GUEST EDITORS’ INTRODUCTION

Resisting Exile in the “Land of the Free”

Indigenous Groundwork at Colonial Intersections

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You see, their names for themselves are really the names of their places. That is how [Gad ’O’áahn—the Juniper Tree Stands Alone People] were known to others and to themselves. They were known by their places. That is how they are still known.

Charles Henry, Apache historian

To this day the Sac and Fox [of the Mississippi in Iowa] still believe that the lands in Illinois belong to them. It is their land by right, and I cannot say whether your people will ever believe that, but we still do, and for a long time in the future the Sac and Fox will always believe the same.

Young Bear, Meskwaki historian

The complex relationship of people to places intimated by the two Indigenous historians and public intellectuals Charles Henry and Young Bear has come under increasing scholarly scrutiny in recent years. Grave transnational conditions of imposed displacements and diasporas, volatile borders, and coerced exiles have brought the political question of place and space into sharper focus. Recent waves of writings on the subject, both within and across fields ranging from environmental psychology to human geography and urban planning, compel us to begin this introduction with a self-effacing question: What is meant to be the contribution of this work, and to whom is it meant to contribute? What were the aims of this particular group of authors in presenting their papers at the American Studies Association annual meeting in 2005 and in revising them in light of the panel presentation, subsequent reader
responses, and growing interdisciplinary concern with place and space? Collectively, we have a variety of answers.

Before turning to introduce the four papers that constitute this thematic contribution to American Indian Quarterly, first allow us to establish its broader setting. Readers interested in place and space no doubt are familiar with the contributions made by the late cultural anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz and the cultural and linguistic anthropologist Keith H. Basso. In his prize-winning book Wisdom Sits in Places, Basso uses his long-term relationship with the Western Apache community of Cibecue and the thick description of ethnography to illustrate, in the words of the late Vine Deloria Jr., “the idea that language and linguistics are mutually supportive and irretrievably combined so that knowing language connects an individual to the land and knowing the land holds the personality together in a cohesive, balanced unity.”1 According to Comanche scholar-activist, musical artist, and educator Cornel Pewewardy, Basso shows us how “knowledge of places is closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one’s position in the larger scheme of things, including one’s own community, and to securing a confident sense of who one is as a person.”2

More recent work over the last decade has moved beyond the earlier concern in anthropology with and critical starting point of theorizing spatially constituted Indigenous identities—thick descriptions of people and selfhoods—to theorize place and space from the standpoint of its contestations and linkages to local, national, and global levels of state power. In a 2005 American Ethnologist article entitled “Imagined Geographies,” for instance, University of California anthropologist Thomas Biolsi complicates his readers’ understanding of Indian nations as what he terms “obligatory categories of modern space” by examining “four kinds of Indigenous space imagined, fought for, and[,] to a remarkable extent, achieved by American Indian people”: tribal sovereignty in a homeland (e.g., a modern tribal government with its citizenry on a reservation), territorially based rights to off-reservation resources, rights within a wide-ranging space that ultimately spans the entire contiguous United States, and a variety of interlocking spaces in which Indians assert political and cultural citizenries in their nations and in the United States.3

“Imagined Geographies” embodies a number of critical matters in interdisciplinary research concerned over the last decade with shifting
meanings for (and in) social space and the creations and transformations of real places. These concerns have resulted in increasingly complicated understandings of the legal geographies of race and racism, the geopolitics of race, and what Amherst College professor David Delany has termed the legal landscape, or “the complex ensemble of lines and spaces—territorial configurations—that give legal meaning to determinable segments of the physical world or actual lived-in landscapes.”

For at least the last ten years, scholars representing a number of fields—from geography and political science to ethnic and gender studies—have further complicated our understanding of “race” by shifting analyses to the crossroads of Indigeneity and law generally and congressional plenary power in particular. Recent work has dealt with neoliberalism and governmentality as it manifests in Indian Country. In addition to producing provocative and nuanced ways of thinking about place and space—and about sovereignties and citizenships, racisms and indigeneities—this research also created the conditions and confidences necessary for a critical introspection.

