

Chapter 1

Indigenization, Indigenous Social Work and Decolonization: Mapping the Theoretical Terrain

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This opening chapter attempts to map the complex theoretical terrain of Indigenous social work, a term used to describe First Nations (in North America) or Aboriginal (in Australia) social work and seen by people in North America and Australia and New Zealand as specific to a form of practice with minority Indigenous populations in mainly Western societies. Embracing Indigenous social work means being comfortable with uncertainty and diversity rather than attempting to condense complex histories and cultures into measureable units of analysis. Indigenous social work is far more comfortable with, and deals better with, uncertainty and complexity than Western social work (Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird, 2008).

This resistance can be seen in the history of the term ‘indigenization’, which has its origins in Africa. Its repeated use in relation to ‘making Western approaches relevant’ gives a clear message that Western approaches do not fit (see Chapter 2 and Gray and Coates, 2008 for a history of the use of this term in social work). The term ‘making social work indigenous’ has been used in Africa and Asia for decades to highlight the imperialism of Western social work (Midgley, 1981).

Not only do the discourses vary globally but there are also tensions between the global and the local – between internationalizing and localizing processes – and the way in which globalization is understood for this affects people’s views about its effect on local processes and practices (Gray, 2005). This impact is often expressed as ‘homogenization’ – a process in which local cultures and practices are distilled with wider ones. Since these issues arise mainly in contexts where local cultures feel threatened – and where due to their history, concerted attempts are being made to recover, reclaim, or maintain traditional cultural practices and languages – they are considered problematic. This does not necessarily mean that heterogenization – or the coexistence of many cultures – is preferred, for, as is shown below, another dynamic comes into play that has been conceptualized as essentialism and hybridity. It is with this complex theoretical terrain as reflected in the challenges of terminology discussed in the Introduction, that this opening chapter maps the theoretical landscape of Indigenous social work for discussion in subsequent chapters.

Towards Cultural Relevance

While historically the literature on 'indigenization' developed mainly in relation to social work practice in developing countries in Africa, Asia and South America (see, for example, Asamoah and Beverley, 1988; Brigham, 1982; Campfen, 1988; Hammoud, 1988; Shawky, 1972; Walton and Abo El Nasr, 1988), China presents an interesting contemporary case study for those interested in international social work or, more specifically, in the transfer of Western social work to non-Western contexts (Gray, 2005, 2008). While not a central focus in this volume, the Chinese experience has spawned a growing literature on the emergence of culturally relevant social work education in China in the last 15 years (see, for example, Tsang, Yan and Shera, 2000; Tsang and Yan, 2001; Yan and Tsui, 2007; Yuen-Tsang and Wang, 2002) and has reignited debates on the 'indigenization' of social work (see, for example, Cheng, 2008; Hutchings and Taylor, 2007; Gray, 2008; Jia, 2008; Yunong and Xiong, 2008). It offers a good example of the way in which many of the terms and concepts relating to decolonizing social work are played out.

As a result, it might be argued that a new field of knowledge development, namely, 'indigenized social work' could be emerging which 'independent of its imported origins ... stands on its own in addressing local problems and in providing its own local training and textbooks' (Adair, 1999: 415). 'Indigenization' requires sensitivity to local cultures and contexts but time has come to extend the debate beyond 'indigenization as making social work fit local contexts' (Gray et al., 2008). It is also necessary to critique the ethnocentric nature of the 'indigenization' discourse and the approaches used in knowledge development to discern what might be involved in extending Indigenous research. Rather than a mere strategically planned process of disciplinary development – as it is portrayed in the social work literature, 'indigenization' is also a naturally occurring process when foreign and local cultures come into contact with one another be that within Western contexts, between Western and non-Western contexts, or within non-Western contexts. It follows that *an exclusively ethnocentric form of Indigenous social work would be counterproductive to forms of practice that incorporate knowledge and interventions from other cultures*. In fact has this not been one of the major concerns within mainstream social work in regards to professional practice in multicultural contexts? It has spawned a variety of approaches to deal with diversity, such as culturally sensitive and culturally competent social work practice but these have more often addressed minority issues in Western contexts rather than the development of culturally relevant social work education and practice in non-Western contexts (see Gray et al., 2008 for a fuller discussion of this).

