

Editorial

Representations of Indigeneity in North America

Andrea Blätter and Sabine Lang

For centuries, indigenous peoples in North America have been represented by others. Such representations began with early – and persistent – stereotypes of noble versus ignoble savages,¹ and constructs of the ‘other’ have been reproduced “in myriads of representations and ideological constructs of the Other in scholarly and ‘popular’ works and in the principles which help to select and recontextualize those constructions in such things as the media, official histories and school curricula” (Smith 2012: 8). Native Americans were represented by the writings of conquistadors, explorers, traders, travellers, anthropologists – and non-Native novelists, some of whom laid claim to powerful Native spiritual knowledge (e.g., Andrews 1983), while others, such as Karl May,² who spawned a phenomenon called ‘Indi-enthusiasm’ in Germany, have been instrumental in creating a romanticizing, positive image of Native Americans.

Many of the early writers who left accounts, and thus representations, of Native American life ways were not scholars but hobbyist anthropologists and adventurers (Smith 2012: 8). The significance of their tales of the ‘Other’ cannot be overestimated, because “they represent the Other to a general audience back in Europe which became fixed in the milieu of cultural ideas” (Smith 2012: 8). Images such as those of cannibals, ‘witch doctors’ or Native Americans richly adorned with feathers and surrounded by an exotic flora and fauna, as well as enthralling stories about ‘savage’ and ‘primitive’ peoples “generated further interest, and therefore further opportunities, to represent the Other again” (Smith 2012: 8). Smith points out that

“The travellers’ tales had wide coverage. Their dissemination occurred through the popular press, from the pulpit, in the travel brochures which advertised for immigrants, and through oral discourse. They appealed to the voyeur, the soldier, the romantic, the missionary, the crusader, the adventurer, the entrepreneur, the imperial public servant, and the Enlightenment scholar [...]. In the end they were all inheritors

of imperialism who had learned well the discourses of race and gender, the rules of power, the politics of colonialism. They became the colonizers.” (Smith 2012: 9)

The Other was even physically represented in the Old World by ‘ethnic shows’ such as Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show or the *Völkerschauen* organized by Carl Hagenbeck (cf. Thode-Arora 1989, 1997), which staged Native Americans and other indigenous peoples for the appreciative European public. Beginning in the early 20th century, the new genre of Western movies increasingly spread stereotyped images of Native Americans that reveal more about the social and political climate in the countries where these movies were made than about those portrayed in them.³ It may also be noted that Indianthusiasm still persists unabatedly in Germany. Karl May’s books have been made into plays that are performed every summer in an open-air theatre at the northern German town of Bad Segeberg and attract large audiences;⁴ and particularly in eastern Germany there is an entire ‘scene’ of Indianthusiast hobbyists who in their leisure time get together to enact their version of 19th-century Plains Indian life in tepee camps and clad in beaded buckskin clothes.⁵

Native Americans have not only been represented, but also named by others for centuries. They were labelled as ‘Indians’ to begin with, and the conquistadors and colonizers were quick to replace the indigenous names of many ethnic groups with terms of their own or garbled versions of the original tribal names: “They Came, They Saw, They Named, They Claimed” (Smith 2012: 83). The Secwepemc, for example, became the Shuswap, the Diné were named ‘Apaches de Navajú’ (‘Apaches with large cultivated fields’) and later on ‘Navajo’ by the Spaniards, and the Nlaka’pamux were christened ‘Thompson Indians’ in allusion to the river where they lived, which in turn had been named after the white explorer David Thompson. Only recently have Native American groups begun to reclaim their own names for themselves.

The very term “indigenous peoples” is of quite recent origin as well. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith has pointed out that it “emerged in the 1970s out of the struggles primarily of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood.” She goes on to explain: “It is a term that internationalizes the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world’s colonized peoples [...]. It is also used as a way of recognizing that there are real differences between

different indigenous peoples. The term has enabled the collective voices of colonized people to be expressed strategically in the international arena” (Smith 2012: 7). It is, of course, no coincidence that the emergence of this term went hand in hand with the world-wide ethnicity movement.

