

Editorial

Contemporary Native American Studies – Language, Rights Systems, and Identity

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When we taught our first Native American Studies class in 1990– on Diné (Navajo) culture past and present –, some participants wanted to know whether these “Indians” really still exist. Haven’t they rather become extinct over time – our students asked us –, and are we thus teaching a historical discipline?

Back then, we were glad to point out that Native Americans are the fastest-growing segment of the population in the U.S., and that they are fighting for cultural autonomy with new self-confidence following a terrible history of cultural destruction.

Not only the indigenous North Americans are very procreative; academic work on their lives and cultures is thriving, too. As a result, there is ever new seminal research that shows that this field is by no means over-studied but, quite to the contrary, continues to spawn new, innovative approaches.

Within the context of comparative ethnology, Native North Americans are a highly interesting topic. The manner in which Native Americans were treated, the genocide, displacement and cultural oppression committed on them, as well as the resilience of ethnic identities are issues of global relevance. In North America, the impacts of deculturation, cultural deprecation and oppression, and forced acculturation are particularly evident because they have an exceptionally long history and are comparatively well documented. After all, the colonization of the indigenous North Americans has been going on for more than five hundred years.

The pronounced interest in Native American cultures and the tremendous sympathy felt for these ethnic groups in Europe may be due to the fate suffered by many of them, reminding some people of classical Greek tragedy. It may also be due, however, to the appealing aesthetics of their artwork or a romanticizing idealization of “noble savages” that has little to do with reality. As far as Germany is concerned, the works by Karl May (1842-1912) – who in his “Wild-West” novels drew

on 19th-century travel accounts such as those by Maximilian Prinz zu Wied and Balduin Möllhausen – have doubtlessly contributed a great deal to the popularity enjoyed by Native American cultures. At the same time they have created a romanticizing image of North American Indians that continues to linger on in people's imagination.

The commitment of European and North American scholars to this topic also becomes evident in the American Indian Workshop (AIW) that has been annually convened for 31 years as an informal, European forum. These meetings of Americanists, who come from various disciplines and as a rule have much fieldwork experience, show the broad range of contemporary Native American Studies. Most of the contributions presented in this issue of *Ethnoscripts* have been chosen from among the more than 50 papers presented at the 2010 AIW conference in Prague. From quite diverse perspectives, the contributions deal with re-appropriation – of language, land rights, and cultural identity.

The first contribution, by Conor Snoek, discusses language endangerment, fieldwork, and revitalization as the contexts in which two seminal projects of the University of Alberta, Canada, are situated: the Canadian Indigenous Language and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI) and the Pan-Athapaskan Comparative Lexicon Project. Both projects have been informed by concerns of the speaker communities. Snoek points out that in 1998 only three of the 50 indigenous languages spoken in Canada were viewed as having a chance of survival in the long run. Aimed at countering such language loss, both the CILLDI and the Lexicon Project show how linguistic research and language activism can aid and complement each other, and how collaboration between indigenous activists and academic institutions can be beneficial for both sides.

Julie Giabiconi addresses the legal problems that can arise due to conflicting interpretations of treaties by state agencies and indigenous peoples, using the example of Treaty No. 10 concluded between the Buffalo River Dene Nation in Saskatchewan and the Canadian state in 1906. In order to convince them to sign the treaty, the representative of the Crown gave the Buffalo River Dene the oral promise that they would be able to pursue their way of life as hunters, trappers, and fishermen in the future. This was in contradiction to the written text of the treaty, which stated that the Dene were to cede all land rights to the Dominion of Canada. When the Canadian government built a huge air weapons range on the land still

considered by the Dene as their rightful hunting grounds, the discrepancies between the oral agreement and the written version eventually triggered a series of lawsuits involving the Canadian state and the Buffalo River Dene Nation that continue to this day.

Access rights to land and resources, the latter including intellectual and cultural property, are the topic of Nina Reuther's contribution as well. In the culture of the Secwepemc (Shuswap) of the Plateau, songs occupy a central place in the traditional system of transmitting cultural knowledge, including collective and individual knowledge about access to resources such as land or fishing rights. Access to songs, in turn, is regulated by a complex system of ownership. Infringements of these ownership rights are subject to strong negative sanctions, as becomes apparent from the frequency of stories about warlike events due to such transgressions in Sekwepemc oral traditions. The inherent structure of this very complex and codified, yet not easily visible, system of access rights became clear to Reuther only after she had spent prolonged time with the Secwepemc and had opportunity to learn their emic way of passing on knowledge by means of the medium of song. She is thus able to refute older anthropological writings that hold that the Plateau tribes are characterized by a lack in complexity as compared to the neighbouring Northwest Coast cultures in which cultural knowledge and ownership are visibly displayed by means of totem poles, ceremonial dancing masks, and other "tangible" objects.

