



Suzanne MacKenzie Memorial Lecture

Conceptually unclad: feminist geography and Aboriginal peoples^{*}

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This paper argues that feminist geography can provide some useful lessons in an attempt to increase Aboriginal peoples' representation in geography. It asks the question: How can we use the example of feminist geography to think about a geography that is more inclusive of Aboriginal people? The paper focuses on the issues of content in teaching, drawing on examples from urban and social geography, and on methodological challenges, especially the issue of reflexivity. Feminist geographer Suzanne Mackenzie argued that an emerging feminist geography left the discipline 'conceptually unclad', challenging scholars to consider new theoretical frameworks and new perspectives. I argue that emphasising the geographies of Aboriginal people also enriches geography, including feminist geography.

Cet article témoigne en faveur de la géographie féministe qui peut nous donner quelques leçons utiles pour augmenter la représentation du peuple aborigène en géographie. L'article pose la question suivante: comment peut-on utiliser l'exemple de la géographie féministe pour penser à une géographie qui est plus inclusive du peuple aborigène? Cet article insiste sur les questions du contenu d'enseignement, tirant les exemples de la géographie urbaine et sociale, et des défis de méthodologie, particulièrement au sujet de la réflexivité. La géographe féministe, Suzanne Mackenzie, a disputé qu'une géographie féministe émergente était partie du discipline d'un façon «conceptuellement nu», qui invitent aux érudits à considérer des nouveaux plans de théorie et des nouvelles perspectives. Je dispute que l'emphasis sur les géographies du peuple aborigène peut aussi enrichir la géographie, y compris la géographie féministe.

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Introduction

In a March 2002 essay in the *Globe and Mail* introducing George Erasmus's LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture,¹ Gerald Friesen, a historian at the University of Manitoba, noted the urgency of resolving Aboriginal peoples' place in Canada. With examples from a variety of cases where the justice system had failed Aboriginal people, Friesen asserted: 'Aboriginal people still do not possess the full rights of Canadian citizenship. They do not see the institutions of the country as reflecting their view of their history and status'. This was a story, he said, about place and the culture of places. These stories were:

not the reality of Toronto, Hamilton, London, Windsor, Montreal, Sherbrooke, Fredericton, Halifax. But the story is familiar in Labrador, northern Québec, northern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, the three territories. [They are] the story of the North and the West, on the one hand, and aboriginal people, on the other. Numbers of aboriginal people, often great numbers, make these places different. (Friesen 2002; p. A17)

He went on to say, 'It's hard to make the urgency of this circumstance clear in Toronto or Ottawa or Montreal. It must receive national recognition'.

The following day, also as an introduction to the lecture, John Ralston Saul had this to say:

Something that exists does not go away because we pretend it isn't there. Much of the past 150 years of our history has been troubled... by an almost child-like, head-under-the-blanket approach toward the central role of aboriginals in the ongoing shape of Canadian society... We have long regarded our society's origin as bipolar. But it is triangular, its foundations influenced by anglophone, francophone and aboriginal cultures. (Saul 2002; p. A11)

In his essay in *The Canadian Geographer* for the fiftieth anniversary of the Canadian Association of Geographers, Cole Harris (2001, 193) provided a more sophisticated argument for what Ralston Saul was trying to say. 'Canada,' Harris said, 'is an

evolving human geography that has nurtured difference and made a unitary state impossible'. According to Harris, the historical-geographical construction of Canada encouraged a type of confederation that ingrained deeply different identities in the fabric of this country.

This brings up some very important themes. The first is the continuation of a distinct Aboriginal identity in Canada that, while it has changed over time, shows no signs of disappearing. Canadians are increasingly challenged to respond, in the words of the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, to restructure the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples (Royal Commission 1996). The second theme is the deeply geographic roots of this evolving relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. From Friesen's *local* geographies of difference, to Saul's and Harris's *national* geographies of difference that constitute the identity of Canada, geography matters.

In this context, I am struck by the fact that Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal realities are so poorly represented in our discipline. While I know Aboriginal graduate students and faculty in English, sociology, history, politics, public administration and, of course, native studies, I know of almost no Aboriginal faculty, staff or graduate students in geography in Canada. Aboriginal people are only occasionally mentioned in undergraduate geography textbooks and are generally not mentioned in most of geography's subdisciplines.² After writing a review of recent work by Canadian geographers on Aboriginal people in Canada, I reviewed earlier journals out of curiosity and found a paucity of geographic research on Canadian Aboriginal people (Peters 2001).

Several decades ago, feminist geographers noted the absence of women in geography. Since that time, feminist geography has changed the discipline.³ Clearly, the poor representation of Aboriginal people in Canadian geography is not identical to the underrepresentation of women's and gender issues. Aboriginal people constitute a much smaller proportion of the Canadian population (Table 1).

1 The LaFontaine-Baldwin lectures are a joint initiative of the Dominion Institute and John Ralston Saul. They were organised to emphasise the political ideals of Canadian politicians Sir Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine and Robert Baldwin.

2 Historical geography seems to be an exception.

3 I recognise that there have been critiques that feminist geography remains 'outside the project' (Christopherson 1989; Rose 1993). I maintain, though, that feminist geography has had a major impact on teaching and research in the discipline.

