

Title

This word is (not?) very exciting: Considering intersectionality in indigenous studies.

The author

Torjer A. Olsen, PhD in religious studies (2008), is professor of indigenous studies at the Centre for Sámi Studies, University of Tromsø - The Arctic University of Norway. Olsen's research interests include issues of methodology within indigenous studies, indigenous issues in educational contexts, and indigenous Christianities. In 2015/2016, Olsen went on a research stay at Te Puna Wananga (School of Maori Education), University of Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Postal address:

The Centre for Sami Studies
UiT The Arctic University of Norway
9037 Tromsø - Norway

Email

Torjer.olsen@uit.no

Twitter:

@Torjer

Abstract

Gender and intersectional approaches can provide important insights and reflections for indigenous studies. Issues related to indigenous people and communities are broad and complex. Doing research within indigenous studies has to consist of more than simply discussing indigenous identity. I argue that intersectional approaches of varying kinds provide an opportunity to understand several aspects of identity and a diverse set of issues relevant to indigenous communities. Using intersectional approaches enables one to maintain a critical focus on power. In this article, I describe indigenous studies and intersectionality separately, then move on to a discussion of how intersectionality and gender perspectives can be used within indigenous studies. The starting point for intersectional approaches as well as for indigenous studies is the margins rather than the centre. The focus of the article is on methodology, which is based on the reading of literature from indigenous methodologies, gender studies and intersectionality. A key concept is the cultural interface, which points towards the existence of plural subject positions both for individuals and within a community.

Key words:

Indigenous people, intersectionality, gender, indigenous studies, feminism, methodology

**This word is (not?) very exciting:
Considering intersectionality in indigenous studies**

“This word isn’t very exciting – I’ve already been doing this for a long time” (Hunt, 2012, p. 3). So said Sarah Hunt, an indigenous participant in a dialogue on intersectionality and indigeneity. The word in question was *intersectionality*, for decades a popular and widely debated approach, particularly within gender studies. In this paper, I consider gender and intersectionality within the study of indigenous issues and pose the research question: how can an intersectional analysis emphasizing gender benefit indigenous studies? Or, indeed, why is it necessary? The quoted statement points towards an epistemological challenge for intersectionality: Are indigenous ways of knowing about interconnectedness similar and comparable to the intersectional approaches of research methodologies?

Intersectionality is an approach to describing and analysing how different kinds of social identities work together and/or against each other. The intersectional focus is on the interplay of identities, as well as on how multiple forms of power can either push or pull social identities (May, 2015, p. 3). Gender can emphasize or de-emphasize, coincide with or contest, indigenous identity, and the other way around. This approach allows us to recognize differences within a social group or category, not only between groups or categories. An intersectional approach to indigenous studies is a means of highlighting differences within an indigenous group or community, not only the differences between indigenous and non-indigenous groups. The relationship between gender and indigeneity is of particular interest in this article.

Issues related to indigenous peoples and communities are broad and complex. The emphasis today is on an exploration of what indigenous studies should aspire to be rather than into the field's origins and boundaries (Andersen & O'Brien, 2016, p. 1). However, I argue that gendered and intersectional approaches of varying kinds provide the opportunity to understand several aspects of identity and a diverse set of issues relevant to indigenous communities. The use of gendered and intersectional approaches enables a critical focus on power. This is necessary because the unequal world we live in is structured and divided along lines of class or privilege, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, to name just a few (Pease, 2010, p. 3). The starting point for intersectional approaches, as well as for indigenous studies, is the margins rather than the centre (May, 2015).

A case in point, definitely originating from the margins, which I use to illustrate my argument, is the Swedish director Amanda Kernell's award-winning film *Sami Blood* (2016). Its protagonist, the resourceful Sámi girl Elle-Marja, grows up in a reindeer-herding family in the South Sámi area of Sweden during the 1930s. Facing school and state demands, harassment by Swedish neighbours, and alienation from her family, Elle-Marja tries to break with everything related to being Sámi. She even changes her name to the more Swedish-sounding Christina. In this article, I use the case study of *Sami Blood* as an example of an intersectional analysis combining indigeneity and gender (and more). By unravelling further aspects of the film, I argue that an intersectional approach is needed to understand Elle-Marja's situation and story. She must be seen not only as a Sámi, but also as a girl, a sister, a less-privileged citizen and a young person.