The existing social work literature on 'indigenization' questions the relevance of Western social work as a professional model of practice with universal application. It is part of the profession's continuing struggle with diversity, specifically its inability to work effectively with people from non-Western cultures. Calls for 'indigenization' originated – and continue to arise – from the growing realization of the limitations of Western research, education and practice models (Gray

et al., 2008). They have spawned 'a deepening sensitivity to the rich potential that exists in local customs and behaviours peculiarly driven by indigenous traditions' (Adair, 1999: 405). *A current understanding of 'indigenization' holds that social work knowledge should arise from within the culture, reflect local behaviours and practices, be interpreted within a local frame of reference, and thus be locally relevant, that is, it should address culturally relevant and context-specific problems.* Indigenization calls for Indigenous research that emanates from, adequately represents and reflects back upon the cultural context in which problems arise. Thus the development of Indigenous knowledge is reflexive and requires that researchers – and social workers – integrate their reflections on local cultures, society and history into their work (see How Kee, 2008; Nimmagadda and Balgopal, 2000; Yang, 2005)

Indigenous social work insists upon cultural relevance and culturally specific knowledges and practices, *which may or may not be universal or even cross-Indigenous* (for example, Hart, 2002; Lynn, 2001). There are two streams of literature pertaining to Indigenous social work, and both relate to contexts where there is a history of colonization. One arises in developing nations in Africa, Asia and South America and another in developed Western contexts, like the USA, Canada and Australia, where it is associated primarily with professional education and practice relating to Aboriginal or First Nations Peoples. However, regardless of origin, an Indigenous social work that results from indigenized knowledge development processes is not necessarily only a social work of and for Aboriginal or First Nations people nor is it exclusive to developing countries (Gray et al., 2008). It refers to a form of social work which seeks effective culturally appropriate research, education and practice. *In this sense it is a decolonized form of social work.* It also refers to attempts to make dominant or mainstream models relevant to culturally diverse client populations. Although not without its critics, Family Group Conferencing, which originated in New Zealand, is an example of an Indigenous social work model that has enjoyed cross-cultural application (Shlonsky et al., 2009; Sundell and Vinnerljung, 2004).

Juxtaposed against processes of 'indigenization' are attempts by social work to internationalize, that is, to continue spreading the profession to as many countries as possible around the world in the belief that social work is useful in solving personal and social problems wherever it is practised. Unlike globalization of trade that relates to the spread of global capitalism, with which it is often confused, *internationalization refers to increased interaction among people and cultures that focuses on mutual understanding and respect* (Yang, 2005). But, as Gray (2005) noted, internationalization is not without its problems for it often leads to, or opens doors to, universalization and adaptation. This often makes it more difficult to develop Indigenous theory and practice, as Yang (2005: 66) says, 'free from the tyranny of massive and totalising ideologies'. Often, though, those who seek to internationalize, that is, universalize, social work, fail to question its transportability across cultures and languages or its relevance to the contexts in which it is being transplanted (Yunong and Xiong, 2008). There is too the

paradoxical question of how something that is imported can be Indigenous – how a universal social work might simultaneously be culturally relevant (see Gray, 2005; Gray and Fook, 2004). Replicating social work – its theories, concepts, methods, standards of education and so on – does not chart new ground for the development of Indigenous social work. It merely repeats forms of education and practice in new contexts or extends the reach of international social work. Thus Indigenous social work is not just about making models of education and practice fit new contexts. It is also about the development of local, empirically based knowledge about culturally appropriate solutions to particular contexts (see Gray et al., 2008; Gray and Fook, 2004).

Indigenous social work thus seeks to highlight the unique culture and consequent plight of particular minority cultures and, in so doing, insists upon ‘culturally sensitive’ and culturally specific knowledges and practices. First Nations’ Indigenous social work has in many contexts, but especially in Canada, Australia and the USA, emerged to meet the needs of Indigenous groups in an effort to overcome the aftermath and injustices of assimilation, isolation and cultural displacement perpetrated by colonizers with the firm belief that they were divinely guided to strip Indigenous Peoples of their children and culture, lands and rights, and many in the USA today still hold to these beliefs.

It is thus not just an effort to find effective local personal and family interventions, it is also a political process that incorporates history and cultural priorities, seeks to redress colonization and establish a mainstream model that is effective and relevant for particular populations. As a specific form of indigenized social work, its goal is to make the profession and discipline of social work relevant or applicable to the particular culture of the – Indigenous – client.