Table 1

Aboriginal population Canada, 1901–2001

Census year	Total population	Total Aboriginal population	Aboriginal people as a percentage of the total Canadian population
1901*	5,371,315	127,941†	2.38
1911	7,206,643	106,611‡	1.47
1921	8,788,483	113,724§	1.40
1931	10,376,786	128,890¶	1.24
1941	11,506,655	160,937**	1.40
1951	14,009,429	165,607††	1.18
1961	18,238,247	220,121	1.21
1971	21,568,311	312,765‡‡	1.45
1981	24,083,496	491,465§§	2.04
1986	25,022,010	711,720¶¶	2.84
1991	26,994,045	1,002,675	3.71
1996	28,846,761	1,101,960	3.82
2001	30,007,094	1,319,890	4.40

NOTE: The statistics for different years are not directly comparable because of changing boundaries, definitions and instructions to enumerators. However, they do illustrate some of the basic dimensions of growth in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations.

SOURCES: Canada 1983, 6; 2002a, 1; 2002b, 2; 2003; Goldmann and Siggner, 1995.

*This was the first post-confederation census that made specific reference to the Aboriginal population in the instructions to the enumerator.

†Includes Indians, and half-breeds, with mixed native and non-native ancestry traced through either parent.

‡Includes Indians, with ancestry traced through the mother's side.

§Includes Indians and Inuit, with ancestry traced through the mother's side.

¶Includes Native Indian, Inuit and persons of mixed native and non-native ancestry traced on the mother's side.

**Includes Native Indian, Inuit and persons of mixed native and non-native ancestry traced on the father's side.

††Includes Native Indian, Inuit and some persons of mixed native and non-native ancestry living on Indian reserves or traced on the father's side, in 1951 and 1961.

‡‡Includes Native Indian and Inuit only, traced on the father's side.

§§Includes Native Indian, Inuit and Metis ancestry, traced through both parents.

¶¶Includes people with North American Indian, Inuit and Metis ancestry, traced through both parents, in 1986, 1991 and 1996.

Nevertheless, it is a growing population that generates issues we must accommodate.

Feminist geography might provide a useful framework for increasing the focus on Aboriginal people. My question today, then, is: How can we use the example of feminist geography to think about a geography that is more inclusive of Aboriginal people? This question can be impossibly broad, so let me list some boundaries. First, I address the issue of content in teaching and research, and I draw examples mainly from my own area of study, which is urban and social geography.⁴ Second, I address the methodological challenges of doing research with contemporary Aboriginal people. I see both of these as limited but absolutely necessary first steps.

The title of my essay hints at the way I am going to develop this argument. In several of her papers, Suzanne Mackenzie argued that as it developed,

4 Teaching styles are also important, but these are beyond the scope of this essay. Interested readers should see Bailey (2000).

feminist geography struggled to make sense of women's lives using existing geographic concepts and theoretical frameworks, both from mainstream geography and from an emerging feminist geography. In her own work, she found herself disconcerted by her research:

Moving between work at home and work in public places, [women] bridged private and public spaces and activities. Women's daily activities were carried out in opposition to a city made up of distinct work spaces and home spaces... Women's activities were also rendering obsolete a geographical analysis based on... the dichotomies of the divided city. (Mackenzie 1989a, 114)

Mackenzie (1989b, 56) saw women as creating new kinds of space, and so useless were the old categories to understand this that she saw these women as 'conceptually unclad'. Feminist geography generated new understandings, new theoretical

frameworks and new perspectives. I believe that an engagement with the geographies of Aboriginal people will provide a similar benefit to geography. This is the strongest argument I can offer for creating a Canadian geography that is more inclusive of Aboriginal peoples.

Aboriginal Content in Geography

My own teaching experience has led me to believe that increasing Aboriginal content in the teaching and research of geography is an important first step in creating a geography that is more inclusive of Aboriginal people. In my first year of teaching at Queen's University, I offered a fourth-year seminar course focusing on Aboriginal peoples. Of the ten students registered, one was a young Aboriginal woman from British Columbia, taking a master's degree in public administration (MPA). My course was not required for her MPA. I believe that she was simply looking for something familiar. The term did not start well for her—I had chosen to begin with some of the literature that presented Aboriginal cultures as fragmented, dysfunctional and declining. One of her fellow students was quite articulate about his view that the only way forward for Aboriginal people in Canada was complete assimilation. Then I showed the film *Cree Hunters of the Mistissini*, made by Boyce Richardson in the early 1970s documenting Cree lifeways in northern Québec. The next day, she came to my office, closed the door and burst into tears. She spoke about her terrible loneliness, being far from home, and how this film was the first recognition she had seen from the university of the relevance of Aboriginal cultures in academic material. The absence of any presence of Aboriginal cultures and perspectives in her courses at the time had made her wonder if she could continue, despite her desire not to disappoint her band, which was sponsoring her financially. This film had encouraged her and also caused her fellow student to change his arguments. Seeing a combination of guns and Aboriginal ceremonies for animals, Cree speakers and power saws, complex Aboriginal rules for managing hunting territories and skiplanes gave him another perspective on the nature of contemporary Aboriginal cultures. Other Aboriginal students I have known have had similar experiences. More Aboriginal content in geography courses can play a crucial role in increasing Aboriginal

representation in the discipline, because it can make geography seem more relevant to Aboriginal peoples' lives.

