

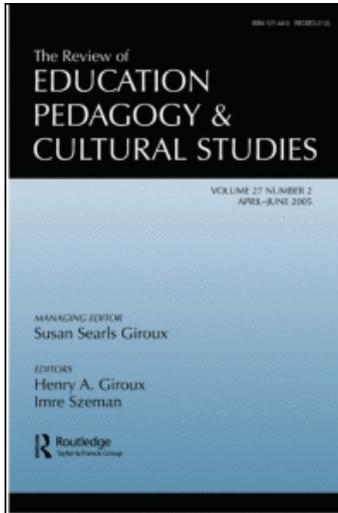
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# What is Hospitality in the Academy? Epistemic Ignorance and the (Im)Possible Gift

*Rauna Kuokkanen*

The academy is considered by many as the major Western institution of knowledge. This article, however, argues that the academy is characterized by prevalent “epistemic ignorance”—a concept informed by Gayatri Spivak’s discussion of “sanctioned ignorance.” Epistemic ignorance refers to academic practices and discourses that enable the continued exclusion of other than dominant Western epistemic and intellectual traditions. The academy fails to recognize indigenous epistemes grounded on different conceptions of the world and ways of knowing, and thus, indigenous people “cannot speak”; that is, when they speak from the framework of their own epistemic conventions, they are not heard or understood by the academy.

There is a need for a radical shift in approaching “cultural conflicts” in the academy. So far, various programs and services for indigenous students have been set up on the premise that they need special assistance to adapt to the academy. I argue, however, that it is the academy that is responsible for “doing its homework” and addressing its ignorance so it can give an “unconditional welcome” not only to indigenous people but also to their epistemes, without insisting on translation. Instead of assuming the need to “bridge” the gulf between the cultures of indigenous students and that of the institution, or help students make the transition from their cultures to the academic “culture,” this article contends that we need to focus on the academy itself; that the academy must take a critical look at its own discourses and assumptions and address the sanctioned epistemic ignorance that prevails in the institution.

I propose that the responsibility of the academy toward indigenous epistemes can be assumed by espousing a specific logic embedded in many indigenous epistemes; that is, the logic of the gift. This logic is characterized particularly by acknowledging and acting upon one's responsibilities to recognize and reciprocate the gift—to ensure the gift is not taken for granted or misused. In this article, I demonstrate why it is necessary to consider indigenous epistemes as a gift, how in the current academic system this gift is not possible, and finally, what needs to be done to enable the gift. I argue that if the academy does not assume its responsibilities, the gift of indigenous epistemes remains impossible.

#### EPISTEMIC IGNORANCE

It is widely recognized that conflicts between cultural values, expectations and goals between indigenous and mainstream societies are among the most common reasons for uneasiness among indigenous students in the academy. Historically, educating indigenous people has been established on the premise of “civilizing,” that is, assimilating and eradicating elements that separated and differentiated indigenous peoples from the dominant society, its culture and values. It is thus not surprising, then, that the difficulties of indigenous students are of quite a different nature from those of students who come from that society and tradition.

However, the notion of “conflicting values” can be highly problematic. Even mainstream society is constantly in conflict over values such as environmentalism, globalization, gay rights, abortion, race, sexuality and multiculturalism, to mention only a few.<sup>1</sup> In the academy, the tension between the objectives of liberal education and corporatization of universities is also regarded as a conflict of values. In this particular context, however, I am referring to *cultural* values of peoples who characterize themselves and are defined as distinct from the rest of society or nations forming the current nation-states. These values are closely attached to and associated with distinct assumptions and perceptions of the world (including the human relationship to the world) and therefore, are not necessarily directly comparable with various values and perspectives circulating in the dominant society and its worldviews.

“Cultural clash” or “conflict” is an expression that is being used to describe the situation where indigenous scholars and students, in educational institutions which are predominantly Western European in their intellectual and philosophical traditions, are faced with a set of values, views and expectations that differ in several critical ways from their own. The underlying principles and values of the “dominant” or “mainstream” culture, underpinning many theories and practices of the academy, often not only differ from but conflict with those of indigenous cultures.

However, focusing only on the idea of conflicting cultures or cultural values can be limiting when it seems that the “conflict” in fact is a consequence of a larger problem of ignorance which has not been adequately discussed in considerations dealing with indigenous students in the university. I call this “epistemic ignorance.” This enables us to frame the problem of cultural conflicts in broader terms and to pay closer attention to the responsibility and role of the academy rather than focus solely on indigenous people.

“Episteme” is often used to denote “of or pertaining to knowledge.” Michel Foucault, however, defines epistemes as “something like a world-view” and “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems” (Foucault 1972, 191). It is in this sense I employ the concept of episteme here—that is, I am not discussing indigenous knowledge but more broadly, indigenous ontologies, philosophies and presuppositions or conceptual frameworks through which one looks at and interprets the world.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of epistemic ignorance is connected to “sanctioned ignorance,” a term coined by Gayatri Spivak, but also informed by considerations of epistemological marginalization. For Spivak, sanctioned ignorance—the way in which “know-nothingism” is justified and even rewarded in the academy—is “of heterogeneous provenance,” manifesting itself in various ways (Spivak 1999, x). It refers to academic practices that enable the continued foreclosure of the “native informant” by not acknowledging her role in producing knowledge and theories. Sanctioned ignorance also relates to ways in which intellectual practices obscure contemporary concerns such as global capitalism and neocolonial processes. Sanctioned ignorance is, therefore, inseparable from colonial domination (Spivak 1987, 199).