One can easily see tensions emerging here between models that are exclusive and singularly dedicated to a particular culture, and an approach that seeks effectiveness and cultural relevance. Merely increasing the number of Indigenous case studies or the number of Indigenous social workers or scholarly contributions by them, or research on what is unique and different in Indigenous cultures, does not necessarily lead to Indigenous social work (Weaver, 2000). A theorist or researcher who accepts the need for Indigenous social work in terms of one of these models may research culturally unique traits, concepts or practices without regard to how commonly they occur, how widely they are accepted, how they integrate conceptually, or how meaningful they are for contemporary research, education and practice (see Adair, 1999). This is compounded by urban-rural differences which are a major issue in Canada and Australia as the needs of Indigenous people living in urban communities are frequently overlooked in the social work discourse, with some exceptions (Baldry, Green and Thorpe, 2006; Levin and Herbert, 2004). The practical reality is that there are very large proportions of Indigenous people living in cities whose lives are urban and they are often physically, and sometimes socially, disconnected from their First Nations or Indigenous communities (which was, of course, one of the goals of colonization). For example, there is considerable public attention to the horrible conditions in

many First Nations communities but very little attention to urban realities where about half the Indigenous population resides.

Rethinking the Interplay between the Local and the Global

Rethinking Globalization

Globalization is a highly contested concept (see Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009; Hopkins, 2002; Martell, 2010). Rather than merely a contemporary economic process that aims to remove barriers to international trade, Robertson interprets globalization as a ‘long-term, complex and multi-phased historical process, underpinned by subtle and shifting interdependence between the local and the global, or the universal and the particular’ (in Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: xiv). Giulianotti and Robertson (2009: 1) distinguish between two models of globalization: ‘world globalization’ and ‘global globalization’. They link the former to ‘the historical emergence and international diffusion of Western modernization – notably capitalism, industrialism and bureaucratization – from the nineteenth century onwards’. The latter, however, might be more akin to our analysis of decolonizing social work for it includes ‘an appreciation of how ancient civilizations, Islam, south and east Asia, and Africa, for example, have constructed distinctive forms of globality and have contributed to particular kinds of transcultural interdependence’ (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 1). Global globalization ‘posits in part that non-Western societies modernize in distinctive and selective ways relative to the West’ (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 2). In this way, rather than ‘a triumph of the West’ over the rest, global globalization leads to ‘increased concrete interdependencies of societies and to the greater consciousness of the world as a whole’ (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 2).

Giulianotti and Robertson (2009), drawing on Robertson’s (1992) earlier work on the phases of globalization, examine several historical epochs over the past 500 years in the process of global globalization. The first phase of globalization that they call the *germinal* phase is crucial for Indigenous Peoples for it was the period of colonial subjugation as Europe spread its influence from the early fifteenth to the mid eighteenth century (the second phase). The third *take-off* phase saw ‘a strong accentuation of principles of national self-determination and identification’ (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 4) and the fourth – *struggle-for-hegemony* – the creation of the Third World. In the fifth *uncertainty* phase – from the late-1960s to 2000 – notions of global ‘civil society’ and global citizenship come to the fore in the face of contemporary ‘risks’, such as the militant Islamism which emerged as the West’s radical other. It is in this phase that Indigenous struggles for recognition began with the formation of the

International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA),¹ an international human rights organization created by human rights activists and anthropologists in 1968 to support Indigenous Peoples worldwide.

Giulianotti and Robertson (2009: xv) believe that globalization has entered a sixth, 'millennial' stage since 2000, distinguished in part by a climate of fear alongside the intensification of surveillance and security across social settings' (see also Scott, 2009). Following their analysis and interpretation, we might see social work as *the highly complex interplay between the global and the local, or between the particular and the universal* (see Gray, 2005). We might see Indigenous social work as similarly driven, given more recent attempts to develop an Indigenous Peoples' bill of rights, to organize international conferences on Indigenous social work and to foster a global identity for Indigenous social workers. At the same time, Indigenous social work takes on a particular hue – and varying degrees of saturation – to use a photographic metaphor, in local contexts, as the chapters in this book show (see also Gray et al., 2008).