The experience of feminist geography also suggests that this type of project can enrich geography. It is helpful to use the material Mackenzie presented in several papers to describe the nature of this potential (see also Bowlby *et al.* 1989; Bowlby 1992).⁵ In a 1984 introduction to a special issue of *Antipode*, Mackenzie (1984, 5) noted that early work in feminist geography was empirical and comparative, laying the basis for a definition of women as a distinct subgroup of the population. Early incursions were wary, noted Mackenzie, looking for places, footholds, in existing theoretical frameworks to study aspects of women's lives. This focus, however, amassed enough information about women's perceptions and movement patterns in cities to document 'their definition as an urban subgroup, deviating from the assumed male norm by virtue of occupying less space, having access to fewer resources, travelling less, and generally suffering specific spatial constraints' (Mackenzie 1989a, 112).

Increasingly, though, Mackenzie expressed frustration with the limits on the development of theory created by attempts to fit women's lives into existing explanatory frameworks (Mackenzie 1984). She was convinced that these frameworks could not accommodate various dimensions of women's lives. 'Studying women's lives,' she said,

broke down many of the categories geographers had used, leaving only a mass of conceptually unclad and immediate content. One could not assume a neat division between economic and social activities, nor between economic and social geographies; activities and forms had to be seen anew. It was necessary to watch them being actively produced, reproduced, and altered. (Mackenzie 1989a, 114)

New categories, theories and perspectives were required.

Incorporating Aboriginal peoples into urban geography

Bringing Aboriginal people into work in urban geography can also provide critical new insights. It

⁵ I recognise that there are other, less linear ways of presenting this history (Women and Geography Study Group 1997).

can challenge taken-for-granted perspectives and, by challenging unexamined assumptions, show that the geographies of Aboriginal peoples are relevant to thinking in the whole discipline. Bringing in Aboriginal people also challenges ideas about who counts as appropriate geographic subjects and who produces geography. Here, I briefly highlight some examples, focusing on Aboriginal migration to urban areas.

Tools for exploring urbanisation, such as urbanisation curves, are familiar to urban geographers, as are important issues such as differences in urbanisation rates and processes in different countries and the different definitions of 'urban'. Slightly more than 60 percent of all Canadians lived in urban areas by 1951. Only about 7 percent of Aboriginal peoples lived in cities by that time (Drost 1995, 17). In 1996, about half of all Aboriginal people lived in urban areas. How do we view Aboriginal urbanisation with these perspectives? A simple interpretation starts with population pressures, the search for education and employment and the government programs that encouraged Aboriginal people to move in increasing numbers to urban areas, starting in about the 1950s. The Aboriginal population in urban areas is expected to grow by about 50 percent between 1991 and 2016 (Norris *et al.* 1996, v). Is this simply an example of an Aboriginal case study illustrating familiar urbanisation patterns? I believe that if we look at this story more carefully, there are also implications for how we think about the development of cities and about the relationship between urban and Aboriginal spaces.

First, we need to recognise that this is not just an example of rural Aboriginal people becoming urbanised much later than most Canadians. Understanding Aboriginal urbanisation means that we also need to understand that Aboriginal people were actively removed from emerging urban centres at the turn of the century. This is not a familiar part of Canadian urban historical geography. While there is no comprehensive documentation available, there are numerous examples to suggest that the general absence of Aboriginal people in cities before the mid-1900s resulted, in part, from policies that actively displaced them from urban areas.

In one of the few urban geographies that starts with the process of removing Aboriginal peoples from urban land, Cole Harris (1992) documents the

confinement of First Nation people to reserves along the Lower Mainland of what is now Vancouver and the destruction of their villages. In 1881, Cree people in Alberta, exercising their right to choose the site of their reserve, moved to the south side of the North Saskatchewan river, opposite Edmonton. Under pressure, most of the residents of this reserve gave up their Indian status. Those remaining were moved, and the Papaschase reserve was expropriated (Raby 1973, 39–40; Leonard 2002). In 1907, the Cowessess reserve in southern Saskatchewan was reduced by 30 percent moving its boundaries further from the town of Broadview, and between 1904 and 1907, the Cote reserve in Saskatchewan was reduced by 15 percent to create the townsite of Kamsack at the crossing of the Assiniboine River (Raby 1973, 41–2). In 1911, the Songhees Indian reserve was removed from Victoria, together with all monuments and tombstones. The Department of Indian Affairs reported:

The difficulties that were brought into prominence by this vexed question led to careful consideration as to how they might be avoided in the future. Contiguous to several large towns and cities there are Indian reserves which, owing to the growth of these communities, may become completely surrounded by them; indeed several reserves are now in that position... [S]uch a situation, apart altogether from its accompanying irritation, is fraught with great danger to the Indians. (Canada 1911, xxi)

There are also stories of Metis communities living on road allowances next to towns, continuously being forced to move with the expansion of urban boundaries. These are only a few examples; it is, however, clear that for decades, policies responding to Aboriginal urbanisation have been informed by a discourse that defines Aboriginal and urban cultures as incompatible (Peters 2002).