Nevertheless, constructs of the ‘other’, and thus the “underlying code of imperialism and colonialism”, continue to be perpetuated not only in academia and in the paradigms of scholarly research (Smith 2012: 8), but also in popular culture, educational textbooks, and other spheres.⁶ In a process that has been termed ‘whitification’ by some authors (e.g., Farca 2011: 99), these forces of colonialism and imperialism have had a deep, disruptive impact on indigenous peoples in North America; the mechanisms at work in that process included “separation of families and local bands, re-education, abuse, rape, open terror and forced assimilation” (Farca 2011: 99). At the basis of these attempts at erasing the cultural and historical heritage of North America’s original inhabitants was the conviction of the European newcomers that “their lifestyle, culture, religion, and education was superior and worthy and that aboriginal people should be thankful to the gift of civilization” (Farca 2011: 100). These endeavours towards imposing Western culture on the indigenous peoples also brought “an alteration of identity and started a history of forced hybridity” (Farca 2011: 99), as people became disconnected from “their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own way of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world” (Smith, 2012: 29).

Notwithstanding the massive and manifold attempts at complete deculturation, indigenous cultures in the U.S. and Canada have not only survived but, beginning in the 1960s, revived like phoenix from the ashes. Nowadays, many Native Americans/First Nations see indigeneity no longer as a stigma but are proud of their heritage.⁷ In that process, they try to abandon the forced hybridity and to (re)define – and represent – their indigenous identities themselves.⁸ To construct, maintain, and revive a certain identity it is necessary to stage, pose, and demonstrate it. This is also true for ethnic or indigenous identities.⁹ The presentation and representation of indigenous identity is done in various ways, but media certainly play a prominent role in this process due to the fact that they can be replicated all over the world. Since media are controlled by the dominant strata of society, representations of indigeneity are still mostly extrinsic, made by others, often the former colonizers. These portrayals of the indigenous ‘Other’ hold tremendous appeal for

Whites, and this is especially true for depictions of Native Americans. The stereotype of the 'Indian' has become engrained in people's minds through numerous adventure stories for children, teenagers, and adults, and in recent times even more so through internationally broadcasted movies and TV shows.

For this *Ethnoscripts* issue we have compiled essays that deal with different ways of representing 'Indianness'. They include intrinsic and extrinsic representations, new interpretations of indigeneity, and various ways of using the image of 'the Indian'. We approached most of the contributors at the 33rd American Indian Workshop in April 2012 in Zurich, and we wish to thank all of them most cordially for their kind and patient cooperation in our publication project.

The opening contribution is an essay by Christer Lindberg on "The Noble and the Ignoble Savage", where he describes how the representation of a dualistic and somehow contradictory image of the Native Americans became firmly established throughout the centuries by whites. The debate as to whether 'savages' were noble or ignoble divided European intellectuals of the 16th to 19th century into two camps, the modernists and primitivists. The former group argued that the Indian was an inferior creature, subject to Aristotle's law of natural slavery. The primitivists' camp, on the other hand, argued that Native Americans and other indigenous people were by no means brutish, but true humans with human rights. The modernist view was strongly supported by a number of religious groups, including the puritans of New England who viewed the life of the 'savages' as the sign of the Devil. From the days of Columbus until today, this double image has persisted in positivist and relativist circles; this shows that the double stereotype of the ignoble and noble savage is an intellectual construct in which the ignoble concept represented the reality of the wilderness and the obstacles to a modernistic endeavour of controlling nature.

The contribution "Savages in Transition" by Andrea Blätter and Gerd Becker reviews 100 years of cinematic representations of American Indians. For Europeans, Native North Americans hold particular fascination. This is reflected, among other things, in an abundance of what is called "Indianerfilme" in German – movies in which Native Americans play a prominent role. No other indigenous population has been staged with any comparable frequency in films. In retrospective, the authors show how even supposedly realistic representations reproduce stereotypes of the romantic and noble or dangerous savage, according to the *Zeitgeist* of a given

time. Hence, the cinematographic portrayals suit much better as ethnographies of 'white' America (or Europe) and its attitude towards the aboriginal peoples of North America than as authentic depictions of the life ways of the indigenous population.