Giulianotti and Robertson (2009) provide an interesting framework from which to view the history of Indigenous Peoples whose identity centres on the legacy of colonial subjugation during the *germinal* and *incipient* phases in their model. Disputes surround the determination of who the First Peoples were, and their rights to land claims, given the history of migration of the world's peoples. Generally, however, Indigenous people are those who were found living on the lands the colonists sought to conquer and appropriate during this period. The death and destruction and political and cultural subjugation of these peoples has left scars to the present day where Indigenous Peoples still constitute the poorest of the world's population and remain minority cultures. This is the legacy of colonial subjugation and the rise of modern Western culture following the Enlightenment of the *incipient* phase. During this period, the Aborigine's Protection Society (APS) was formed in London in 1837 by prominent abolitionists, who realized that emancipation from slavery had not diminished the problem of European exploitation of Aborigines. At this time, Aborigine referred to non-whites and not necessarily First Peoples. In New Zealand the Waitangi Treaty (see Chapters 7 and 13) was signed in 1840 and in Ghana – West Africa – the first African APS was launched in 1897 (see Chapter 9).

European colonization met with strong resistance from Indigenous Peoples during this period. Hughes (2003) marks 1876 as a historic moment when the Indians triumphed at the battle of Little Bighorn, recorded in European history as Custer's Last Stand. But retribution was exacted with intensified force – here, as in Africa and South America and other regions of the world, where colonists encountered strong resistance and won some victories.

Despite Indigenous resistance and the abolitionist movement, the loss of Indigenous cultures and languages was intensified by modernization projects

1 See <http://www.iwgia.org/sw617.asp> – note 'indigenous peoples' is not capitalized on this website.

in the *take-off* phase from the 1870s to the mid-1920s, most importantly the spread of Western Christianity. Indigenous Peoples were forced off their lands onto Christian mission stations and into residential boarding schools that sought to assimilate them into Western culture. This meant conversion to Christianity and forsaking traditional languages, values and practices. Overlooked was the existing structure of governance and social organization of Indigenous cultures, which closely identified with land, ancestors, tribe, kin and clan, a structure that long-preceded European colonization. Two key historic developments during this phase in Lotte Hughes' (2003) history is the formation in the early 1920s of the Alaskan Native Brotherhood and Society for American Indians and the unsuccessful challenge – mounted in 1923 – by Deskaheh, an Indigenous leader from the Iroquois Confederacy to seek help from the League of Nations in Geneva in their dispute with the Canadian Government.

Social work emerges during this period and is strongly identified with the colonial 'civilizing' mission, being part of the system of child removal that perpetuated into the *struggle-for-hegemony* phase of the mid-1920s to the late-1960s (such as the Stolen Generations in Australia, residential schools and the 60s scoop in Canada, see Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), 1997 and Sinclair, 2004). In the subsequent *uncertainty* phase up until the turn of the century, the Indigenous movement grew in strength in tandem with the independence struggles of colonized peoples, decolonization, the rise of Red Power in North America and Black Power in the USA, the flowering of the human rights movement, and the advent of the United Nations (Hughes, 2003). Two North American Councils formed in the USA and Canada in 1974 and 1977 respectively led to the first international non-government conference focusing on Indigenous issues in Geneva in 1977. From then on the international Indigenous movement gained in intensity and became increasingly politicized with the explosion of civil society organizations among the world's poor in the South across Africa, South America and Asia-Pacific region. In the sixth *millennial* phase, these protests became linked to the anti-globalization movement, and consciousness-raising projects grew through the Internet. Among the main projects is the move to have Indigenous remains returned to their ancestral lands (Hughes, 2003). As noted by Gray et al. (2008), for the Indigenous Peoples' struggle, globalization meant a new form of colonizing expansion but unlike imperialistic modernization, it could be harnessed to raise awareness of Indigenous rights and the plight of the world's Indigenous Peoples. At the same time, the focus on climate change and impending ecological disasters has rekindled interest in Indigenous knowledges and understandings of environmental sustainability (see Gray, Coates, and Hetherington, 2013).