Failing to recognise that Aboriginal people were removed to make space for settler cities suggests that Aboriginal people are new migrants to urban areas. It obscures the role that Aboriginal people played in creating the conditions for urban growth. It ignores the fact that Aboriginal people were actively erased from city landscapes and helps to reinforce a dichotomous view of urban life and Aboriginal cultures. It relies on the story that cities in Canada were built on empty lands. When

geographic theory explaining the growth and location of contemporary Canadian cities frames their development only in terms of physical geography, transportation and spatial relations and urban institutions, it ignores colonial settlers who displaced Aboriginal peoples and communities from urban areas. Adding Aboriginal people to urban geography provides a more accurate lens through which to view the conditions for urban growth in this country.

It is also interesting to look at the spaces Aboriginal urbanisation patterns create. Geographers have recently re-examined how migration is viewed in the discipline, drawing attention to the ways people forge connections over space, as individuals maintain links with communities across borders and boundaries (Massey and Jess 1995; McHugh 2000). James Clifford (1994) suggests that contemporary migration studies are relevant to the situation of indigenous peoples. He notes that colonial histories and assaults on lands and economies create, for indigenous peoples, 'diasporic practices of long-term dwelling away from home' that accompany urbanisation. Like trans-

national migrants, many urban Aboriginal people maintain links with their communities of origin—political, economic and cultural—stretching out social relations and identities across urban and rural space (Todd 2000/2001). What are the geographies of this type of analysis? They are geographies of an indigenous connection to land on reserves and a disruption of the significance of reserve boundaries through repeated movements, interaction and identity. These are geographies that assume that there is a boundary separating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal spaces.

However, there may be other ways of thinking about these geographies. Kathleen Wilson's PhD thesis examined the relationships to land of urban Anishinabek people who had moved from reserves on Manitoulin Island. She asked her respondents whether they experienced difficulty in maintaining that relationship in urban areas (Wilson 2000). She found that, while many respondents emphasised a continued relationship with the land through their connections to their reserves of origin, they also connected to the land through practices in the city (Figure 1). Some

I believe that, um, there's places we can find within the city, if we have to physically put ourselves in a spot. In Toronto I used to find places. High Park is big and then there's the ravine system around the Don Valley. (Lisa, Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation, Sudbury)

I can't take tobacco or sweetgrass to work and smudge with it but I can go to a small park and find a tree. All you need is a quiet spot for your offering. I feel good about doing it without fear of being scolded or shunned. No one can take that from you. It wasn't easy though. It took me years to feel comfortable, to feel okay about doing it. (Carrie, Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation, Hamilton)

My relationship [with Mother Earth] is centered on spirituality. It helps me to be able to understand what is around me. I'm not living in a native atmosphere. I am living in a white society. It helps me visualize everything, to really see the trees, the birds, the rain and everything. It helps me focus on the day to day atmosphere. Having that relationship keeps me focused on everything she provides. (Sharon, Sheshegwaning First Nation, Sudbury)

For Native people, Mother Earth is North America's Turtle Island. We're unique. Unlike the Europeans, unlike the African or the Asian, Canadian or even the American, we cannot track our roots back to any other land beyond the borders of Turtle Island. (Jim, Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation, Toronto)

Figure 1

Urban Aboriginal Descriptions of How They Connect to the Land in Urban Areas.
SOURCE: Wilson 2000, 275, 276, 283, unpublished transcripts.

emphasised that city lands were part of Turtle Island and that this helped them to maintain a connection. In the process of connecting with Mother Earth in the city, Anishinabek people saw urban places as part of Aboriginal land. In this way, they defined urbanisation as movement, not across boundaries separating Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal territories, but within Aboriginal territories. These are unfamiliar urban geographies that challenge colonial practices of assigning Aboriginal peoples and cultures to places far from the urban industrial core of Canadian society. They make urban into Aboriginal space.⁶

Implicit in adding Aboriginal people to urban geography, then, is the requirement for new theoretical frameworks—perspectives that connect a colonial history of the growth of Canadian cities and the emergence of new social geographies that redraw the boundaries of Aboriginal space in Canada.

Incorporating Aboriginal peoples into feminist geography

Including Aboriginal people can also make important contributions to feminist geography. Developing an inclusive feminist geography means critically assessing whether the concepts and frameworks we use are appropriate for women from different cultures and in different circumstances. A geography of Aboriginal women poses some interesting challenges in this regard.⁷ Colleen Youngs, a PhD student at the University of Saskatchewan, has been working with some of the feminist research on the geographies of daily survival strategies of low-income women in urban areas (Oberhauser 1995; Gilbert 1997, 1998). She argues that using this work to explore the situation of First Nation women's lives requires at least two modifications. The first is an acknowledgement of the ways these strategies are shaped, not only by economic considerations but also by cultural expectations about kin and acquaintances (Youngs 2001). The second is an acknowledgement of the ways these strategies are shaped by movements and connections between reserves and cities, requiring new ways of thinking about spatial entrapment. Examples like this demonstrate how research on Aboriginal peoples can enrich feminist geography. Integrating

Aboriginal frameworks of meaning into feminist geography can produce a superior scholarship.