A unique form of extrinsic representation of indigeneity is discussed by Frank Usbeck, who has investigated into "Indianthusiasm and Nazi Propaganda in German Print Media 1933-1945". He describes the Nazi regime's propagandistic appropriation of German Indianthusiasm as a useful device for the National Socialists to purport national pride among the populace. The Nazis' perception of Native Americans and the representation of Indian imagery in Nazi-controlled media cashed in on older traditions of 'German Indianthusiasm' which interwove Romantic notions, cultural despair, and conservative nationalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It becomes apparent that although the Nazis promoted Aryan superiority, their utilization of Indian imagery is not a contradiction, as Indian imagery was a useful device for the promotion of militarism, racial segregation, and sacrifice.

While the stereotype of 'the Indian' may be used as sympathetic role model in Europe, the long-standing ideological struggle to control U.S. history is persisting in North America and has spread to the school system, an issue explored by Trisha Rose Jacobs. In her essay "They gave us Syphilis" she focuses on misrepresentations of Native American history in the classroom. Noting that texts used for pedagogical purposes in the U.S. are "the only products of historical scholarship that do not receive regular critical review by acknowledged experts" (Axtell 1987: 621), she concludes that educational books on Native Americans are generally prone to trivialization, marginalization, and misrepresentation. In addition, and to illustrate the political climate in which the concerns of Native Americans are dealt with, she touches on some recent cases of demagoguery and assaults on multiculturalism in the U.S. In order to determine the impact of educational texts about Native Americans in a non-American academic setting, Jacobs explored basic levels of knowledge and negative stereotypes about Native Americans among history students at Gent University, Belgium. She found that they have a rather high standard of information that is, however, coupled with romantic notions leading to the denial of facts that contradict the image of the 'ecological Indian', such as the possible extinction of the Woolly Mammoth by Paleo-Indians.

Another, rather romantic extrinsic representation of 'Indianness' is discussed by Sabine Meyer. She analyses "Representations of Native Americans in a Chil-

dren's Cartoon TV-Series". *Yakari* is the young Sioux hero of a thirty-five-volume comic series, which was first written and drawn by two Swiss francophone cartoonists in the early 1970s. The comic series was such a tremendous success that its issues have been translated into at least seventeen languages including English, German, Finnish, Breton, Indonesian, Polish, Chinese, Turkish, Arabic, Inuktitut, and Catalan. For some time, the adventures of *Yakari* have also been broadcasted as a cartoon series on TV, which has become so popular among German children that the program attracts more than 1.5 million viewers and is one of Germany's most prominent children and youth program on the public channels. In her contribution, Meyer points out that *Yakari's* major agenda is not to educate children on Native American cultures, but to promote a critique of anthropocentrism and to advocate environmental ethics.

After these discussions of extrinsic representations, Eduardo Fichera explores an example of indigenous self-representation and describes the "Challenging of Colonial Representations" by Zacharias Kunuk's movie *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner*, which was the first Inuit dramatic film in the Inuktitut language to receive nationwide and international attention. Made by the first independent Inuit-owned production company, the film won six Genie Awards including Best Picture, and the *Caméra d'Or* for best First Feature at the Cannes Film Festival in 2001. The film is a visual recreation of an oral narrative that is important to the Inuit community, where it still has didactic functions today, admonishing the audience not to let envy, rivalry, and personal interests prevail over the sense of responsibility and community that is of utmost importance for survival in the Arctic. Fichera furthermore explains the film's cinematic dialogue with *Nanook of the North* (1922, directed by Robert J. Flaherty, the first ethnographic movie ever made), and discusses the use of particular motifs in the film, as well as cinematographic acts of visual empowerment that are apparent in *Atanarjuat*.

Film, video, and new media nowadays allow for creative acts of self-representation that have the potential to both undermine stereotypes of indigenous peoples and strengthen the cultural vitality of communities in the wake of genocide and colonialism.

A much older way of "Resisting Colonization" that has existed since the beginning of colonization is explained by Chad Hamill. He cites the post-contact history of the Nez Perce as an example of ceremonies serving as a first line of defence in the

struggle for sovereignty. He points out that the Seven Drum Religion (Washat) and the medicine dance are two traditional Nez Perce ceremonies that reach back to the Beginning – that is, to the time when people came into existence – and have preserved the People’s bond to their ancestral homelands while keeping the forces of colonization at bay. He argues that simply holding a Washat or a medicine dance can be considered an act of resistance after two hundred years of colonial repression, because dancing within the longhouse creates a unifying thread, tying the People together while songs give voice to their collective sovereignty, calling on the spirits for continued strength and sustenance. His observation that the function of sacred ceremonies expanded after contact is notable as well: What used to be an act of prayer came to include acts of sovereignty and resistance. Rather than moving outside the boundaries of a new emerging political system, the ceremonies were situated on, across, or against those boundaries.