Within one particular indigenous community, there can be a whole line of differing and different kinds of indigenous identities – decided by gender, class,

profession, age, religion, ability and other social and/or physical dimensions. Being an unprivileged young woman is obviously very different from being a privileged adult man – even if both live in the same indigenous community. Some things draw them together; some things pull them apart. Using an intersectional perspective, regardless of how it is termed, enables us to understand people as belonging to a diversity of contexts and/or identities at the same time.

Located within a methodological discourse, this article is a contribution to the broad discussion on how to do indigenous studies and how gender as an analytical category can be applied in the study of indigenous issues. In particular, I argue that gender needs to be foregrounded in indigenous studies and consider whether intersectional approaches may be the way to achieve this. The empirical basis for the article is the reading of research literature and methodological literature primarily from indigenous studies, gender studies, and other outspoken intersectional methodologies. I start out with introductions to gender in indigenous studies and intersectionality, before discussing the potential contributions of the latter to the former. As such, the article is also a contribution to gender studies (see also Olsen, 2015; 2016; 2017a; 2017b).

Indigenous studies

Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies* has become a monument in the global discourse of indigenous research. It has paved the way for indigenous scholars who have felt the need to do research differently from the dominant Western researchers (cf. Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2010, pp. 12–13; Kuokkanen, 2007; Chilisa, 2012; Porsanger, 2004). Similar ideas have been spoken of both in

Aotearoa/New Zealand through the kaupapa Māori movement (GH Smith, 1997; Bishop, 1996), amongst the many peoples of the Americas (Deloria, 1998), in Australia (Nakata, 2007), and in Norway/Sápmi (Porsanger, 2004; Gaski, 2004). The terms vary, but the ideas have resonance across a wide geographical area.

Even though many researchers would argue that indigenous studies still belongs within different kinds of cultural studies, today it is – if somewhat ambiguously – a field of its own, comprising studies of issues related to indigenous peoples. Its main characteristic is that the subject defines the field. Indigenous studies today is carried out through studies of literature, political documents, religious rituals, fieldwork, and – quite often – through combining a diversity of sources and types of sources (Andersen & O’Brien, 2016, p. 4).

Indigenous studies is still in the making. Because it is a multidisciplinary field with scholars participating from a number of other disciplines, Chris Andersen and Jean M. O’Brien (2016) call for a methodological “promiscuity” that can reflect the dynamic and pragmatic nature of the young field. Anyone researching indigenous issues can argue that they are doing indigenous studies. A precondition is that indigenous voices, perspectives and interests are the main emphasis or basis (regardless of how difficult this may be to define) (Smith, 2010). That being said, the term “indigenous” is in itself difficult to define with precision. As in neighbouring disciplines like social anthropology, religious studies, art history, sociology and gender studies, it is difficult to find a univocal definition of the centre of attention, whether it is “culture”, “religion”, “art”, “society”, “gender” or “indigenous people”. The most common choice for finding a definition is to go to international conventions and declarations, which have in part grown out of the

success of the international indigenist political struggle of the last four decades (Dahl, 2012).

A challenge when it comes to providing a clear-cut definition is that the span of those who count as indigenous stretches from tribal people living in the rainforests of Borneo, via reindeer herders living in the Sámi mountains of Sweden, to professional politicians on Manhattan in New York. Needless to say, it takes a broad approach to be able to study issues related to such a huge diversity of people within one field. Thus, indigenous studies is at its core multidisciplinary.

The diversity of indigenous people points to a huge variety of indigenous localities. A dilemma, possibility, and/or tension within indigenous studies is related to the relationship between what is local, specific, or relevant for one community or group of people on the one hand, and what is global, general, or concerning indigenous people worldwide on the other.

Decolonization has become a defining part of indigenous studies, and is used by many in preference to the term post-colonialism (Hutchings & Lee-Morgan, 2016). The latter presupposes something that has ended, whereas from the perspective of decolonization, colonization and imperialism are seen as processes that are still on-going. Thus, decolonization has to deal with the present, the colonial past, and the pre-colonial past (Smith, 2010, pp. 23–24; Lee-Morgan & Hutchings, 2016, pp. 3–5). Decolonization, in the context of indigenous studies, refers to a critical exploration of how existing research has been conducted through the impact of more or less colonizing methods and concepts and also to attempts at carrying out research without the damaging impact of colonization (Pihama, 2016, p. 103). Moreover, it refers to the move towards

indigenization, an approach with a number of starting points. A key issue is to move beyond critique to the making or use of particularly indigenous concepts, methods and/or institutions (dependent on the context). Martin Nakata states that, in Australia, the process of indigenization has been important on several levels. The indigenization of research and of academic work has implied making a recognizably indigenous space within universities, a space that works to culturally affirm indigenous people and practices (Nakata, 2006, p. 269).