Rethinking the Homogenization-Heterogenization Debate

In the social sciences, concepts like culture, identity, agency and self-determination are used to decipher the way in which local – and Indigenous – cultures engage with ‘the global’. Giulianotti and Robertson (2009: 31) note how ‘the arising arguments are often predicated upon conventional binary oppositions – notably between the local and the global, or the particular and the universal – and are flavoured by a critical preference for one perspective over the other’. In this regard, they draw attention to:

an axial problem in the sociology of globalization ... the homogenization-heterogenization debate. Homogenization arguments generally posit that globalization is marked by growing cultural convergence at the transnational level. Conversely, heterogenization arguments contend that global processes maintain or facilitate cultural diversity or divergence [although] ... rival ‘schools of thought’ tend not to strike absolutist poses. (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 38)

Thereafter, they examine these two conceptual or theoretical orientations in more detail:

Homogenization theories posit that social actors and their local cultures are orchestrated into passively absorbing or otherwise reproducing the cultural products, practices, and predilections of the world’s most powerful corporations and nations ... [T]hese theories of global cultural convergence have produced a diversity of keywords and theories, such as cultural imperialism, synchronization, Americanization, Westernization, and globalization [sic]. (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 38–9)

By way of contrast, theories of cultural heterogenization pivot on a variety of keywords, notably ‘creolization’, ‘indigenization’ and ‘vernacularization’ (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 41). Perhaps of most immediate interest, particularly for developed societies, indigenization registers ‘an increasing fragmentation of identities, the break-up of larger identity units, the emergence of cultural politics among Indigenous, regional, immigrant, and even national populations’ (Friedman, 1999: 391, cited in Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 41–2). Giulianotti and Robertson (2009: 32), in proceeding to their substantive analysis of ‘football’s cultural globalisation’, emphasize – and go on to exemplify consistently throughout – the *interdependencies* between the global and the local. It is these kinds of interdependencies that we are trying to discern in this book. Rather than perpetuate binary oppositions, we aim to create a space for dialogue on the ways in which forces of globalization and localization – homogenization and heterogenization – are playing out in particular contexts. Rankopo and Osei-Hwedie (2011), for example, provide an example of the difficulties of developing locally and culturally relevant social work education in a university environment pushing for internationalization,

and there are a growing number of empirical case studies of the tensions between these processes in social work (see Gray et al., 2008).

In social work, as in football, there are 'trends towards both commonality or uniformity and divergence and differentiation' (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: xv) captured more fully by the broad homogenization-heterogenization opposition 'which registers trends towards *cultural* convergence and divergence' (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: xv, emphasis added). Conventional binary oppositions place cultural imperialism at one end of the continuum and compensatory resistance grounded in local identity and cultural reclamation at the other. Rather than perpetuate irresolvable differences, Giulianotti and Robertson (2009: 31) point to the 'need to 'account for the complexity of cultural globalization' by appreciating 'the intensive analytical and empirical *interdependencies* of the global and the local, or the universal and the particular' (original emphasis).

Bearing this in mind, we need to accept that social work varies greatly across diverse international contexts, mainly because it remains *nationally* rooted in specific social policies while seeking a common international professional identity. It has organs of internationalization – like the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) – that seek a common international definition of social work and global education standards, despite the increasing variability and degrees of relevance of social work across diverse international contexts (Gray and Webb, 2008; Gray et al., 2008).

In the same way, Indigenous Peoples are seeking a common identity for Indigenous social work by harnessing the benefits of internationalizing processes. While social justice was a major factor in the emergence of social work, for much of the twentieth century, mainstream Western social work was strongly associated with the history of colonization and modernization, but the profession has started once again to embrace a strong social justice and human rights culture that has the potential to work in the interests of Indigenous Peoples and cultural minorities (see Finn and Jacobson, 2003). Rather than see social work as hemmed in by two historical influences: colonization and globalization, it might be more useful to recognize that we are living in a post-colonial global society where there is 'legitimacy of difference' and 'the development of transnational standards of citizenship and rights' (Yeatman, 2000: 95). However, the term 'post-colonial' is somewhat problematic for Indigenous Peoples as it implies that colonization is 'finished business.' Hence Smith (1999: 25) asks, 'Post-colonial? What? Have they left yet?'. Nevertheless, post-colonial scholars, such as Young (2003: 4), maintain that post-colonialism can be regarded as an activity of liberation since it 'names a politics and philosophy of activism that contests that disparity, and so continues in a new way the anti-colonial struggles of the past'.