In order to counter oppression, traditional ceremonies may also be modified by indigenous people to express new meanings and even address different target groups than the older ritual. A unique example of this is presented by Sabine Lang who had the opportunity to attend an all-women’s Sun Dance. ‘Sun Dance’ is a term applied to certain ceremonies widespread in the Plains and adjacent areas to the west. During these ceremonies, which usually last for four days and serve – very generally speaking – the purpose of spiritual renewal, those who have pledged to dance will not partake of either food or liquid as they are focused on establishing rapport with the supernatural. Being religious, social as well as political events in the pre-reservation days Sun Dances attracted large crowds of spectators and brought together many people from numerous local groups. With colonial repression the ceremony was banned, but then became revitalized in the middle of the 20th century. While the Womyn’s Sun Dance emerged as an attempt to (re-)indigenize Native female homosexuality, it has also become a space where non-Native women spiritually ‘indigenize’ themselves. Lang argues that this ceremony and its setting show features of a heterotopia in Foucault’s (1984, 2005) sense, defined as “real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1984).

While the Womyn’s Sun Dance is held in remote places and addresses only a

rather limited group of people, the next contribution discusses performances made exclusively for the wider public. In these performances, native musicians from South America avail themselves of the positive image of the stereotyped North American Plains Indian. Jana Jetmarová has accompanied street musicians from the South American Andes performing in Europe, and witnessed the emergence of a new kind of ethnic identity among the artists. When Andean performances ceased to attract European audiences in the 1990s, the musicians developed a new Pan-Indian style, now wearing feather bonnets, long hair, body paint, and fringed shirts. Even though this type of staging was originally created for the purely pragmatic reason of appealing to European audiences, it had some impact on the identity of the musicians and also on their South American audiences. When they returned to their home countries successful and wealthy from being “big in Europe”, they enthralled their own people with Pan-Indian performances and emancipatory lyrics. Due to their artistic success, they contributed much to a new, more positive image of indigeneity. Particularly in the anonymous urban environment, this modern “rock-version” of indigeneity (mostly with lyrics in the Quechua language) has become quite popular, even in countries such as Bolivia or Ecuador where until the 1990s indigeneity was a severe social stigma.

Based on long-term fieldwork experiences and taking a more personal stance, the two concluding contributions reflect on more general issues associated with the interaction between anthropologists and indigenous peoples.

Gerd Becker’s contribution deals with a specific way of looking at indigeneity from the outside. He describes his fieldwork on processes of re-ethnicization, that is, attempts to shape particular cultural identities by re-appropriating lost traditions. From the perspective of a visual anthropologist, he discusses the scientific potential of applying visual methods and reflects on their impact on qualitative research. Using the examples of the Columbian Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Morocco, and the Marquesan Islands in the South Pacific, he makes his case for what he calls the principle of ‘interacting contemplation’ instead of participant observation, arguing that the latter is impossible to achieve for outsiders. Moreover, Becker emphasizes the role of anthropologists in cultural revitalization, as in the case of the Columbian Kankuamo where anthropologist and filmmaker Andrew Tucker’s work for indigenous TV channels lends at least technical aid to their re-ethnicizing local programs: his work for the indigenous channel Kankuama TV includes the applica-

tion of digital techniques of image production for a visualization of mythical spirit beings. That way, cultural activists hope to introduce the young generation to traditional ideas, as children in remote villages no longer sit around the campfire listening to the elders' stories, but learn about their traditions in front of the flat screen.