Still, indigenization, particularly in the shape of indigenous methodologies, seems to have the (unwanted?) effect of downplaying gender (Olsen, 2017a). Without negating the importance and necessity of the movement of the different decolonizing and indigenous methodologies, I have previously (Olsen, 2017a; 2017b) argued that there is a tendency within the academic movement of indigenous methodologies to de-emphasize other aspects of power and identity besides indigeneity, in particular gender. Porsanger (2004), Kovach (2010), Deloria (1992) and Wilson (2008) do not explicitly discuss gender in their work. Smith (2010), despite dealing with gender (understood as women's issues), mentions issues related to neither class nor sexuality. Joyce Green (2007), however, harshly criticizes indigenous leaders' hesitation or even outright hostility towards the perspectives of women and/or gender. Likewise, class issues or issues of internal relations of privilege and lack of privilege are rarely dealt with in indigenous studies.

This is a challenge that needs to be addressed. Intersectional perspectives can potentially be a way of maintaining a gendered perspective at the same time as a multifaceted, critical perspective is applied.

Sami Blood can be seen as an expression of decolonization and indigenization. The film explores a Sámi community's encounter with the Swedish state, clearly showing how the policies and practices of the Swedish state can be seen and talked of as colonization. The most horrific example here is the scene depicting 1930s racial research. Here, Elle-Marja and the other Sámi students at the boarding school are used as objects in a clearly dehumanizing craniometry. Furthermore, *Sami Blood* is an expression of indigenization, as the film tells the story from an outspoken Sámi perspective using Sámi language and actors. Through this, the film makes and claims a recognizably South Sámi space, a space that is gendered through-and-through.

The critical questions regarding gender (together with class, privilege, sexuality and so on) can follow along these lines. The diversity within indigenous communities, as well as diversity when it comes to the relations between indigenous and non-indigenous people, is another point and premise. Elle-Marja of *Sami Blood* is Sámi and the film is told from a Sámi perspective. Perhaps she – and the film – is first and foremost Sámi. Nonetheless, she is also portrayed as female, young, a reindeer herder, resourceful and unprivileged. Diversity matters. Elle-Marja initiates several relations of different kinds with non-Sámi Swedes, and chooses a way of life that differs from that of other Sámi.

The diversity within indigenous communities and methodologies calls for approaches that can deal with complexity. Intersectional approaches have the potential to help enable scholars to avoid problematic one-sidedness of various kinds.

Intersectionality

The basic metaphor for intersectionality is of course the intersection, the point at which many different roads meet. While Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) originally described the intersection where gender meets/crosses Racism Street, Colonialism Avenue, and Patriarchy Road, scholars of indigenous studies might add that indigeneity also meets/crosses Modernization Boulevard, Privilege Alley, Religion Road, and Rue du Language. This intersection may seem quite chaotic, but the point is not too complicated: gender is not only about gender; indigeneity is not only about indigeneity.

The levels of individuals, institutions, and structures add to the picture in two ways (Gullikstad, 2013). Firstly, the social categories at hand can be studied at each level. Hence, as a scholar, you can look into how individual indigenous persons experience and/or navigate between different social categories. Or you can look into how the school as an institution deals with different social categories. Secondly, you can look into how the different levels intersect. Understandings of gender are related to institutional practices and state policies (Gullikstad, 2013).

As mentioned, *Sami Blood* provides a series of scenes and expressions of colonization that can be understood through an intersectional lens. Throughout the film, Elle-Marja is portrayed as facing colonialism at many different levels. At a state level, through the school system, she attends a boarding school for Sámi children. Here, the Swedish teacher, Christina, despite being understanding and sympathetic, carries the voice of Christianization and of Swedish segregation policy. At the boarding school, Elle-Marja and the other children also encounter the state's racist biological policy through researchers who measure skulls and perform generally abusive research. At a local

community level, Elle-Marja faces harassment and condescending behaviour from Swedish villagers (who are all depicted as almost unnaturally tall).