At the same time, I am troubled by the prospect of a feminist geography that focuses primarily on Aboriginal women. It is not so much the 'Aboriginal' part that bothers me—I am well aware that this is a heterogeneous category, and I am familiar with ways of dealing with this.⁸ Rather, I am bothered by the 'women' part. Many Aboriginal women express reservations about a feminism that puts most of its emphasis on gender (Emberly 1993). For example, Sylvia Maracle and Marilyn Kane's interview in *Canadian Woman Studies* describes a perspective on gender relations that fits uneasily with some aspects of western feminism:

Osenontion (Marilyn Kane): The 'others' have to start to think differently and they have to look in their own mirror, at their own selves, and their own baggage that they're carrying.

Skonaganleh:râ (Sylvia Maracle): I agree that we had a hard time with this thing called 'feminism' and writing for a 'feminist' journal... I understand the nature of being defined as a 'feminist' and wanting some sense of equality, but frankly, I don't want equality... while I suppose equality is a nice thing and while I suppose we can never go back all the way, I want to make an effort at going back to at least respecting the role that women played in communities and where they come from. They should not look at a universal sisterhood, so much as we should be looking at creating a situation where all people of many colours can peacefully exist. (Kane and Maracle 1989, 15)

In a special issue of *Native Studies Review* on Aboriginal women and decolonisation, Patricia Monture-Angus (1999, 87) similarly asks for a thoughtful evaluation of Aboriginal women's roles in Aboriginal communities:

The answer to the colonization questions I have been asking rests with the women... Women are the nurturers in our community. Women offer the first teaching to every child who comes into the world. This is our traditional responsibility (and I have a plea for you to read this without putting it through any 'mainstream' or White western filters). Our gendered roles in our

6 We discuss this further in Wilson and Peters (in press).

7 I made this argument in Peters (1998) as well.

8 See Emberly (1993) and Manderson *et al.* (1998).

social structures were not oppressive to women in the same way that is found in Canadian society.

Aboriginal cultures vary, and there are different gender relations in different groups and different times (Schoorman 1998). However, underlying both these quotes is an argument that there is a need to consider culturally distinct gender relations and to connect 'woman' with 'Aboriginal'. I believe that many Aboriginal women have reservations about a feminist analysis that extracts women from their communities, their histories and the experiences they hold in common with 'all their relations'. Maybe, the greatest challenge to feminist geography that comes with a sustained attempt to 'add Aboriginal women' is the challenge of finding ways to create accounts that do not isolate gender.⁹ Studying the lives of Aboriginal women, then, poses some intriguing questions for feminist geography.

Methodological Issues

If we are to improve Aboriginal representation in geography, we need to pay attention to appropriate research methods. In recent years, many Aboriginal groups have asked for more involvement in, and control of, the research that takes place in Aboriginal communities and among Aboriginal people. While feminist research methodologies provide some important guidelines in negotiating these initiatives, they also leave some critical gaps.

Feminist research methods¹⁰

Over the last few decades, there has been an increasing critique, in feminist geography and other work, of the notion of objective, impartial, value-free knowledge that positions the researcher as an expert, extracting information from a passive subject. This critique argues that researchers cannot produce research that is independent of their histories, experiences and social positions, both because they are conditioned to see what fits into their conceptual frameworks and because partici-

pants respond to researchers according to their perceptions of who they are (the coproduction of knowledge). Any knowledge, then, is partial—linked to the circumstances and perspectives of the participants, both researchers and researched. Let me expand briefly on three implications of this perspective on knowledge production, as it has been addressed in feminist methodologies.

The first implication is the importance of reflexivity, involving 'close scrutiny and (re)politicisation of all aspects of the research process—from choosing a research topic to selecting data collection methods, from setting a research question to conceptualising theoretical constructs, and from designing a research project to presenting and circulating analysis' (Moss 2002, see also England 1994; Nast 1994).¹¹ The object of reflexivity is to identify biases and preconceptions contained in research methods related to the social positions of researchers and participants.

A second implication is a commitment to provide opportunities for marginalised peoples to include their views and perspectives on the topic being studied (Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabata 2002). Creating venues and methods through which participants represent themselves are ways that feminist researchers attempt to lessen the impact of dominant frameworks of meaning on understanding and interpretation.¹² Pursuing this goal, though,

9 See McKittrick (2000) and Ruddick (1996) for some possible ways forward.

10 There is a long-standing debate about whether there are distinct feminist methods. Clearly, other disciplines have addressed issues of objectivity, power and the relationships between researchers and participants in the research endeavour. This debate is not my central focus. Nor do I wish to provide my version of what constitutes a feminist methodology in geography.

11 Hay (2000, 194) defines reflexivity as: 'self-critical introspection and a self-conscious scrutiny of oneself as a researcher'. Recently, Gillian Rose (1997) has suggested that an underlying text in some of the feminist emphases on reflexivity has been an attempt to remove biases and create certainty in the knowledge that is produced. This is impossible, she argues, because complete understanding of what the researcher and the participant bring to the situation, and how this affects the knowledge that is produced, is unobtainable. There is a need, therefore, to acknowledge gaps and uncertainties in the process of doing research. Reflexivity is important, but Rose suggests that the fissures and contradictions that emerge should also be written into the research product.