What I call epistemic ignorance refers to ways in which academic theories and practices ignore, marginalize and exclude other than dominant Western European epistemic and intellectual traditions. These “other” epistemic and intellectual traditions are foreclosed in the process of producing, reproducing and disseminating knowledge to an extent that generally there is very little recognition and understanding of them. Epistemic ignorance is thus not limited to merely not-knowing or lack of understanding. It also refers to practices and discourses that actively foreclose other than dominant epistemes and refuse to seriously contemplate their existence. Epistemic ignorance is thereby a form of subtle violence. When other than dominant epistemes and forms of knowing are not seen or recognized, they are made to disappear through this invisibility and distance. In this way, also the reality that they attempt to represent is erased and destroyed (Shiva 1993, 12).

Operating on a more or less taken-for-granted set of values, norms and expectations, the academy at large usually knows very little, if anything, about indigenous epistemes, creating various kinds of conflicts with and perpetuating discrimination against those indigenous people who “speak through” their own epistemes—who desire or attempt to express their views based on an episteme foreign to the mainstream academic conventions. While there might be awareness of the *existence* of “local narratives” and “truths” (and possibly other epistemes), there is not necessarily much understanding of their contents and ontological foundations.

Epistemic ignorance is not, however, only a question of individuals acquiring a “multicultural perspective” or “a cross-cultural understanding.” One of the key challenges with which indigenous people are faced with in the academy (and also elsewhere) is that “speaking” through an epistemically different framework is too quickly interpreted as not more than a “difference.” This difference, then, usually requires a translation into the “sameness”—the language that makes sense to a general public and the code that we are expected to share in academic circumstances for communication.

Epistemic ignorance is not limited to making changes in the curriculum. It is a much more fundamental concern questioning the narrow epistemic foundations of the academy which fail to welcome and recognize indigenous epistemes. In other words, manifestations of epistemic ignorance are not random offshoots or isolated incidents but rather, a reflection of a structural and

systemic problem which “are endemic to the social, economic, and political order, deeply embedded in all of its self-reproducing institutions” which the academy is part of (McIntyre 2000, 160). Epistemic ignorance occurs at both the institutional and individual levels and is manifested by exclusion and effacement of indigenous issues and materials in curricula, by denial of indigenous contributions and influences and the lack of interest and understanding of indigenous epistemes or issues in general by students, faculty and staff alike. It can be either explicit and visible, or it can take the form of what Sheila McIntyre calls “studied ignorance” and “privileged innocence” that are reflected, for instance, in the tendency of the privileged academics to choose not to know (2000).

#### THE PROBLEM OF SPEAKING

Assuming that the underpinning structures and practices of the academy, by and large, reflect and embody what Foucault would call the modern episteme with certain perceptions of knowledge and ways of knowing the world, attempts at speaking through and from the framework of another episteme may prove challenging if not altogether impossible. In a setting relatively ignorant of and indifferent to indigenous worldviews, a person positioned within a framework of a different episteme is forced to negotiate with the structures of colonialism and also with oneself: do I conform and check my “cultural baggage” at the gates of the university or do I take the baggage with me and therefore, risk the chances of being understood?

In her well-known essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1994), Spivak analyzes the problems of representation and complicity of well-meaning Western intellectuals in constructing the colonial subject as Other. What is particularly relevant to the question of epistemic ignorance is Spivak’s intention to illustrate that the level where the subaltern could be heard or read cannot be reached because what is said is either ignored, forgotten or it simply “disappears from the official, male-centred historical records” (Morton 2003, 33). Whether muted by colonial authorities or the liberal multiculturalist metropolitan academy, the intended “message” of the subaltern remains either not heard or misinterpreted (Spivak 1999, 308). In other words, Spivak’s argument has revealed how “the historical and structural conditions of political representation do

not guarantee that the interests of particular subaltern groups will be recognized or that their voices will be heard" (Morton 2003, 57). Spivak's argument thus reveals how the historical and structural conditions of political representation prevent the recognition or hearing of the subaltern. Similarly, the academic conditions of intellectual representation—liberal multiculturalism, tolerance, diversity—preclude the recognition and hearing of indigenous epistemes.<sup>3</sup> As the attempt of the young Bengali woman at rewriting *sati* failed, attempts to bring the gift of indigenous epistemes to the academy fail as long as the conditions of intellectual representation remain unchanged; that is, the academy refuses to engage in a new relationship grounded in different logic of the gift.