Gender and indigeneity also cross other pathways or axes of identity and power. The issue of class and privilege is depicted when Elle-Marja does not have the resources to be accepted into a secondary school in Uppsala. Her sexuality becomes an issue, through the expectations she has of a potentially loving relationship. Colonization is at stake during all these scenes. Lastly, there is of course both the colonization of the mind, through her own internalization of patronizing talk about the Sámi when she calls her sister a “Lappjåvel” (“Lapp [i.e. Sámi] bastard”), and finally of the body, through her felt need to literally wash the Sáminess out of her skin and hair.

Intersectionality may work to enable an analysis of these different levels, as well as of how different levels and aspects of identity work together. Can indigenous studies provide a decolonizing intersectional approach?

The intersectional perspective, starting with the encounter between gender and race as analytical categories, implies exploring how gendered situations also include other social dimension or categories. Within intersectionality, we analyse social categories as being mutually constitutive. As an approach, it is power-critical and usually takes the margins as its starting point – or at least aims to explore how power and margins are constituted and working. Intersectionality, as such, is not and does not aim to be neutral. Instead, it is oriented towards exploring diverse forms of political struggles and justice (May, 2015, p. 28).

There is some debate about the place of origin of intersectionality as a scholarly approach. Thoughts and approaches similar or close to what was later termed

intersectionality were seen and heard both in the USA, where there was a focus on gender's connection to race, and in Europe, where there was a focus on gender's connection to class (Gressgård, 2013).

Crenshaw (1989) first used the concept and model of intersectionality as part of a larger project of black feminist critique. Those roots, which are important to acknowledge, point to a certain characteristic of intersectionality: it is both an analytical and a political orientation coming from a particular situation. Black feminists in the USA were experiencing and articulating a two-sided oppression, from men and patriarchy on the one side and from white people regardless of gender on the other. Thus, intersectionality approaches social identities as lived and interlaced, and contests one-sided and single-axis ideas of power and hierarchy (May, 2015, p. 3).

Intersectionality has of course been debated. One issue is that some of the literature on intersectionality is not grounded in empirical research (Orupabo, 2014). Another issue that has been raised is whether the term and approach actually constitute a *new* agenda for women's and gender studies. Feminist critiques already included capitalism in the 1970s. Furthermore, black feminists accused white feminists of only raising the issue of white middle-class experiences of oppression. They claimed the need for a multidimensional model of understanding and addressing domination (Lutz, Vivar & Supik, 2011, p. 3). Adding to gender, class, and race as interlocking systems of the sexual politics of oppression, issues of age and disability have added to making intersectionality a complex matrix of analysis.

The complexity of social identities and categories is seen within intersectional approaches as an interplay between different categories carrying different internal logics.

“Gender” follows/carries a different logic than categories such as “ethnicity” and “class”. Thus, political actions against ethnic discrimination, for instance, do not necessarily lead to gender equity, just as recognition of indigenous identity/rights does not necessarily lead to the recognition of sexual minorities. This constitutes a dilemma within a rights discourse. For intersectional research, this dilemma is the key. Intersectionality combines the analysis of social differences brought about through the interplay between class, race, gender, ethnicity and other issues on the one hand, and the poststructuralist deconstruction of identity categories on the other (Gressgård, 2013).

Smith (2010, p. 90) and Moreton-Robinson (2011, p. 415) represent the connection between gender studies/feminism and indigenous studies as they both refer to gender scholar bell hooks to demonstrate the parallel between gender issues in indigenous contexts and in other minority contexts. hooks (2000) claims the importance of class, ethnicity, and race alongside gender. As social identity, class is particularly important due to the simple fact that resources are not equally shared. For hooks, the starting point is the unfair social conditions experienced by black people in the USA. In such a context, race and gender can be used to draw attention away from the bitter reality of class (hooks, 2007, p. 7).

As already mentioned, there is a tendency within indigenous studies, and indigenous methodologies in particular, to downplay gender issues. Relations of privilege and oppression are never binary but a system that carries with it an aspect of invisibility. Privilege, in particular, can be difficult to unfold and acknowledge, especially from the perspective of those carrying the privilege (Pease, 2010, p. 9). Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000) argues that white feminist women have been unable and unwilling to see and

understand issues relating to indigenous women, while Joyce Green (2007), as we have seen, complains that indigenous leaders refuse to deal with women's issues. Moreton-Robinson follows the lead of the black feminists who criticized white feminists for not seeing the racial dimension of oppression. White feminist women have privileges through their whiteness despite being oppressed as women. In studies of privilege/oppression relations, there is a great need to move beyond static categories. Adding more than one dimension or identity shows that neither "men", "gay" nor "working class" are categories that provide full meaning by themselves. Instead, the picture is complex and multifaceted. As argued by Bob Pease (2010, pp. 21–23), gay men may take part in the oppression of lesbians, black heterosexuals in the oppression of black gay men, working-class men in the sexist oppression of women, and so on.