Taking an innovative approach to cultural heritage, Geneviève Susemihl points to the scarcity of American Indian heritage in the World Heritage programme of the UNESCO. She proposes to include the cultural heritage of Native American peoples' movements in time and space, as this would be an excellent opportunity not only for understanding history, but also for exploring peoples' contemporary lives. World heritage – she argues – must thus comprise three aspects related to movements of people in North America: the reflection of cultural diversity, the keeping of stories (and histories), and the shaping of identity. Susemihl suggests three major North American sites to fill this gap: first, the Klondike region in Canada as an outstanding example of a cultural landscape that illustrates significant stages in different ethnic peoples' history, representing their movements and cultural and ethnic diversity. A second aspect that needs to be an imminent feature of World Heritage is the aspect of heritage as a keeper of trans-cultural stories,

which is intimately related to cultural heritage, and illustrated by Susemihl by the example of the movie *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner*. Her third suggestion for the World Heritage programme is the Kamloops Indian Residential School, illustrating the heritage features of the representation and formation of identity. The Kamloops Indian Residential School – like other boarding schools for Native American children in Canada and the U.S. – shaped the identity of its students in many, and frequently traumatizing, ways. From 1893 to 1977, children were completely isolated from their families, communities, and cultures, and were forced to assimilate in that school, which is now a museum and research centre.

People of mixed Native American and Caucasian or African American ancestry are a large, as yet quite understudied section of the population. While there are some accounts on well-known Native American mixed-bloods¹, and while many of those who represent Native voices – for example, as writers and poets² – and/or advocate indigenous causes are of mixed descent, anthropologists have only recently begun to do research on the particularities and problems of that heterogeneous group as a whole. Mixed heritage may be a source of pride, but also of shame in families; it is an issue that may be silenced or fraught with ambiguity for various reasons, which makes it difficult for mixed-heritage people to find an identity for themselves. In the introduction to her study *“Real” Indians and Others* (Lawrence 2004), Bonita Lawrence, herself a mixed-blood urban Native American, points out:

“At the same time, many urban mixed-bloods have described how their families, which are the sources of their pride in their own identity, are also the sites where they have been most frequently discouraged from expressing any pride in that identity, or even from learning about it. The reasons are myriad and complex. Some were abjured to be silent about their identity as children, for their own protection in the face of racism, while others were told nothing about their heritage to make it easier for them to assimilate into a white identity.” (Lawrence 2004: xv)

Moreover, mixed-bloods may find it difficult to be accepted by either White society or Native communities on and off the reservations. In addition, reasons grounded in history often make it difficult for people to trace their Native ancestry. Incidentally, this is not only true of mixed-bloods but also of other Native Americans:

“Unfortunately, centuries of war, oppression, disease, poverty and as-

similation have stripped many Native American individuals, families and even entire tribes of the ability to document their status as indigenous citizens. Of the 4.1 million, only 1.7 million are enrolled in a federally recognized tribe. The remaining 2.4 million are either unaffiliated with any tribal organization or belong to one of the many tribes that the government refuses to recognize as legitimate.” (Bragi 2005: 10)

Nelly Laudicina analyses the racialized discrimination experienced by people of mixed First Nations and Caucasian heritage (Metis) and the role it played in defining the contours of a community of mixed descent in western Canada. While the country prides itself on its politics of inclusion, it still struggles to address the demands of First Nations’ legal claims. Laudicina’s contribution traces the evolution of institutionalized discrimination and the ethnic discourse it triggered, from the racist policies of the Hudson’s Bay Company in the 1830s to the judicial context of colonial Red River, before briefly concluding with an analysis of Canadian policies regarding the Metis up to 1900.

Even more understudied, in spite of its long history, is the issue of people of mixed Native American and African descent, some of whose dilemmas can be summarized as follows:

“African American Indians [...] face a double-edged sword of prejudice. Like other mixed-blood or multiracial people, they may face considerable social pressures to choose which grandparents to honor and which to forget. Yet, they carry an additional burden – many people do not consider black Indians to be real Indians.” (Bragi 2005: 144)

In this volume, the topic of African-Native American identities is addressed by Robert Keith Collins, using the example of the Five Civilized Tribes. Collins’ contribution reconstructs the question of why some ex-slaves claim American Indian kinship. In his person-centred ethnographic case study he looks at American Indian kinship among ex-slaves or Freedmen, as discernible from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Slave Narratives. He argues that American Indian kinship among Freedmen must be understood as a product of the interactions between enslaved American Indians and African Americans and alludes to the infrequently recognized phenomenon that some Freedmen descended from enslaved American Indian and American Indian descended parents.