12 It is also a method of challenging some of the power differentials that often separate researchers from the individuals and groups they research. Some strategies for accomplishing this include: involving multiple voices from design stage onwards—both on research teams and among participants (Hanson 1997, 126; Pratt 1998, 301); using methods that encourage participants to represent themselves; sharing the prepublication text; and producing multi-vocal texts that 'give voice' to the research (England 1994, 85). Most of the concern about power differentials has been with the more powerful position of the researcher in relation to the participant, although there has been some work on situations where the people being researched are more powerful than the researchers (Schoenberger 1991, 1992; McDowell 1992).

requires a conscious attempt to relinquish some control over the research process—a prospect that involves considerable risk but also opens up alternative perspectives and other ways of knowing (Pratt 2000, 645).

A third implication is the need to address issues of representation and appropriation. Feminist researchers recognise the threat of harmful misrepresentations and the risk of appropriating other peoples' perspectives (Alcoff 1991–1992; England 1994; Nast 1994; Pulido 2002).¹³ At the same time, these issues need to be balanced against a responsibility to bring the situation of marginalised peoples into view and to speak out against injustice (Alcoff 1991–1992).¹⁴

These qualities of feminist research—an openness to alternative perspectives and a recognition that this might mean giving up some control over the research process, an emphasis on examining the ways social positions affect researchers' initiatives and participants' responses and a thoughtful conceptualisation of appropriation and representation—provide a useful grounding for work in Aboriginal communities.

But there are also some challenges in Aboriginal research that are not sufficiently addressed by feminist research methodologies in geography. One of these has to do with the solitariness or individuation of processes of reflexivity and the consideration of issues of representation. Reliance on isolated self-critical and self-conscious reflection about motives, biases and assumptions and careful attention to issues of appropriation and misrepresentation are not enough in cross-cultural

situations, and they will not fulfil the requirements for involvement put forward by many Aboriginal communities. A second challenge has to do with the issue of giving something back to the community (Reed 2002). In a volume on research ethics, Thomas Herman and Doreen Mattingly (1999, 209) have this to say:

Like other social scientists we mine the lives of our research subjects for our own use and write stories that simplify, objectify, and at times misrepresent them. In return we offer them only token payment for their time (if they're lucky) and the vague promise that our work might some day change the academic discourse about their lives in a manner that might indirectly affect them.¹⁵

Considering Aboriginal challenges to research methods can contribute to new strategies for working with research participants.

Aboriginal challenges to research methods

Increasingly, Aboriginal people are attempting to exert some degree of control over research that concerns them by writing their own research guidelines and protocols. Government agencies and academic institutions are also recognising the importance of these issues. Section 6 in the Canadian *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* is one such example (Canada 1998).¹⁶

Protocols relevant to Aboriginal people are not transferable to all groups. However, they do provide an example of a marginalised group, studied disproportionately to their representation in the

13 Even attempts to create spaces in academic texts for marginalised women's perspectives are shaped by researchers' choices about inclusion and exclusion and the contexts in which these perspectives are placed (England 1994, 84; Pulsipher 1997, 308).

14 A useful way for thinking about these issues is to recognise that there are always social and cultural differences and similarities between researchers and participants—sometimes great, sometimes small. There are never 'outsiders' or 'insiders' in an absolute sense, and one strategy may be to build on commonalities between participants. Audrey Kobayashi (1994) points out that settling issues of legitimacy and representation cannot be answered with reference to personal attributes (e.g., race, gender or sexuality), because this involves a 'slippery slope argument'. Instead, our choices to engage in research with a variety of groups should be premised on the basis of a history of involvement and a commitment to political change, accompanied by an understanding of how attributes are used and changed to create solidarity and difference in varying situations.

15 Some feminist researchers have emphasised political involvement as an integral part of their research and teaching and have identified this as a contribution they make to the needs of communities (Katz 1994; Kobayashi 1994). However, activists are often greeted with a great deal of suspicion by Aboriginal groups. Rundstrom and Deur (1999, 241) write: 'We contend that [an activist role does not] serve the interests of the people studied very well, people whose own voices usually are better suited to assessing their own needs'.

16 Section 6 is entitled *Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples*, and it attempts to identify some issues researchers should be aware of. These include the ownership of cultural property, the possibility of reproducing negative stereotypes, the need to give Aboriginal communities an opportunity to respond to research findings and the importance of considering when researchers need to obtain community approval for conducting research.

Where Indigenous people are major participants in research or they have a major interest in the outcome of a research project focused on an issue of relevance to Indigenous people, then working relationships based on collaboration and partnership should be established between the researcher and these participants. This would include the mutual sharing of research skills and research outcomes (pp. 3–4)

The researchers' main responsibility and accountability will be to the people involved in the activities being researched, who will be considered as having an equal interest in the project (p. 6).

The terms of the research as well as the research question and methodology will be designed in consultation with, and having due consideration for, the expertise of the Indigenous individuals or groups who will form part of the research.

The researcher and the individual or group providing the information will share continual monitoring of the research process equally.

As part of collaborative processes the research initiator will take responsibility for sharing and co-developing research skills with research participants (p. 7).