It is important to notice that "the problem of speaking" discussed here is not whether indigenous people are being *allowed* to speak or not in the academy. In many cases, the situation is quite the opposite: they are not only "given" a voice but *urged* to speak and express their views and perspectives in the name of diversity and decolonization (though in official, public circumstances such as conferences and anthologies, they tend to remain tokens in the fashion of "one indigenous person per event/publication"). Trinh Minh-ha aptly calls this phenomenon "the voice of difference that they long to hear" (1989, 88).

## THE GIFT OF INDIGENOUS EPISTEMES

I suggest that to counter epistemic ignorance, indigenous epistemes have to be recognized as a gift to the academy. This implies learning about and engaging in a specific logic embedded in many indigenous epistemes; that is, the logic of the gift.

While recognizing that indigenous peoples are not homogeneous even internally and that their cultures, histories and socio-economic circumstances are not the same, I maintain that underpinning these apparent differences is a set of shared and common perceptions and conceptions of the world related to ways of life, cultural and social practices and discourses that foreground and necessitate an intimate relationship with the natural environment. This relationship, considered one of the central aspects of indigeneity<sup>4</sup>, is often manifested through gift giving and the philosophy of reciprocity—a close interaction of sustaining and renewing the balance of the world by means of gifts. I call this the logic of the gift that applies

not only to human relations but to the entire kinship with the world. This logic, manifested, for example, in various “give back” ceremonies, is different from the logic of exchange that prevails in modern society and through which gift giving practices and philosophies of indigenous societies are commonly interpreted (and thus, misunderstood).<sup>5</sup> The underlying logic of the exchange paradigm is that gifts cannot be given unless the receipt of counter-gifts is guaranteed (Vaughan 1997).

Unlike the binary give-and-take of the exchange paradigm, in the gift logic of indigenous thought, gifts are not given first and foremost to ensure a counter-gift later on, but to actively acknowledge the relationships and coexistence with the world without which survival would not be possible. In this logic, the gifts of the land are not taken for granted but recognized by giving back or other expressions of gratitude. This logic does not separate the self from the world to an extent that it would be possible to view human beings as independent from the rest of the socio-cosmic order. It foregrounds an understanding “that life depends on maintaining the right kind of relationship with the natural world” (Brody 2000, 289) and that personal and collective responsibilities toward the natural environment are the necessary foundation of society.<sup>6</sup>

The gift thus implies *response-ability*; an ability to respond, to remain attuned to the world beyond self and be willing to recognize its existence through gift giving. Such a sense of responsibility is a result of living within an ecosystem and being dependent on it. It is this sense of responsibility toward other epistemes that is called for in the academy; a responsibility that emphasizes the necessity of reciprocal, non-hegemonic relationships rather than discourses of control and change that shape the social system of mainstream Western society.

## THE IMPOSSIBLE GIFT

Of all theorists of the gift, Jacques Derrida has most rigorously argued the impossibility of the gift, maintaining that the gift is *the impossible*, “the very figure of the impossible” (1992, 7). For him, the precondition of the gift is that it is *not* recognized, for once the gift *is* recognized as a gift, it ceases being a gift and instead, becomes something else (credit, loan, obligation). Derrida further argues that reason—*logos*—is sent into crisis by the madness and

the impossibility of the gift: "In giving the reasons for giving, in saying the reason of the gift, it signs the end of the gift" (Derrida 1992, 148). If we need to give a reason in order to give, what is given is no longer a gift but something else. Reason seems to cancel the gift.

When analyzed more closely, however, we can see that in fact the gift is not so much *opposed to* reason as *passing and going beyond* it (Derrida 1992, 77). The gift will always be without the border which is commonly associated with rationality: "A gift that does not run over its borders, a gift that would let itself be contained in a determination and limited by the indivisibility of an identifiable *trait* would not be a gift. As soon as it delimits itself, a gift is prey to calculation and measure" (Derrida 1992, 91).

Throughout history, the academy has been considered an institution of reason.<sup>7</sup> In *Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant reinforces this perception, asserting that the university has to be governed by "an idea of reason." How, then, is it possible to bring the gift to the academy, an institution which regularly requires *giving* a reason for everything; reason that contradicts the gift? A gift constantly crossing its borders appears ambiguous, uncontrollable and unreasonable. As such, it may present a threat to the academy which does not necessarily welcome such ambiguity and unpredictability. Besides impossible, would it be also futile to seek to bring the gift to the academy? Would such attempts inevitably fail, at the borders of reason?

Rationalist accounts of knowledge have created and continue to create epistemic and epistemological hierarchies that define forms of knowledge based on rationality, individualism, detachment and the mechanistic worldview as "real" and "legitimate" and elevate these forms above others. The dualistic structures of the rationalist philosophy of the West also play a central role in the exclusion of indigenous epistemes in the academy. These mechanisms of exclusion have their roots in dualistic assumptions of reason emanating from classical Greek philosophy. Also the Enlightenment empiricism signified a radical break from participatory, respectful relations with the world and the Cartesian view of the world became characterized by hyper-separation and the fantasy of mastery.