“Are ‘Indigenous Methodologies’ and ‘Native Studies’ Incompatible?” is the question asked by Nina Reuther based, among other things, on her deep long-term involvement with the Secwepemc, an ethnic group living in the Plateau area of North America. She argues that the terms “Native Studies” and “Indigenous Methodologies” imply two different perspectives of working with indigenous knowledges. “Native Studies” refers to an academic reaction to the growing demand by indigenous communities that more respect be paid to their own ways of accessing and handling knowledge. The goal is responsible research based on reciprocity with the communities. Reciprocity, in turn, implies consultation of and cooperation with the respective indigenous community, and the local implementation of research results in order to provide technological and economical help. In contrast, “Indigenous Methodologies” refers to the efforts undertaken by indigenous scholars to find ways of including indigenous ways of dealing with knowledge, and to attach the same importance to them in academia as to the traditional Western European intellectual processes and epistemologies; the intent is to liberate indigenous knowledges from being a mere source of information and cultural hoard which is solely to be studied and analyzed for obtaining a more differentiated understanding of the world. Reuther concludes that ‘Indigenous Methodologies’ and ‘the Studies of Natives’ are neither incompatible, nor antagonistic, and makes some insightful suggestions as to how they can work together in a complementary way.

Apart from contributions on a special topic, each *Ethnoscripts* issue contains various rubrics. We would thus like to give at least a brief English summary of the further rubrics of the present *Ethnoscripts* issue which, unlike the contributions on Representations of Indigeneity in North America, are in German. First, there is the Institutsgespräch (“Chat at the Institute”), this time a conversation between Andrea Blätter and Frank A. Weigelt, who recently joined the University of Hamburg’s Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology as a research assistant (‘wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter’). In the “Conference Reports” the editors of this volume give an impression of the American Indian Workshop convened in Zurich in 2012, as well as of a Symposium entitled “Re-Ethnisierung, Wiederaneignung von

Tradition und Inszenierung von Indigenität” held in Mainz in May 2012. And last but not least, Gerd Becker gives a review of a book recently published by Michaela Ott, *Affizierung. Zu einer ästhetisch-epistemischen Figur*.

The editors wish to express their most cordial thanks to all contributors of this volume; we greatly enjoyed working with them. We also wish to thank the *Ethno-scripts* editorial team for their insightful, constructive comments on the contributions and their generous collegial support of our publication project. Very special thanks go to Clara Doose-Grünefeld, who has done a wonderful job designing the cover image of this issue. And, last but not least, we hope that the readers will enjoy the contributions and find them stimulating in terms of current and future research.

Notes

¹ See the contribution by Christer Lindberg in this volume.

² Karl May (1842-1912) was a German novelist who wrote 40 volumes of travel and adventure literature, mainly set in North America and the Near East – parts of the world he had actually never set foot upon. However, using published accounts by explorers and other travelers as well as his vivid imagination he described the ‘Wild West’ and its Native and non-Native inhabitants in such an enthralling manner that his books became favorites among generations of German readers, particular the younger generations. Karl May and his impact on German images of Native Americans have been the subject of various publications; for a discussion from an anthropological perspective see, for example, Bolz (2008) and Hans (2000).

³ This is aptly pointed out by Andrea Blätter and Gerd Becker in their contribution to this volume.

⁴ The ‘Karl-May-Spiele’ (‘Karl May Plays’; for information see <http://www.karl-may-spiele.de/frontend/startseite.php>). However, May’s books seem to have lost appeal for younger Germans. Whenever we ask students in our Native American Studies classes whether they are familiar with his work, most of them will usually answer in the negative.

⁵ On this phenomenon see, for example, Bolz (1987; 1999); Galloway (2002); Turs-

ki (1994); Wilczek (1997). There exists a similar hobbyist movement in the U.S. (cf. Powers 1988), and Native American anthropologist Beatrice Medicine (Lakota) has turned the camera on 'Russian Indians' and made a fascinating documentary about these hobbyists, the way they were perceived in the former Soviet Union, and Native American comments on their manner of interpreting and enacting Plains Indian life ways (Medicine and Baskauskas 1997).

⁶ See Trisha Rose Jacobs' contribution on representations of Native Americans in educational books.

⁷ However, Jana Jetmarová (this volume) argues that a stigma continues to be attached to indigeneity in some Andean countries.

⁸ Cinematic self-representations are discussed by Becker and Blätter, as well as by Eduardo Fichera, in this volume.

⁹ Smith (2012: x) defines ethnic identity as the feeling of belonging to a specific group and indigeneity as an unspecific ethnic identity. A central feature of ethnic identity is that it is constantly reinforced by means of characteristics that set a particular group apart from others (cf. Barth 1969). In addition, ethnic identities and boundaries are based on primordial – and not just situational – attachments of people to their respective group; this distinguishes them from merely situational identities such as those shared by groups of professionals, fan clubs, etc.

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