Given that the 'politics of difference' is tied to the recognition of minority groups, it represents a challenge to the homogenizing effects of neo-liberal individualism and its implications for *national* health and welfare provision. It denotes a multiculturalism that respects cultural diversity in both the private and

public spheres and requires structural pluralism, a system that is responsive to people's special needs, even if they constitute a minority group (see Husband, 2000). However, multiculturalism is also problematic for Indigenous Peoples. As Weaver (1998) and Voss, Douville, Little Soldier and Twiss (1999) assert, Indigenous Peoples are not just ethnic or cultural minorities within a larger society; they are more than a special client population or social problem group. As we have seen, however, movements that strive to foster a unique cultural identity, such as Indigenous in the First Nations' sense, seek a special kind of recognition and attention that calls for the highlighting of difference. Ways need to be found to do this without setting up an oppositional position whereby Indigenous identity is located in the fissures where mainstream social work does not fit. Rather than focus solely on how Indigenous social work differs from Western social work in laying claim to what is unique about Indigenous cultures, histories and politics, ways need to be found to harness Indigenous social work's inherently *critical* stance for the good of the profession as a whole and *vice versa*. Staying at the cultural imperialism end of the continuum merely locks us into a 'them and us' discourse. This is counterproductive because Indigenous Peoples are invariably minorities in the societies in which they are situated and, from the perspective of the politics of difference – or the theory of cultural recognition – they are always constructed – by themselves and others as 'Other' (Paradies, 2006; Sinclair, 2004). The recognition discourse creates a space for the creation of homogeneous categories that require some sort of 'special recognition' while respecting the cultures of others as well as an international professional identity. This more nuanced standpoint 'highlights the complex interdependencies between the global and the local' (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 33).

Rethinking the Essentialism-Hybridization Debate

Essentialism

How culture is defined is pivotal to understanding the interdependencies of the local and global that we are seeking. It is important that we do not see societies – whether Indigenous or Western – as 'passive recipients of global cultural content ... local cultures are not 'fixed' in time and space. Rather, we need to explore the routes and roots of any culture; its mobility and its senses of 'dwelling fixity' (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 33–4). We also need to be wary of simplistic defences of local cultures that imply unidirectional global flows from the West to the rest.

Culture might be seen as both a boundary of resistance and of imposition or domination. In fact these processes are interrelated: As *resistance*, it comes into play when external forces seek to subdue or *dominate*. Such events, according to Badiou (2001), herald a return to sameness or the *essential*, enduring features of cultural identity. Likewise, Kaya (2007) notes that 'the increase of people's

demands for their ethnic, religious, and racial identities' – referred to as 'the cultural turn in the social sciences' – runs the danger of 'reducing social life to cultural elements ... [The] recent increase in identity politics has come with a shift from a general politics based on ideal universal progress to a politics of identity based on gender, local, religious, or ethnic identities' (Kaya, 2007: 707). However, in this discourse, identity politics revolves around '*resistance to imposed or fixed identities*' (Kaya, 2007: 708, emphasis added). Unlike multiculturalism, which calls for 'recognition of the other' based on the idea that all cultures have equal value and worth, identity politics is divisive and provokes conflict. Hence a perspective that celebrates 'difference', 'division' and 'incompatibility' needs to be problematized for it holds little promise 'of solving the problem of living together' (Kaya, 2007: 722). While post-structuralists and postmodernists criticize the modernist 'essentialized – fixed identity – approach' to cultural constructions, its opposite of fluidity and hybridity is not helpful to the Indigenous cause. More in their interests are post-colonialist and feminist privileging of 'lived experience' and 'local knowledges' in the reclamation and preservation of culture and ethnicity. But they walk a fine line in defending identity without resorting to simplistic 'essentializing discourses'. Once fixed categories are dissolved it becomes difficult to explain the experience of racism, sexism, discrimination, oppression, marginalization and so on.

Postmodern and post-structural 'multiplicity' overturn the very hierarchical systems which, feminists and post-colonialists argue, engender oppression and marginalization. So in seeking to ground identity in 'lived experience' and 'local embeddedness or situatedness', post-colonialist and feminist theorists enable 'explorations of embodiment, narrativity and social location' (Wuthnow, 2002: 185) as markers of a distinct identity. For them the fluid, mobile, disembodied nomad perpetuates colonialist discourse whereby the white settlers become the fluid shapeshifters while Indigenous Peoples are constructed as embodied, immobile, situated and objectified – exotic subjects for study: they were always there living close to the land grounded, embedded and wedded to location while the settlers assume a new identity, move on, progress and integrate into society. Feminists must cling to identity markers like gender, race and ethnicity in a world which renders whiteness and Western-ness as invisible norms and which marginalizes local knowledges such that 'knowledges produced in locale are denigrated as local, subaltern, and other' (see Wuthnow, 2002: 190). This does not allow for solid critique and support for Indigenous Peoples attempting 'to secure political rights, self-determination and cultural survival' (Wuthnow, 2002: 190). For feminists like Wuthnow (2002: 195):