The crisis of hegemonic reason necessitates a radical revision of the predominant distorted, abstract and extremely reductionist forms of rationality to make it more accountable with regard to

the complex world of interdependence. As Val Plumwood notes, we do not need more knowledge—what is needed is developing a different set of values that “fully acknowledges the non-human sphere and our dependency on it, and is able to make good decisions about how we live and impact on the non-human world” (Plumwood 2002, 3).

Derrida maintains that “‘thought’ requires *both* the principle of reason *and* what is beyond the principle of reason” (Derrida 1983, 18–19). Further, he brings forth Levinas’s suggestion of reason as “hospitable receptivity” and asks: “Reason *in a position to receive*: what can this hospitality of reason give, this reason as *the capacity to receive . . .*, this reason under the law of hospitality?” (Derrida 1997, 27). One could argue that reason as hospitable receptivity signifies certain openness beyond control. Reason as the capacity to receive might also be able to receive the gift responsibly, with a response and therefore, also reciprocity. In other words, receiving implies responsibility: “It is necessary *to answer for* the gift, the given, and the call to giving. It is necessary to answer to it and answer for it. One must be responsible for what one gives and what one receives” (Derrida 1992, 63).

If the university is an institution of reason and reason implies the capacity to receive, isn’t there something seriously wrong in the academy that cannot receive the gift? Without a logic rooted in responsibility and reciprocity, it is easy to exploit and misuse the gift, as is the case with indigenous epistemes that have been increasingly commodified and appropriated by the global capitalism that has developed new, powerful tools such as intellectual property regimes for further increasing corporate monopolies and consolidation of profit. Besides the reasons of commodification of indigenous systems of knowledge for profit, there are other, perhaps more fundamental reasons to make the gift impossible; that is, to reduce indigenous epistemes into forced gifts and disregard the entire gift logic as obsolete and unsophisticated. These practices, as argued above, enable the foreclosure of the native informant for the purposes of consolidating the hegemonic self and “the persistent constitution of Other as the Self’s shadow” (Spivak 1994, 75).

The gift continues posing a threat to the prevailing modes of thinking and interaction that characterize the contemporary transnational capitalism in the same way as potlatch (and countless other gift-practices) posed earlier a threat to the civilization and

the emerging nation-state of Canada—so serious that it had to be outlawed by the early colonial authorities and later put under erasure by various, sometimes very ambiguous and insidious forms of cultural imperialism. In other words, the gift has the potential to interrupt and even subvert the agenda of what Spivak calls “the new imperialism of exploitation” (Spivak 1999, 371). As Derrida contends: “There is gift, if there is any, only in what interrupts the system as well as the symbol, in a partition without return and without division [répartition], without being-with-self of the gift-counter-gift” (Derrida 1992, 13). One of the reasons for the academy not to recognize the gift is then the fear of interruption and ambiguity, loss of control, erasure of boundaries (e.g., disciplinary), excess of endless relativity. The gift may threaten the hegemony and hierarchy of epistemes which serve certain interests. One reason to prohibit the gift is also that the current academy is deeply rooted in the ideology of exchange economy.

The dominant paradigm highlighting the importance of exchange (i.e., giving in order to receive) has made the gift of indigenous epistemes impossible also in the academic world. In a current system, indigenous epistemes are not regarded as gifts but as something else, such as intellectual property. In some cases, they are appropriated and exploited in the name of profit or fulfillment of the spiritual needs of others. The basic premises of the exchange paradigm are manifested in the one-sidedness and unilaterality of academic discourses that are usually thoroughly self-oriented without attention—that is, “responsibility”—to the other. The failure or refusal to receive the gift has led to serious deterioration and disruption of relationships (of discourses, worldviews, for instance) that has made the academy an untenably difficult place for many indigenous people.

The exploitative, hegemonic and asymmetrical exchange that commonly takes place in academic discourse is a reflection of a broader, dominant neocolonial and also often neoliberal paradigm that continues to foreclose indigenous epistemes. This logic of dominance is not, however, detrimental only to indigenous peoples and their worldviews, but it removes everybody “from all connections except the circuit of capital accumulation” (Kailo forthcoming, n.p.). The commodification of all life forms and the shortsighted abuse of the environment, women, the “Third World” and other vulnerable countries and groups also affects the culture of learning, education and academic freedom (Kailo forthcoming, n.p.).

The gift is impossible when it is located within the exchange economy informed by colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy—all of which have made sure that in many cases only traces are left of indigenous relation-oriented epistemes and social and cultural orders. Conversely then, the gift *is* possible only in specific circumstances outside the logic of exchange. In a system where the logic of the gift does not imply “earning” the gift or “owing” something to the giver, and where the formation of the relationship through gift giving is not considered in negative terms (a burdensome obligation, or a loss of one’s individuality and independence) but a condition of balanced existence and ultimately, part of one’s identity, the gift cannot be ignored or rendered to something else.