The research will make a positive contribution to Indigenous needs, aims and aspirations as defined by Indigenous people and the enhancement of Indigenous values (p. 7–8).

The findings of the research will be presented in a format that is readily understandable and accessible to all stakeholders (p. 8).

Figure 2

Excerpts from: *Protocols and Principles for Conducting Research in an Indigenous Context*

SOURCE: University of Victoria Indigenous Governance Program, *Protocols and Principles for Conducting Research in an Aboriginal Context*. <http://web.uvic.ca/igov/research/index.html>. Accessed September 2002.

general population, that is attempting to define what the research process has meant and can mean to them. In this context, it seems important to explore some of the dimensions and the implications of their interventions. I use, as an example, *Protocols and Principles for Conducting Research in an Indigenous Context*, produced for faculty and students in the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria, Faculty of Human and Social Development (2001).¹⁷ In addition to the excerpts from the document shown here (Figure 2), there are guidelines regarding negotiating ownership of data and publications. Clearly, this protocol does not represent all available initiatives, and what constitutes ethical conduct varies among Aboriginal people (Wax 1991; Mihesuah 1993; Rundstrom and Duer 1999; McAvoy *et al.*

2000; Meijer Drees 2001). I find this example useful because it is not linked only to reserves or to northern communities. Instead, it is linked more generally to research where 'indigenous people are major participants in research or they have a major interest in the outcome of a research project focused on an issue of relevance to Indigenous peoples' (2001, 3). Moreover, it is written for a research institution.

A basic theme that emerges from protocols such as this is the need for collaboration between researchers and participants. Areas of collaboration include defining terms of the questions and the methods used, participating in and monitoring the research process (including being trained in research skills), interpreting results, writing and being acknowledged in reports and papers and making decisions about dissemination. Clearly, the level of Aboriginal involvement in these elements varies. What is important, though, is that Aboriginal research protocols are envisioning

¹⁷ I do not address the ethics of what to do with material cultural property such as human remains and human tissue—I am mostly concerned with the standard subjects of social science research in our discipline.

Aboriginal people as collaborators rather than as research 'participants'.

The rationale for collaboration is threefold. First, there is the desire to protect the cultural property of Aboriginal communities, including traditional medicines, ceremonies, songs, rituals and other sacred cultural traditions. Part of this has to do with keeping private, items or information that are not for public consumption, or controlling the right time and circumstances for their exposure. Part of this has to do with having the right to tell one's own histories.

A second rationale for collaboration has to do with finding ways of avoiding stereotypes and misrepresentation. In her master's thesis, based on a community collaborative research project, Verna St. Denis, a Cree/Metis woman at the University of Saskatchewan, puts it bluntly: 'If the community is not involved in the entire research process, the result is often misinformation and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes' (St. Denis 1992, 57). This statement may be overly general. However, Tri-Council guidelines acknowledge the harm that has been done to Aboriginal people by inaccurate or insensitive information and suggest that researchers should think about when the approval of the community as a whole should be required before results are made public (Canada 1998, 6.2–6.4). Clearly, these initiatives have to do with representation, legitimacy and who can speak for whom. These are issues that have received a great deal of attention in the feminist literature. What is different here, though, is the suggestion of community involvement as a mechanism for addressing these issues.

Of course there are difficulties, and I do not want to seem too idealistic. Based on her experience, St. Denis (1992, 54) notes, in what I consider an understatement: 'The pragmatics of practice, it turns out, provide a formidable challenge'. It is not often clear, for example, what are the boundaries of the group that should be consulted or who appropriately represents that group (St. Denis 1992; Rundstrom and Deur 1999). Community control over research may marginalise less-powerful groups, and there is the challenge of community leaders who have other agendas that can derail the collaborative process. There are special challenges in urban areas where Aboriginal people are heterogeneous and where there are often struggles over who represents them. At the same time, there are people who are helpful and open all kinds

of doors, people who are genuinely interested in collaborative work and tremendously giving of their time and knowledge.

The main point I want to make here, though, is that the promotion of collaborative research in Aboriginal research protocols establishes a different framework for reflexivity, making decisions about representation and thinking about the challenges of producing research that does not harm participants. Under these protocols, these are not solitary practices based on researchers' reading and reflection. They are not even based on relationships established between individual researchers and individual participants. These practices require the establishment of a relationship between the researcher (or group of researchers) and the group of people that is affected by and has an interest in the research and its results. This approach creates different sets of challenges for researchers and requires different sets of skills. However, it also opens up an avenue for approaching seemingly intractable problems of representation, legitimacy and appropriation.