Privilege is a multi-faceted part of any society. It works in mysterious ways. In *Sami Blood*, Elle-Marja starts out as a privileged Sámi girl, then she becomes an unprivileged outsider in Swedish society, before she apparently ends up as a privileged middle-class Swede (carrying a certain ambiguity). Every person and community is positioned with regard to different systems of privilege and social categories such as ethnicity, gender, class/privilege, and so on. Scholars cannot know beforehand how privilege plays out and which subject position(s) is (are) emphasized and which is (are) downplayed. Thus, the scholar needs to reach an initial understanding of the situation at hand before embarking on a thorough analysis. This means that neither "gender" nor "indigeneity" is necessarily the central issue(s) (Gullikstad, 2013). This, of course, poses a challenge to scholars of indigenous studies and gender studies respectively, as scholars from both disciplines tend to include a political aspect in their research. I will return to

the concept of the *cultural interface* (Nakata, 2007) as a potential solution to this challenge.

Doing research, being a scholar, taking part in the activities of the Academy – all these are highly (although in some cases implicitly) political and/or politicized activities, regardless of each scholar's active take. Intersectionality is an approach or an orientation that keeps this as a starting point or premise. It is as much a political as an analytical orientation. It brings with it an invitation to think less from “either/or” spaces and more from “both/and” spaces, and asks for attempts to identify the workings of privilege and oppression in different contexts (May, 2015, p. 21).

Considering intersectionality in indigenous studies: On relationality and interconnectedness

Despite a general lack of focus on gender and privilege issues within indigenous methodologies, some indigenous authors or scholars of indigenous studies have been using intersectional approaches. One example, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, is Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Under the heading “The Intersections of Race and Gender” (Smith, 2010), she discusses how gender refers not only to women, but also to men and to the relations between men and women. In Australia, Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000; 2015, pp. 129–130) emphasizes the need to do (and the lack of) research on the intersections of indigenous sovereignty, whiteness, and race. She calls for a critical perspective on how whiteness functions as the invisible norm against which others are judged in the construction of identity and representation. In Sápmi/Sweden, Anna-Lill Ledman (2012) used an intersectional approach in her analysis of media representations of Sámi women.

Ledman showed that in this representation, Sámi women were positioned as Sámi through stereotypical articulations of Sáminess. In Sápmi/Finland, Sanna Valkonen and Sandra Wallenius-Korkalo (2015; 2016) take an explicitly intersectional approach in a study of Christian revivalist group Laestadianism. The main categories in their study include gender, religion, Sáminess, sexuality, and age. One of their findings was that the women interviewed stated that part of their Sámi identity had been lost due to Laestadianism, and that Laestadianism had an impact on both indigenous identity and gender (Valkonen & Wallenius-Korkalo, 2015). In Australia, Natalie Osborne, Catherine Howlett and Deanna Grant-Smith (2017) have applied intersectionality to understand the varied impacts of public policy on how the power dynamics of colonization have created axes of power both within and between indigenous communities. In all of these cases, intersectionality offers different ways of shedding light on and dealing with indigeneity alongside other axes of gender identity and power. In each case, the critical analysis is related to post-colonialism/feminism and power/marginality issues respectively.

A question that is not addressed to any great extent is whether the concept of intersectionality relates to indigenous thinking on a more epistemological level. Sarah Hunt chooses a point of departure that is different from those of the others mentioned. She tells the story of how indigenous (Coast Salish) participants in a “Dialogue on Intersectionality and Indigeneity” in Vancouver, Canada, encounter the concept of intersectionality:

A number of people said that Indigenous knowledge and worldviews already include ways of expressing the interconnectedness of all things and various

forms of knowledge, so intersectionality was not a new concept to them. One person shared “this is a new term, but I’ve been living it since I was a child,” while another participant said “this word isn’t very exciting – I’ve already been doing this for a long time”. Underlying these sentiments was the reality that as Indigenous people grounded in Indigenous knowledge, “we know intersectionality even if it’s not named as intersectionality”. Intersectionality was seen as “a new word for something we’ve always known, been, done”. (Hunt, 2012, p. 3)

Even though it can be applied in research in order to understand how different power axes are connected, intersectionality is of course not in itself an indigenous concept. Hence, in this debate there is an argument for using indigenous concepts rather than Western concepts like intersectionality (Hunt, 2012, p. 3). It is interesting, however, that Hunt’s Coast Salish research participants talk about their familiarity, if not with the concept, then with the approach. They draw lines from intersectionality to the “interconnectedness of all things” and of various forms of knowledge. This recognition and sense of familiarity is in itself a potential argument for the integration of intersectionality into indigenous methodologies. Such an integration implies a particular understanding of intersectionality, however.