In such a system and social order, if the gift is not recognized and received, it ceases to be a gift and the relationships formed through the gift are weakened and ultimately lost. Contrary to Derrida’s argument that the gift is annulled when it is recognized, I maintain that in indigenous philosophies, it is the very recognition that makes the gift possible. This does not necessarily oppose Derrida’s argument—as far as I am concerned, his explanation is valid and needs to be understood within the exchange paradigm. When the gift is taken outside that framework, it does become possible. My argument is, therefore, that we need to perceive indigenous epistemes in another framework, within the logic of the gift of indigenous philosophies, where it is the very recognition that makes it possible.

Recognition is generally considered an “acknowledgement that must be given to human beings who are subjected to inquiries,” consisting primarily of remembering and knowledge (Fabian 2001, 159–160). In some cases, recognition does not go beyond rhetoric. At worst, recognition is relegated to a mere gesture of tokenism as in officially, publically acknowledging those considered “minorities” or “marginalized” and then quickly forgetting them and continuing “business as usual.” Could such “gestures of convenience” mark an attempt of a neocolonial discourse to fabricate its allies in a new way, as suggested by Spivak (1993, 57)? Does such a discourse suggest an exchange (which is a tit-for-tat relation, not a gift) that agrees to recognize “the indigenous other” for a conciliatory cooperation as native informants, “add-ons” or consultants and perhaps in the future, shareholders, as universities are increasingly aligning themselves with corporations? Or could it

be argued that it is better than anything; that it is a good starting point? Spivak disagrees, insisting that

'One must begin somewhere' is a different sentiment when expressed by the unorganized oppressed and when expressed by the beneficiary of the consolidated disciplinary structure of a central neocolonialist power.... If the 'somewhere' that one begins from is the most privileged site of a neocolonial educational system, in an institute for the training of teachers, funded by the state, does that gesture of convenience not become the normative point of departure? (Spivak 1993, 58)

The gesture of recognition might be a necessary first step in engaging with, establishing or improving relationships with the indigenous peoples of the area. It cannot, however, become a proxy for continued repressive tolerance or benign neglect of their issues, concerns and epistemes. It also requires great vigilance on the part of those who participate "in such a privileged and authoritative apparatus" and are in peril of becoming mere allies of the neocolonial discourse (Spivak 1993, 58).

The question of recognition, however, remains crucial for indigenous peoples whether we are discussing the validation of identities erased by colonial gestures or the recognition of indigenous peoples' collective, historical rights. As I suggest, recognition is also a central aspect of indigenous philosophies that I call the logic of the gift. In this framework, recognition is a condition for survival. It stems from the philosophy according to which the well-being of all is dependent on the balance of the entire social system. Within the logic of the gift, recognition is a form of reciprocation not only between human but all living beings.

## HOSPITALITY AND THE ACADEMY

Hospitality is commonly understood as various practices of welcoming guests into a space that is considered, in one way or another, belonging to the host, whether an individual or a group of people. Like the gift, hospitality implies a relationship and is other-oriented in the sense that both hosts and guests are expected to look to the well-being and needs of the other. Like the gift, hospitality requires reciprocity, a contract between two individuals, groups or entities.

It is a relatively well-known, though inadequately acknowledged fact that early settlers and colonizers—who were not only

foreigners and strangers but absolute, unknown and anonymous others—arriving on the continent today known as North America were in many cases presented with an unconditional welcome by various indigenous peoples who had been living on the continent for generations. Though unique in different regions and taking place in different periods of time, the history of first contact and early encounters between indigenous peoples and newcomers also shares many similarities across the globe, manifested in trade, conflict and conquest, intermarriage and politics characterized by “gift diplomacy” of sealing agreements and alliances with other peoples (Dickason 1992, 76–78).

The hosts welcomed the *arrivants*<sup>8</sup>, the guests, and treated them according their laws of hospitality without which many newcomers would not have survived and prospered (Carter 1999, 33–36). In many cases, however, this welcome turned against the hosts. This is what many indigenous peoples did to the foreigner and the absolute other who was received as a stranger but also as a guest. They were eager to welcome the other because they wanted to learn from the stranger, to be open to the other and to be taught. This kind of hospitality is infinite or radical—hospitality that exceeds invitation and thus consists of receiving, welcoming without invitation (cf. Derrida 2002, 360). Emmanuel Levinas elaborates:

To approach the Other in discourse, is to welcome his [sic] expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Discourse, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this discourse is a teaching. (Levinas 1990, 48)<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to infinite hospitality, there is the politics of finite hospitality. Émile Benveniste examines the etymology of “hospitality” and notes that “guest” in Latin is called *hospes* and *hostis*. The term “*hospes* goes back to \**hosti-pet-s*. The second component alternates with *pot-* which signifies “master,” so that the literal sense of *hospes* is “the guest-master”” (Benveniste 1973, 72). In Benveniste’s view, this is an unusual combination. In the context of indigenous-colonial relations, it, however, makes perfect sense when considering how the colonists arrived as guests but soon became the “guest-masters.” It could be even suggested that it is the contemporary context of the academy which has become the

guest-master. Moreover, the etymological genealogy connects hospitality to hostility. The Latin root *hostis* signifies not only the host and hospitality but also hostility and hostage. The *hostis* is thus both a host and an enemy.