The third rationale for an emphasis on collaboration is the goal of giving something back to the community—the desire to ensure that Aboriginal people benefit from the research by influencing topics that are being researched, learning research skills, obtaining data for their own use and gaining publications. In everyday language, the rationale reads something like this:

Historically, research conducted in Aboriginal communities has been done at the discretion and under the direction of White professionals.... It is now recognized that the research questions and subsequent research direction must come from the community. The focus of research then becomes the betterment of the community rather than the betterment of the investigator or other stakeholders outside the community. (Kowalsky *et al.* 1996, 268; see also Mihesuah 1993, 136; Manderson *et al.* 1998, 225)

I can get quite defensive about statements like that. They attack my commitment to socially relevant research, and I am at a loss, sometimes, to identify the great benefits that I get from the hard work of doing this research! I also believe that trying to change ideas and produce knowledge are useful pursuits, even if they do not provide someone with

a job or fix someone's roof. Nevertheless, there is something here that we need to address. Murray Wax (1991, 438), in his article on ethical research in American Indian communities, notes some of the problems with the intersection of abstract scientific goals and community concerns:

As a formal ethical requirement, consent may be sought, but since the scientist is oriented away from the community toward research that is of theoretical significance, or whose benefits will be to humanity at large, the [Aboriginal people] are not being treated as agents whose autonomy is valued, and toward whom benefits must be channelled. (See also Deloria 1991, 467; Martin Brizinski 1993, 155; Mihesuah 1993, 132; McAvoy *et al.* 2000)

Research directed towards the theoretical frameworks of the academy is not a bad thing. But what happens when, in the process, the expressed needs of the community and the questions of local people go unanswered while they are asked to participate in research invented by academics?

At the same time, a research career that concentrates on the topics and questions defined by communities can create some difficult choices for academics. Community-defined research is often applied research that does not lend itself well to the standards for tenure and promotion, academic publications and success in obtaining research funding. One strategy is to think about the different kinds of research conducted among Aboriginal people—applied research requested by communities; research initiated by governments, businesses or non-governmental organisations; and academic research oriented towards questions emerging from theory. A project may attempt to address several of these types of research at the same time. Depending on the research question, the degree of collaboration may vary. Murray Wax (1991, 454) talks about 'conjoint planning', so that both community needs and generalised findings can be produced. This requires that researchers use their skills to meet some of the research needs of Aboriginal groups and gain their cooperation in projects that make more general contributions to the production of knowledge. Optimistically, Wax suggests that: 'Rather than regarding themselves as the exploited victims of careerist scientists, [Aboriginal people] might come to define themselves as co-participants with

correlative status, responsibilities, and privileges' (1991, 454). This is certainly a goal worth pursuing, especially given the suspicion many Aboriginal people have of academic university research.

At the same time, there is a pressing need to re-evaluate the way that community-based and applied research is evaluated in our discipline. We need to change our model of scholarship to open up time and space for community-based work to count.

The pragmatics of 'giving something back' to the Aboriginal people participating in academic research projects is not straightforward. There is often a lack of understanding about how academia works and the multiple commitments of academic researchers. Aboriginal groups may not have the required research skills, and funding for training community members is not a standard part of research grants. Planning for collaborative research and ways to provide academic rewards to participants requires a substantial investment of time and energy and a commitment to involvement in the intricacies of local life. This time commitment is not built into the system of academic rewards and recognition (Wax 1991; Martin Brizinski 1993; Kowalsky *et al.* 1996; Rundstrom and Deur 1999; McAvoy *et al.* 2000).¹⁸ There is also the vulnerability that comes from relying on another group to hold up their end of the agreement, depending on the kind of protocol, and relying on that group to release the results of the research for publication.¹⁹

Given the difficulty of collaborative research, why try! First, it opens up the chance of 'surprises', of different frameworks for understanding and of discoveries (Hanson 1997, 125). Second, it provides

18 Shaw (1995) and Farrow (1995) also found, in their feminist participatory research projects, that the institutional demands of funding agencies and requirements for thesis production were at odds with the amount of time needed to respectfully research communities.

19 Rundstrom and Deur (1999) document an incident involving researchers working for the Inuit Cultural Institute (ICI) in northern Canada. When native and non-native executives were accused of embezzlement by the federal government in 1988, elders locked up all of the information associated with ICI projects. Cultural research the ICI is conducted with the sole permission of a council of local elders. Rundstrom's ICI-funded participatory place-name mapping project was cancelled, along with the projects of other researchers, and all data were legally declared to be elders' intellectual property. Researchers had nothing to show for their efforts.

one way forward into the difficult challenges of representation and appropriation highlighted in feminist geography. Third, it broadens community-academic linkages (Peake and Kobayashi 2002). In his evaluation of the growing demand for policy relevance in academic research a couple of years ago, David Demeritt (2000, 324) notes that while there are some very real dangers in this demand, there are also some useful challenges. 'If our critiques...are not to sound like special pleading for the old days of ivory-tower elitism, we need to find a way to make what we treasure publicly meaningful.' (See also Martin 2001, 190.) Research in collaboration with Aboriginal communities is one way of making our research publicly meaningful.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have suggested that increasing Aboriginal representation in our discipline is a worthwhile goal. Like feminist initiatives in the discipline, work about and with Aboriginal people contributes a great deal, introducing new theoretical frameworks, new spaces, new ideas about who makes geography and new approaches to methodology.

Feminist geographers have worked for several decades to make geography more inclusive of women. This work provides some useful guidelines for making geography more inclusive of Aboriginal people. However, research on Aboriginal peoples also provides some challenges for feminist geography—challenges that can enrich our research and scholarship. In Nelson, British Columbia, Mackenzie was conducting feminist research in collaboration with the community women she lived among, exploring new methods of research, writing and analysis. I would have loved to hear what she had to say about all of this.

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