This Coast Salish intersectionality seems to resemble holism, with its emphasis on interconnectedness and relationality. Within holism, a basic idea is that in order to know the parts of something you need to know the whole, and vice versa. Holism as an approach and concept is found in both academic and non-academic contexts. In the latter,

holism plays an important part within the alternative and/or new religious spirituality movement. When expressed within indigenous methodologies, the holistic idea that everything is connected is often spoken of in spiritual and religion-like terms. In the literature on indigenous methodology, holism often appears either explicitly or implicitly (cf. Smith 2010, p. 74; Moreton-Robinson, 2016, p. 71; Deloria, 1992, p. 153; 1999; Kovach, 2010, p. 59; Wilson, 2008, p. 88). It is mainly addressed in terms of *relationality*, explained by Moreton-Robinson as “the conception of the inter-connectedness and inter-substantiation between and among all living things and the earth, which is inhabited by a world of ancestors and creator beings” (2016, p. 71) and by Wilson (2008, p. 80) as how identity for indigenous people is grounded in the relationships between individuals, community, the land, and the people of both the future and the past. Similar demands and ideas are common to the extent that they are almost definitional for one branch of indigenous studies. The scholar needs to see herself as part of a bigger set of relationships, with and within the community or phenomenon in focus, and in terms of her own background and position. It is striking, though, that within this edition of intersectionality there does not seem to be much room for gender (or class, for that matter).

The discursive encounter between holism and critical analysis is interesting and points towards a flexible concept of intersectionality – or towards a concept that can be used to encompass almost anything (which clearly is not a very exciting concept). The issues of holism raise the question of whether intersectionality, interconnectedness, holism and relationality are the same. The answer is probably that they can be, but not necessarily. There is a need to clarify what kind of relationality one is concerned with.

The most relevant seems to be relationality wherein a power-critical approach holds its ground at the same time as indigenous perspectives and voices are starting points and points of reference.

Arguments for the use of indigenous rather than Western concepts are well known within indigenous studies. They resonate with other encounters between the concepts used in research and indigenous worldviews. Feminism is a good example of this. Both as a term and an approach, feminism has been contested amongst indigenous writers. Its critics from many parts of the indigenous world have claimed that it is a Western construct not suited for use within indigenous communities (Green, 2007; Irwin, 2007; Pihama, 2001; see also Olsen, 2017a).

The issue of Western terms and approaches being used in the context of indigenous research is a complicated one. Wilson (2008) talks of paradigms, axioms, ontology and epistemology; Kovach (2010) talks of theory, methodology and qualitative research; Smith (2010) talks of deconstructionism, feminism, and even intersections; Chilisa (2012) talks of post-positivism and data analysis. These are mere examples of concepts that are more or less necessary in any academic writing within the humanities or social sciences. At the same time, they reveal a dilemma. While it is necessary or even unavoidable to use explicitly Western terms at least some of the time, the above-mentioned quartet of established figures within indigenous research recommend the use of indigenous terms and theories wherever possible. I view both feminism and intersectionality in light of this dilemma.

In my opinion, the terms used are of less importance than what is put into them. Hence, the conceptualization of an approach that discusses various perspectives on the

study of identity and power is more important than the term intersectionality itself.

Whether the scholar is looking at indigeneity, gender, or class, these issues have to be understood alongside other social factors (Holter, 2009; Beynon, 2002; Mosse, 1996).

The key is openness to the existence of several available positions at the same time.

Considering intersectionality in indigenous studies: The case of gender

Different scholars of indigenous studies have looked at the intersection between indigeneity and gender in different ways. (In parentheses, I acknowledge the literature on sexual identity and indigenous issues, but there is no room for a discussion of this here.)