Derrida suggests that in order for hospitality be hospitality—that is, not a mere duty—it must be unconditional. This unconditionality requires an unquestioning welcome (Derrida 2000, 23–25). If the academy only welcomes what it is ready to welcome and what it considers it must welcome, it is not hospitality. It is not a welcome but a compulsory obligation or an act of superficial political correctness. In short, the hospitality of the academy must consist of two critical moments: a welcome of the other without conditions (such as expectations of translations or definitions) and openness to receive the gift that the guest may bear.

Unconditional welcome calls for and urges the academy to take responsibility—to respond, be answerable to—toward indigenous epistemes by embracing the logic of the gift. This logic requires a new relationship that necessitates both knowledge and action; a relationship which is continuous, interminable and where responses flow from the both sides (cf. Spivak 1999, 384). It requires transforming the way the dominant academic discourses and practices perceive and relate to other epistemes and also epistemologies. It would imply that indigenous epistemes are given an unconditional welcome in the academy without asking their names; that is, without asking them first to be defined or transcoded into the language of the host, and thus violated.

Unconditional welcome is a continuous relation, not another academic policy, program or guideline that can be forgotten once implemented. It is also a mindset that propels us—everybody in the academy—into action by a commitment to responsibility toward the other, whether a guest or a host. It also recognizes the existing tensions of the guest-host relationships and therefore does not falsely assume a space that is entirely comfortable and uncontested or even “safe.” It recognizes that attempting to do away with the existing tensions is not hospitality but the continuance of ignorance, and consolidation of the Self by the shadow of the Other.

Unconditional welcome implies changing the way indigenous epistemes are perceived in the academy; neither as supplements nor commodities, but as indispensable elements in the process of pursuing knowledge; as imperative for the academy in professing its profession. Derrida has suggested that “[t]he university

professes the truth, and that is its profession. It declares and promises an unlimited commitment to the truth" (Derrida 2001, 233–234). This is not to propose that there is only one truth: "The horizon of truth . . . is certainly not a very determinable limit" (Derrida 2001, 235). In its profession, the university "should remain an ultimate place of critical resistance—and more than critical—to all the powers of dogmatic and unjust appropriation" (Derrida 2001, 235).

Related to the profession of the university, Derrida calls for the "new Humanities"—the need for enlarging and re-elaborating the concept of the Humanities. In his view, one of the first tasks of the new Humanities "would be, *ad infinitum*, to know and to think their own history, at least in the directions that can be seen to open up" (Derrida 2001, 240).<sup>10</sup> An important aspect of professing the truth while remaining critical is to challenge and deconstruct various fantasies of sovereign mastery. Part of this would naturally be the fantasy of the sovereign mastery of certain epistemic traditions and assumptions. Further, the profession of the truth cannot be limited to only certain (types) of truths or reduce it into partial, one-sided truths—thereby, "non-truths"—in the service of interests and benefits of certain individuals or groups. In such a profession, to sanction ignorance or exclude other epistemes from the university, from those discussions *in* the university, would imply that the academy professes its profession poorly and very unprofessionally. Seeking to disavow and disregard other than the dominant Western intellectual, philosophical and epistemic traditions by appealing to academic freedom or tenets of liberal thought and education would then signify a gross misrepresentation and distortion of the idea and the profession of the academy.

In order for the academy to properly practice its profession, it ultimately needs, in Derrida's view, to be unconditional and absolutely free. This would not, however, imply that academics can work without condition or that it is autonomous in the Kantian sense. Instead, it refers to and calls for the responsibility toward the other. It necessitates "the opening of the university on its outside, on its other, on the future and the otherness of the future" (Derrida 2001, 255). For Derrida, the future of the university is necessarily less enclosed in itself and more "*open to the other* as a future" (2001, 256; see also 1993, 16).

In other words, the ethics and the future of the academy require hospitality.<sup>11</sup> Without openness to the other, responsibility toward the other, there is no future of and in the academy. The future of

the university is in its openness to the other. This openness must go beyond a mere opening of the doors to indigenous people while dismissing or failing to recognize their epistemes. As a good host (or guest-master), the academy must accept and claim its responsibilities—it must respond to—for indigenous and other epistemes in the name of knowledge but also of ethics. “The opening of the university on its other” also implies opening up the discourse which so far has remained rather selective and exclusive. Expanding the epistemic foundations is, therefore, a question of the profession of the academy but also of an ethical relation to the “other.”

An example of hospitality where “Western” and indigenous epistemes meet in a responsible and reciprocal way is Derrida’s visit to the University of Auckland in August 1999 where he was received and welcomed according to the Maori tradition of *powhiri* held on the University’s *marae* or the Maori meeting house. *Powhiri* is a ceremony which “pays tribute and honour to the *mana* (dignity and status) of the guest of honour” (Simmons, Worth, and Smith 2001, 12). Through the elaborate procession, the guest crosses the threshold, “passing from being strangers to becoming friends” (Simmons, Worth, and Smith 2001, 24).