While aimed outward at the larger world, this intellectual concern with struggle and justice also is aimed inward, back at ourselves as scholars and the academic traditions that frame and too often constrain research. Emergent from and in resistance to the disciplinary hierarchy of geography, for instance, the new subdiscipline of Indigenous geographies links urban and planning, environmental, and legal geographies to offer a dynamic agenda, space, and potential for decolonizing this academically based field. In a 2006 thematic issue of the Swedish Society of Anthropology and Geography’s Geografiska Annaler entitled “Encountering Indigeneity,” Wendy S. Shaw, R. D. K. Herman, and G. Rebecca Dobbs argue that in an era of so-called postcolonization, when Indigenous struggles continue, academically based geography must thoroughly engage the politics of difference, center Indigenous issues and concerns, and reflect on geographers’ associations and involvements with empire and colonization in order to reimagine and reorder the broader field in a context of social justice.

As these exciting examples from critical cultural anthropologies and geographies compellingly indicate, scholarship across the academy and around the world concerned with place and space once marked by gentle-sounding phrases is now or soon will be characterized in conspicuously unforgiving terms. Capitalism and development, at one time
understood as instinctive and inevitable progress and conveyed with phrases such as nation building and modernization, now are depicted in intellectual work as the extraction of transnational wealth at the unacceptable price of cultural annihilation, ecological ruin, and human misery.\(^8\) Once naturalized as objective recovery and preservation of the past but imbued more recently with Indigenous memory, intellectual work now signifies as suppressions of Indigenous pasts, presents, and futures through settler-colonial national imaginaries.\(^9\)

**GROUNDWORKS: GENERATING SITUATIONAL SPACES, ENGENDERING A SHARED LANGUAGE**

As recent academically based, interdisciplinary intellectual work concerned with place and space powerfully suggests, groundwork might be understood as an active engagement in the making and remaking of place, peoples, and selves. Because there is no meaning outside of the production of meaning through language, discourse, and image, and given that scholarship is one means of producing meaning, we conclude that academic groundwork plays a critical role in place making, and so, too, do place and space play active roles in generating situational interdisciplinaries.\(^10\) As suggested by the contributions to this thematic section of *American Indian Quarterly*, academic groundwork has an intellectual force—a generative strength—that provisionally joins fields such as American studies, composition and rhetoric, history, Indigenous (including American Indian) studies, and literary criticism to forge situational spaces through relational politics centered in the academy and linked to Indigenous epistemologies.\(^11\) Academic groundwork, as we are theorizing it, is intellectually grounded in Indigenous *homescapes*, to borrow a clever use of the term from University of Oklahoma literary scholar and Muskogee citizen Craig Womack, and in the relation of our obligations to homescapes despite the colonial institutions that the land has accommodated. Thus, in a variety of ways and for a number of reasons, academic groundwork is linked to the first languages, religions, and histories of Indigenous peoples that constitute geometrical conceptions of space and astronomically—and geographically—determined spatial systems.\(^12\)

While we depart from one another in critical ways, at least for now we are in general agreement that continued scholarly attention to place
and space is critical. Thus, we offer a shared language used to anchor our work here and, through ever-widening webs of relationship, that might move our conversation outward in new directions. The phrase “Indigenous groundwork at colonial intersections,” we suggest, identifies versatile cultural, historical, and social processes that fundamentally—at times devastatingly—shape relations among differently situated life forms on this planet. In short, *Indigenous groundwork* marks Indigenous epistemologies that inform identities, resistances, and survivals. Understood as resistances to hegemony yet still as struggles for hegemony (or, better, hegemonies), Indigenous groundwork names long-standing responsibilities to the well-defined and marked landscapes on this planet that *Original Peoples* call home and those starting places that make us and therefore require our honor and respect. It also denotes a political praxis, a relational form of mediation moving along a circuitous path of existence—destruction—continued existence toward critical consciousness. In those empowering sites of critical consciousness, assuming it is not incorporated into dominant power and privilege, Indigenous groundwork provides intellectual bases that authorize resistance to exile in the “land of the free.”

As an academic concept and analytical frame, the idea caught in the phrase “Indigenous groundwork” owes at least a symbolic debt to an understanding of Indigenous knowledge written on this continent—such as earthworks, petroglyphs, and particular agricultural practices that left their marks—and to the visible stamp of the occupations and origins of Original Peoples on the land. It is this sense of groundwork, we suggest, that enabled Vine Deloria Jr.’s formulation of power plus place equals personality, Robert K. Thomas’s concept of peoplehood, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn’s insistence on a land-based aesthetic and culture in American Indian written literatures and to discipline academically based American Indian studies, and Taiaiake Alfred’s elucidation of *Wasáxe*. Our notion of Indigenous groundwork and what Haskell Indian Nations University professor and Yuchi citizen of the Muscogee Nation Daniel R. Wildcat terms “thinking spatially” similarly affirm a people’s relationship to land, not “land” in the abstract or land understood as private property but particular places, distinctive homescapes that generate unique, restorative expressions of different tribal identities and peoplehoods. Thus, homescapes provide places to stand to take a stand.