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2010) points out that scholars have not seen or treated Māori women as *rangatiratanga*, which translates more or less as chieftainship, during the process of signing the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. For the British colonizers, being a chief was solely a male thing (Smith, 2010). It is through looking at both gender and ethnicity that such an observation can be made. Smith further presents a set of projects that she sees as important. One of these has the heading “Gender”. Here, she raises the issue of indigenous women in contemporary indigenous politics and discusses the restoration of women to their traditional roles, rights, and responsibilities (Smith, 2010, p. 152). In this sense, gender is directed either/both towards the past and towards traditions, or/and towards recognizing the roles, rights and responsibilities of women as a basis for further research. Smith shows that looking into the intersection of gender and indigeneity has the potential to create new knowledge. At the same time, it is not fully clear whether or not this is a proposal based on a strategic or an analytical intersectionality (see below). The focus on restoration and tradition suggests the former.

Different aspects of gender trouble have been the topic for other scholars, as well. Rauna Kuokkanen (2007, pp. 72–75) argues that a postcolonial feminist analysis contributes to the decolonization and change of Sámi society. She has studied the issue of gendered violence and politics in indigenous communities, showing that they struggle to cope with such issues. Even though colonization matters, it cannot be the sole cause or contextual background when representatives of indigenous communities explain gendered violence. Sexual violence, carried out by indigenous men against women of their own community, must also be understood and explained within the frames of those communities (Kuokkanen, 2015, p. 283; Knobbloch & Kuokkanen, 2015). Leonie Pihama (2001, p. 257) claims that Māori women have felt the impact of the way in which capitalism has combined with racism, sexism and classism. Pihama (2017) also writes on sexual violence within Māori communities. Green (2007, p. 23) shows that sexism and the general oppression of women is a huge problem in First Peoples communities in Canada. Moreton-Robinson (2000) is critical of white feminists struggling to deal with aboriginal women and their situation.

Whether it is more appropriate or more relevant to talk of feminism or of gender studies is not the most important question. Both approaches are critical enterprises that share with indigenous studies the distinction or choice between analytical and political or strategic approaches. The analysis is in any case a starting point. Even the description is a starting point. What you see is based on the approach or perspective chosen.

Looking at *Sami Blood* from a gender(ed) perspective implies looking at the main character Elle-Marja as a girl or a young woman. Adding the relational perspective implies looking at her story through her relations or encounters with other characters. Her

relations and encounters primarily with other girls and women add other dimensions besides gender to the (rather superficial) analysis. A key character is Christina, the Swedish teacher at the boarding school. She is clearly a role model for Elle-Marja, as she has an education from Uppsala (the educational centre of Sweden) and is in charge of managing the state's policies. When Elle-Marja approaches Christina to ask for the opportunity to move on with her education, she rejects the request, arguing that Elle-Marja, being Sámi, does not know as much as the Swedes and does not have the intellectual ability to progress in her studies. When Elle-Marja runs away, though, she changes her name to Christina, the name itself representing an ideal Swedishness, and moves on to become a teacher. Elle-Marja also steals Christina's dress on one occasion, thereby "trying on" a Swedishness related to Christina. Elle-Marja seems to be attempting to "become" Christina. The relationship between the two represents both the dreamed-of possibilities and the boundaries formed by colonization. To analyse this, a consideration of both gender and ethnicity is necessary.

The same goes for the analysis of the relationship between Elle-Marja and her sister. They start out as closely connected and as two of a kind. Their respective encounters with the Swedish community, however, send them in diametrically opposed directions. Dressed in Swedish clothes, Elle-Marja screams at her sister, who is dressed in *gákti*, the traditional Sámi costume, and tells her that she does not understand what she is saying. The sister remains Sámi until the end of the film, many years later, when she is shown lying in her coffin still wearing her *gákti*. As sisters and the main Sámi girls in the film, they represent different options and opportunities for Sámi girls and women born into the same community, family and landscape. They can thus be seen as carrying

different versions of Sáminess. In this way, the film illustrates the existence and possibilities of several choices and positions.

In a specific analysis, the concept of the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007) might provide a solution. There are a number of subject positions also related to gender, between or related to the categories of men and women. The question may be: what is emphasized, and when? Adding this way of talking about and finding the cultural interface between men and women to the analysis of the cultural interface between being related to privilege and indigeneity calls for a complex approach to research.