the 'local' need not be based on an essentialized notion of place ... the term 'local' refers ... not to geographical location, but rather to a status of marginalization within broader discursive realms ... For Hall the local [is] conceptualized variously as marginality, difference and diversity ... In marked contrast to Deleuze ... his notion of the local relies on a sense of place and of 'roots' ... yet

he is very careful to elaborate notions of these concepts that avoid essentialized grounding ... the 'local' acts as an important base for counterhegemonic politics.

The 'local' is not a fixed place – a fact waiting to ground identities – but lives in memory and in history and is recounted or narrated through stories, reconstruction and remembering (Hall, in Wuthnow, 2002). An 'essentialized approach' attempts to construct fixed ahistorical ethnic or racial identities by articulating the 'salient features' of a population group. It assumes that something is 'shared' by a 'group' of people – or a whole population of people – whatever their location. To describe a certain group of people we inevitably highlight their salient features but without a proper footnote or disclaimer, these salient features can easily be taken as 'essentialized features' which reinforce stereotypes and do not allow for individuality. They overlook the fact that there are many facets to the identities people adopt or ascribe to others (Paradies, 2006). An empirical approach would subject 'salient – so-called shared – features' to examination. Without some factual grounding, discussions about the salient features of particular cultures remain speculative.

Hybridity

According to Wang and Yueh-yu Yeh (2005: 176), 'with the rise of postcolonialism, the concept of hybridity ... has become a new facet of the debate about global culture in the social sciences'. It creates a 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994), where different cultural elements encounter and transform one another. Through the notion of hybridization which 'is not merely the mixing, blending and synthesizing of different elements' to form a 'culturally faceless whole' but rather to generate 'new forms and ... new connections' (Wang and Yueh-yu Yeh, 2005: 175), post-colonialists challenge essentialism. They present another scenario for the outcome of cultural globalization – other than 'hegemonic westernization and postmodern diversity' (Wang and Yueh-yu Yeh, 2005: 176) – that seeks 'cultural convergence' as a result of ongoing interaction within and between cultures (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009). Post-colonialists recognize the heterogeneous, contextual, historically contingent nature of 'social experiences and cultural identities' (Hall, 1995: 225). This non-essentialist approach 'transcends the compulsion to unceasingly patrol identity borders that have been constructed around primitivist, romantic and colonial discourses ... and starts us on the long and difficult journey of freeing ourselves from 'myth-making' and the internalized racism of identity politics' (Paradies, 2006: 362). An essentialist approach requires that Indigenous social workers articulate the particular Indigenous frameworks, philosophies or worldviews that undergird Indigenous social work practices. However, non-essentialists or hybridists argue against the possibility of delineating distinctive cultures of this nature which have remained uncontaminated by the external influences of colonization, globalization, indigenization and internationalization, as the case may be. Notwithstanding the possibility of isolated communities that

have not encountered foreign cultures, in most communities where social work is found, there would be varying degrees of hybridization, even cultures able to retain a traditional heritage and traditional cultural practices while living in and adopting Western belief systems, such as Christianity (see How Kee, 2008; Nimmagadda and Martell, 2008). In this regard Weaver's (2001: 251) observation bears repeating:

While we as indigenous people were busy guarding against cultural appropriation, we may have missed a much bigger threat to indigenous community... [by] the self-appointed 'identity police', those who divide communities and accuse others of not being 'Indian' enough because they practice the wrong religion, have the wrong politics, use the wrong label for themselves, or do not have the rights skin colour ... Some Indigenous people ask, 'Are you Indian, or are you Christian?' as if these are mutually exclusive categories.

Conclusion

So, how might we then move forward to a more enlightened stance on Indigenous social work and attempt to deal with all of the debatable labels, arguments and categorizations presented in this chapter? How does the social work profession acknowledge and embrace the complexities, ambiguities and uncertainties involved in incorporating decolonizing practices into our work? The chapters in this book attest social workers' preparedness to work with discomfort and have the difficult conversations often necessary to progress theorizing and develop a deeper understanding as Indigenous and non-Indigenous social workers work together in facing the challenges of developing culturally relevant research, education and practice.

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