Andrea Blätter discusses current trends in ethnopsychological research, addressing the construction of Native psychopathology, the pitfalls of some “Western” definitions of Native psychological disorders, the intergenerational traumatization – a result of five hundred years of forced assimilation and genocide – that emerges as a main cause of modern Native American psychopathological problems, and alternative modern Native psychotherapies developed by indigenous therapists who successfully make use of traditional indigenous world views. Native metaphors are used to get in touch with the disease. For instance, internal oppression is viewed as the bite of a vampire, and alcoholism is treated as an evil spirit. Such Native therapies tend to emphasize communality as opposed to the predominantly individual approach of Western psychopathology: whole communities and tribes participate successfully in community programs against alcohol abuse, suicide, and domestic violence. Moreover, they are based on adoricism rather than exorcism, focusing on an integration of the concerns of supernatural forces and on working with them instead of expelling and negating them.

Judit Szathmári focuses on a specific feature of Native American literature: issues of identity and perceived authenticity. Using the novel *Reservation Blues* by Spokane writer Sherman Alexie as an example, she argues that readers are frequently misled to believe that they read Native American culture, and thus fail to recognize the fictional elements of contemporary Native American literature. Alexie was criticized for allegedly perpetuating negative stereotypes of life on Indian reservations. Starting out from the “post-Indian” concept developed by Native scholar and writer Gerald Vizenor (1994), Szathmári argues that a new tribal presence is created in stories. She shows that Alexie intentionally employs stereotyping to reconstruct an Indian identity both fictional and real, and that stereotypes can be creatively used to both de- and reconstruct images of contemporary reservation life.

The conservative and documentary work of anthropological museums has contributed a great deal to the reconstruction and revival of Native American languages, arts, and cultures in the past, and museums still account for the conservation and publication of these material and immaterial “objects”. Hence, the last two contributions of this issue deal with contemporary research featured by museums.

For some time, interaction between museum anthropologists and archaeologists and Native American communities has been fraught with tension and conflict due to issues of repatriation, cultural and intellectual property rights, and preroga-

tives of interpretation. The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAG-PRA), which was passed in 1990, is undoubtedly a long overdue “historic, landmark legislation for Native Americans”, culminating “decades of struggle by Native American tribal governments and people to protect against grave desecration, to repatriate thousands of relatives or ancestors, and to return stolen or improperly acquired religious and cultural property to Native owners” (Trope and Echo-Hawk 2001: 9). Yet, conflicting interpretations, interests, and attitudes in some cases cause irreconcilable discord over the ownership and treatment of artefacts and human remains. With regard to archaeology, Tamara Bray (2001: 1) notes that repatriation “has often been formulated as a highly polarized debate with museums, archaeologists, and anthropologists on one side, and Native Americans on the other”, and aptly summarizes one of the key issues in American archaeology as follows:

“One of the central points of contention is whether Native American interests in reburying the skeletal remains of ancestral populations should take precedence over the interests of archaeologists and physical anthropologists in studying and preserving them. As a result, the divide over repatriation has often been glossed as one of religion versus science.” (Bray 2001: 2)

Bray’s observations with regard to the relationship between archaeologists and indigenous peoples can be applied to the relationship between anthropologists and Native Americans/First Nations as well. She points out:

“At the dawn of the new millennium, American archaeology finds itself at the threshold of a new, more humanistic orientation toward the past. At the core of this transformation is a redefinition of the relationship between archaeologists and Indian peoples. Over the past twenty years, the discipline of archaeology has suffered the loss of a unified vision of its purposes and goals. This general experience of disciplinary fragmentation is best understood within the context of the post-positivist, anti-colonialist, and post-modernist movements that have swept through many sectors of late twentieth-century academia.” (Bray 2001: 1)