In the contemporary postcolonial context of Aotearoa, the *powhiri* is a moment when Western cultural rationalism is peeled back in order to submit to a different form of cultural appropriateness with regard to the values of ‘welcoming’, ‘honouring’, ‘greeting’, and ‘hospitality’. (Simmons, Worth, and Smith 2001, 12)

In the same way as in Maori ceremony of *powhiri*, the threshold for the academy is a place where the university comes together face-to-face with the world, where some of its Eurocentric, arrogant assumptions and definitions are challenged and where it has to assume its responsibilities. It is crucial to notice, however, that the “world” is not something external or liminal, something “out there,” but always already *in* the academy. This is also true with the gift that has already entered and arrived in the academy, and therefore, passed the threshold without waiting for hospitality. As Derrida deliberates:

Does not hospitality *follow* . . . the unforeseeable and irresistible irruption of a visitation? And will not this inverse translation find its limit . . . at the place where, as past visitation, the trace of the other passes or has already passed the threshold, awaiting neither invitation nor hospitality nor welcome? (Derrida 1997, 63)

The fact that the threshold is always already *in* the academy and that the guest and the gift have already arrived does not mean that there is no longer need for the call for hospitality or for an unconditional welcome. Quite the contrary: the limit, this impossibility that enables the possible, is already in the academy implies that the academy *cannot disavow* its responsibility toward the other, cannot evade its responsibility because it is always already internal to it, not something outside and elsewhere (or even on the outskirts or at the gates of the academy).

Derrida further suggests that “the crossing of the threshold always remains a transgressive step” (2000, 75). With regard to the gift of indigenous epistemes, this means transgressing academic hegemony and exclusivity and irretrievably changing it, even if gradually. With regard to the academy, transgressing the threshold (that is internal to it) means that it cannot *not* respond. In order to have a future, the academy must face the existence of the threshold and thus be responsible, be able to respond. It must be able to receive the gift beyond the capacity of the “I”, and also, to be taught, to listen, to learn to listen.

Characteristic to the threshold is that it cannot be controlled, that its limit cannot be decided: “It is necessary that this threshold not be at the disposal of a general knowledge or a regulated technique . . . so that good hospitality can have a chance, the change of letting the other come, the *yes* of the other no less than the *yes* to the other” (Derrida 1997, 35). Paradoxically, however, hospitality simultaneously requires a rigorous delimitation of thresholds or frontiers (Derrida 2000, 47–49). It is the very paradox which enables hospitality to exist. It is this paradox that makes the impossible possible: by receiving a guest whom one is unprepared and incompetent to welcome and thus, becoming capable of what one is incapable of (Derrida 2002). Put another way, by receiving a guest but also a gift (that the guest bears) which the academy is unprepared and incapable to welcome (and recognize), it becomes capable of what it is incapable of.

What is more, the recognition of the gift of indigenous epistemes implies that the academy is challenged to reexamine its role as a host (or, considering the colonial history, the guest-master). It no longer can assume the role of the sovereign host. Interchangeability of hospitality, a notion by Mirelle Rosello, which I employ in the context of the university, insists on a continuum between the host and the guest. I argue that the question of who is the host and

who is the guest in the academy cannot be definitely answered—both the official representatives of the institution and indigenous people occupy the roles of the host and guest simultaneously and concurrently (however differently and disparately). The continuum keeps hospitality alive, as Rosello points out: “if the guest is always the guest, if the host is always a host, something has probably gone very wrong: hospitality has somehow been replaced by parasitism or charity” (2001, 167). The acknowledgement of this continuum and that there are many hosts in the academy implies a new openness and also humility on the academy’s part; a need and also willingness to reciprocate with other epistemes while remaining aware of disparate relations of power, resources and privilege.

## IMPLICATIONS

The recognition of the gift of indigenous epistemes amounts to a more respectful and responsible scholarship as the academy is compelled to accept responsibility for its own ignorance and act upon it. It enables a vision of a discursive space where indigenous people can be encountered in their own terms. Academic practices and discourses that have previously foreclosed other than dominant discursive practices would have to seriously contemplate the existence of indigenous perceptions and ways of knowing the world. As a result, the normative starting point of academic inquiry could no longer be solely based on the modern episteme and its assumptions.

The recognition of the gift also leads to an improved understanding of indigenous peoples’ histories, realities as well as their epistemes while remaining aware of the pitfalls of knowing other cultures. One of them is what Spivak calls the Eurocentric arrogance of conscience—a simplistic assumption that as long as one has sufficient information, one can understand the “other” (Spivak 1999, 171).

Calling for an improved understanding of indigenous epistemes, however, does not suggest an unheeded access to and prospecting of indigenous knowledge in the name of academic freedom or using indigenous philosophies as convenient models without addressing the systemic power inequalities and hegemony. Rather, it suggests the necessity on the academy’s part to commit to reciprocal relationships with and actively recognize other

worldviews in order to address its own ignorance. By doing so, the academy is able to reinforce its standards and commitment to rigorous research, not to undermine them. In the same way that the gifts of the land cannot be taken for granted or exploited within this specific logic of the gift, indigenous epistemes should not be ignored, appropriated or misused in the academy.

