift giving practices that are based on active participation and attending one's relationships in the world. This world is not an abstraction or a location 'out there,' it is the concrete environment in which we find ourselves in our everyday lives. For academics, this concrete environment can be found, of course, in the academy itself and the relationships therein. What we are currently witnessing, however, is not engaging in forms of ethical singularity but a further alienation from any sense of academic community and intellectual relationships. Due to the pressures of a different kind of accountability, we can see an opposite development toward cut-throat individualism and academic anxiety for excellence that override the need for ethical singularity, a commitment to engage with one another in non-crisis terms.

In other words, the values underlying the market-driven, hyper-competitive exchange paradigm simply does not allow ethical singularity to occur. The era of accountability looks very different depending on through which logic, the gift or the exchange, we define it. This is why we also need a new language, a language of possibility, and being aware how concepts such as responsibility can be understood in significantly different ways, depending on the lens through which we interpret them, and ultimately, on the way we relate ourselves in and to the world.

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