In some cases, this shift results in fierce struggles about ownership of archaeological finds, objects kept in museums, and/or the prerogative of interpreting these.³ In other cases, compromises are found that prove satisfactory both to the source com-

munities and the museums. The Zuni are such a case in point. While they insist on the repatriation of certain particularly sacred objects, they do not demand that less sensitive cultural property be returned. Instead, they hold that “for the protection and proper care of Zuni objects of religious significance housed in museums, appropriate curatorial treatment must be instituted” (Ladd 2001: 109f.). For that purpose, representatives of the Zuni nation are establishing contacts with museums worldwide. One of these collaborative efforts involving representatives of the Pueblo of Zuni and a museum is described by Atsunori Ito in this volume. Ito discusses the vivid interest of Japanese citizens in arts and crafts made by Puebloans in the Southwest of the U.S.A., and recent trends involving approaches by Puebloans both to their arts and crafts commodities and to the museum collections in Japan. On the one hand, these trends have spawned an annual arts and crafts show held collaboratively in Japan by Japanese organizers and Southwestern Native artists. On the other hand, representatives of the Zuni tribal museum have established contact with the National Museum of Anthropology (Minkapu) in Osaka, and reviewed and documented the museum’s collection of Zuni objects. Focusing on these current activities, the contribution thus also analyses the Japanese “collaborative management of cultures” from the perspective of cultural anthropology.

Rainer Hatoum describes his current research project, which focuses on the Northwest Coast collection of the Ethnological Museum Berlin and includes digitization of that collection. In the context of that project and against the backdrop of the future Humboldt Forum in Berlin (the largest German museum project at the beginning of the 21st century), Hatoum sets out to explore the question of the future of museum-based anthropological research both with regard to the source communities and the general community of researchers. For the accomplishment of these goals, two specific partnerships have emerged as being particularly important: a long-term partnership with the U’mista Cultural Center of the Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwakiutl) in Alert Bay (Canada) and the inclusion of the Berlin collection into the “Reciprocal Research Network” based at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. As to the representation of the “non-European Other” in the Humboldt Forum, Hatoum draws on the Northwest Coast collection as an example to illustrate issues of tribal representation, tribal art styles, the determination of focal points in the collection’s content, sources (collectors), and content specifics.

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 Current Native American Studies, are in German. First, there is the Institutsgespräch (“Chat at the Institute”), this time a conversation between Ursula Schmucker (who is a member of the *Ethnoscripts* editorial team) and the secretary of the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology in Hamburg, Heike Perrakis. In “Ethnology and Practice”, Annegret Nippa writes about an upcoming exhibition on nomads, to be shown in Leipzig und Hamburg. In the rubric “Focus on Institutes”, Richard Kuba gives an overview of the history and current activities of the Frobenius Institute located in Frankfurt/Main. In the rubric “Workshop Report” Elisabeth Weller describes the Bambú Project for street children in Quito, and Lisa Hansen reports on her internship in a foreign-aid NGO active in Uganda. In the “Conference Report” the editors of this volume give an impression of the American Indian Workshop convened in Prague in 2010.

Finally, there are some reviews of recent publications in anthropology; two of these are related to the focus of this *Ethnoscripts* issue: Andrea Blätter reviews Tanja Ulmer’s dissertation *Der Hund in den Kulturen der Plains-Indianer* (“Dogs in Plains Indian Cultures”), and Gerd Becker gives a review of Cora Bender’s *Die Entdeckung der indigenen Moderne. Indianische Medienwelten und Wissenskulturen in den USA* (“The Discovery of Indigenous Modernity: Indian Media Worlds and Cultures of Knowledge in the U.S.A.”).

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 *Ethnoscripts* editorial team for their insightful, constructive comments on the contributions and their generous collegial support of our publication project. 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 For example, Peterson (2006) gives biographical sketches of well-known mixed-blood Indian women such as Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Susette LaFlesche Tibbles, Gertrude Simmons Bonin (Zitkala-Sá), Helen P. Clarke, and others.

² Countless examples could be given here; prominent Native American public figures of mixed descent include writers N. Scott Momaday (author of the Pulitzer-Prize winning novel *House Made of Dawn*, 1968), Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, Michael Dorris, as well as poets Maurice Kenny, Beth Brant, and Chrystos.

³ In this context, the most spectacular case in point is undoubtedly the so-called Kennewick Man, whose more than 9,000-year old skeletal remains were found in Oregon in 1996. The find triggered a legal dispute between scientists, the U.S. government, and local ethnic groups; the latter claimed the Kennewick Man as their ancestor and wished to bury his remains according to their custom. In February 2004, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit eventually ruled that a cultural link between any of the tribes and the Kennewick Man (whose genetic relationship with contemporary Native Americans is doubtful) cannot be established in genetic terms, and that scientific study of the remains can thus be resumed. On Kennewick Man and the controversies over his remains see, e.g., Burke (2008) and Thomas (2000).

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