While it is clearly necessary to have knowledge and understanding of indigenous peoples and their epistemic traditions to rid oneself from ignorance, it is necessary to remain aware of the pitfalls of "knowing other cultures" and what Spivak calls the Eurocentric arrogance of conscience. To exceed the Eurocentric arrogance of conscience, the academy must move away from yearning or claiming to know the "other" to willingness to engage in the patient work learning from other epistemes (cf. Spivak 2001). This necessitates that the academy is open and prepared to stretch into a different mode of understanding and perceiving the world (cf. Kremer 1996).

One of the implications of the shift from the approach of knowing the other to the continuous process of "learning to learn" is that the academy is propelled to "do its homework" rather than expect indigenous people to offer ready-made answers or divert their attention away from their priorities and concerns to teaching the "mainstream." Spivak links "doing one's homework" with unlearning one's privilege and "unlearning one's learning" (1993, 25). This requires, among other things, critically examining one's beliefs, biases, and "habits of dissociation" as well as understanding how they have risen and become naturalized in the first place.

At the same time, it is critical to bear in mind that for indigenous peoples, the gift and hospitality are not merely conceptual abstractions but are, above all, practices and strategies. In other words, to contemplate the possibility of the gift and hospitality does not imply remaining only at the level of theorizing. It is about evoking new strategies and paradigms for the future university; a university that will increasingly be also a community of indigenous academics.

## NOTES

1. This debate over values, most heated probably in the United States, has been dubbed the "culture wars." See, for example, (Gates 1992; Hunter 1991; Jay 1997; Shore 1986).

2. Walter J. Ong was the first to point out the problematic nature of the term and concept "world view" which "reflects the marked tendency of technologized man to think of actuality as something essentially picturable and to think of knowledge itself by analogy with visual activity to the exclusion, more or less, of the other senses." Societies that lay emphasis on orality, on the other hand, tend "to cast up actuality in comprehensive auditory terms, such as voice and harmony." The "world" of "oral societies" "is not so markedly something spread out before the eyes as a 'view'" but is experienced and understood through the combination of several senses (Ong 1969, 634). This difference can, in Ong's view, make analyses between the different "world views" difficult if not entirely impossible.
3. As Parekh notes, early liberal thinkers such as John Stuart Mill who endorsed diversity did so only within carefully confined parameters "of the individualist model of human excellence" (1995, 95). This view of diversity was culturally specific and had no room for any understanding or tolerance for nonliberal ways of life that did not cherish individualism in the same way that has become the cornerstone of liberalism.
4. See, for example, working definitions of indigenous people by United Nations, such as the Convention No. 169 (ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries 1989) and the Cobo Report (1986).
5. I have elaborated the logic of the gift in indigenous philosophies in detail elsewhere (Kuokkanen 2004).
6. Tom Mexsis 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 (Happynook 2000). 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. While largely accepted, this claim has also been contested by some scholars. For example, Ernest Sirluck maintains that "Kant's concept of reason was never made the referent of an actual university. Humboldt and others used it to develop the idea of culture, which was embodied in the founding document of University of Berlin and had much influence in Germany" (Sirluck 1997, 617). Robert Young also argues that, "No English university . . . is founded on reason" (1992, 99). See his analysis of the idea of the chrestomatic or practically-oriented university in "Chrestomatic."
8. Derrida observes: "if the new *arrivant* who arrives is new, one must expect . . . that he [sic] does not simply cross a given threshold. Such an *arrivant* affects the very experience of the threshold" (Derrida 1993, 33). This certainly was the case with the colonizers and I would suggest, should, conversely, be the case when the *arrivant* is indigenous epistemes in the academy.
9. Drawing on Levinas, Derrida argues, "hospitality is infinite or it is not at all; it is granted upon the welcoming of the idea of infinity, and thus of the unconditional, and it is on the basis of its opening that one can say, as Levinas will a bit further on, that 'ethics is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy'" (Derrida 1997, 48).

10. The idea of “new humanities” has been also discussed elsewhere, independently from Derrida’s speculations. K. K. Ruthven, for instance discusses the fear in the late 1980s of losing humanities to economic rationalism characterized by reforms in higher education. He notes how humanities is, however, “alive and well” with new research centers and an expanding field, including “new humanities” “powered by transformative energies of people responsive to changes in the material conditions of intellectual life both here [Australia] and overseas” (Ruthven 1992, viii). This “new humanities”—at least according to *Beyond the Disciplines: The New Humanities*, edited by Ruthven—consists of fields such as cultural, multicultural, cultural policy, feminist and gender, postcolonial and subaltern and legal studies. For some reason, indigenous studies still do not make it into the “new humanities.”
11. I take it as an axiom that the future has always already begun, and that at once, it is constantly beginning over and over again. In other words, the future is always here at this moment yet it starts with every step we take.

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