This word may be very exciting: Concluding remarks on gender and intersectionality in indigenous studies

A distinction can be made between a strategic or political intersectionality on the one hand and a critical, analytical intersectionality on the other. A critical, analytical intersectionality looks primarily into issues of power and privilege in situations where indigeneity crosses gender or (an)other axis/axes of identity. A political or strategic intersectionality may suggest that persons who are part of more than one subordinate group may experience and express a “multiple identity advantage”, as Laurie Cooper Stoll argues. This functions to address social inequalities (Stoll, 2015, p. 73). The two are of course interconnected, as can be seen in the statements above. The Coast Salish dialogue on indigeneity and intersectionality, in which there is an explicit ideal of holism present, demonstrates another expression of strategic intersectionality. Here, intersectionality is presented as more or less synonymous with relationality and interconnectedness, and becomes a way of describing the nature of indigenous identity.

The concept of the cultural interface is relevant to describe the space for (both indigenous and non-indigenous) persons living in the border zone between different identities. It helps us to understand the presence or availability of numerous subject positions that an individual person (and community) lives by and with. This space is multi-layered and multi-dimensional, and shapes how individuals speak of themselves and of others (Nakata, 2007, p. 199). For the scholar of indigenous issues, this implies seeing indigenous persons – or everyone she encounters or presents through research – as active agents in their own present time. Likewise, it implies that collective indigenous narratives consist of a collection of complex narratives rather than a singular narrative (Nakata, 2007, pp. 204–211).

Despite its singularity, the narrative of *Sami Blood* may be interpreted as a collection of indigenous narratives. It is part of the greater history of the Sámi in general, about the South Sámi in particular, and about one South Sámi girl on an even more particular level. This narrative necessarily relates to Swedes and the majority society. Elle-Marja makes a series of choices that could have been made differently. She also faces situations that leave her without choice, especially in her encounters with Swedes as a young girl. There are various subject positions available to her, represented by the characters of her mother and sister, in particular. Both remain within the boundaries of the Sámi community. The film narrative portrays the Sámi reindeer-herding girl from a small community and family as she moves on to become a Swedish citizen belonging to the majority society and the big city. She does not simply move from the margins to the centre. More accurately, she moves from the centre of one world or society *through* the margins of both her own society and Swedish society to the centre of Swedish society.

She moves from being a Sámi girl to becoming a Swedish woman. And in the end, she moves back again. Her many positions in between are both shown and implied.

The idea of the cultural interface, I would argue, relates to intersectionality as a fruitful approach to addressing the complexities of insider/outsider relations, and seems to be a constructive alternative to simplistic dichotomies or dichotomisation (Olsen, 2016). It is not just that there are numerous subject positions between being indigenous and being non-indigenous. In addition, each of those subject positions is impacted/influenced by scales of age, resources, and gender, to name but a few. The important and fair claim from indigenous methodologies to talk and do research from the perspective of – and based in the interests of – the indigenous is challenged here. The claim of intersectionality to look from the margins is an interesting addition to this. The combination and correlation between indigenous methodologies and intersectionality implies a critical perspective of decolonization and indigenization, as well as a critical investigation into the dynamics of privilege and position. If anyone is to be favoured, it has to be the less privileged, a category that is as fluent as the category of the privileged (Pease, 2010).

Consequently, a critical perspective implies making a set of choices – especially when it comes to viewpoints and relations. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2011, p. 413) states that most of the critiques of patriarchal conceptual frameworks and knowledge production have not come from the dominant group. Instead, marginality has been the creative space for developing the conceptual tools required to expose the social situatedness of knowledge production and the different realities that are produced and experienced. *Sami Blood* presents a narrative from the margins and it does expose the

social situation and situatedness of the realities of relations between the indigenous Sami and the majority society. To use Moreton-Robinson's (2015) terms, it addresses the conflict or contrast between whiteness/non-indigeneity and indigeneity, and the politics of positions on these matters. At the same time, whiteness and non-whiteness, indigeneity and non-indigeneity, and even women and men, are not binaries. There are spaces in between. Within indigenous communities there is diversity and difference. Even though indigenous peoples are seen as belonging to marginalized and vulnerable communities, there are also differences within them in terms of power as well as internal relations of privilege and oppression. Gender studies, with its explicitly critical perspective on power and normativity, clearly has something to offer to indigenous studies.

Scholars within indigenous studies have argued for the necessity of taking an active stand in their research. Bagele Chilisa (2012, p. 264) challenges scholars to identify with colonized and oppressed people, and to use research methodologies leading to intersectional analyses of different and connecting forms of oppression and exclusion. Taking a stand means figuring out where you actually do stand and what surrounds you. Each individual is connected and carries on relations. Intersectionality offers a potential way of understanding and analysing these relations as well as the relations at work in one's own field of study. Intersectionality may actually be a rather exciting word.

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