Enduring relationships with homescapes are indispensable to criti-
cal consciousnesses derived from entire grounded worlds of knowings and meanings not found anywhere else. The power of homescapes and the relational, therapeutic politics they generate are animated by stories, songs, and signs radiating outward from their many known and tended places as well as from the ceremonies human beings perform within their boundaries. A distinctive people’s connections and prolonged existences within their unique territory in turn yield a history—a shared memory and an organic peoplehood—that imaginatively links pasts to presents to futures for the people emergent from a particular place and accumulate a set of reciprocal responsibilities that colonization and state-sanctioned power do not absolve scholars from engaging.

Indigenous Groundwork at Colonial Intersections

At the 2005 American Studies Association (ASA) annual meeting in Washington DC generally concerned with groundwork, the six contributors to this special section of American Indian Quarterly, including the authors of this introduction and editors of the thematic section, met as a group for the first time. Although our points of departure into the group were grounded in a variety of methodological, political, and theoretical interests and relationships, together we were concerned with how American studies tends to elide Indigeneity and Original Peoples while still offering an academically based space for us to share our concern with the ways in which Indigenous epistemologies inform place and space making and how place and space influence Indigenous epistemologies.

Many of the works we have mentioned were not yet published or were unfamiliar to most of us when we gathered together in October 2005. But this was not what we talked about. Rather, we were struck by something both more basic and profound. Moved by their relationships with particular places and inspired by a spatial relationship with their worlds, Original Peoples and their allies—including public and academically based intellectuals, activists, and community people—are engaged in resistance to the ongoing colonization of their places and spaces. From the multifaceted struggle to protect the sacred San Francisco Peaks in northern Arizona from ski resort expansion and snowmaking to the fight to protect the rugged country of the Northern Cheyenne Reservation from methane gas wells that pollute the water and threaten to make reservation lands unsuitable for farming or ranching, there is much at stake
in the academically based concern with the futures of Original Peoples and place.

Having so strongly announced our commitment to interdisciplinarity, it may seem peculiar that we begin this thematic section of American Indian Quarterly with the work of an historian, University of Texas at El Paso professor Jeffrey Shepherd. However, Shepherd transgresses the theoretical limits of academically based history. Joining decolonial scholarship in an American Indian–centered Indigenous studies and critical cultural geography to forge a powerful analytical frame for the sorts of empirical evidence widely acceptable to historians, Shepherd asks how the people named the Hualapai encountered colonization and engaged modernity as well as how human beings who called themselves Hual: Amat Pa became the Hualapai Nation. From insights shared during visits with Hualapai elders, conversations with tribal members, and testimony before the Indian Claims Commission in 1957 and concentrating on the early reservation era and the more stable reservation decades after 1940 as well as on the movements of people away from and back to and within ancestral homelands, Shepherd argues that viewing Hualapai history through a convergence of space, place, and time reveals the stunning successes they have achieved in maintaining connections to and ties with traditional sites, cultural places, band homes, village locations, and the Indigenous geography of northwestern Arizona.

The same notions that compel Shepherd to embrace the decolonial scholarship of Indigenous studies for means to reinvigorate academically based history similarly provoke the three other contributors. Although none of them are historians in their institutional affiliations, Karen Ohnesorge, Hokulani K. Aikau, and Lloyd Lee continue the conversation concerned with the pasts, presents, and futures of place and space in separate essays exploring American Indian artistic representations and deracializations of place and space, identifying Kānaka Maoli psychosomatic resistance to the colonization of place and space through stories that carry meanings from pasts to presents and into futures, and articulating a call for self-determination grounded in Diné epistemology that links a precolonized past with a decolonized present and future.

In a theoretically rich and wonderfully sophisticated analysis of what she terms critical imagetexts, Ottawa University English professor and
artist Karen Ohnesorge makes a case for the critical significance of artistic sovereignty. Featuring Indigenous artists engaged in practices of indigenizing verbal-pictorial representations of place and space in American landscape art and reclaiming landscape art and art located on the landscape as decolonial sites of resistance, she contributes not only to the concern with power and place making in art criticism and art history but to similar concerns in Indigenous studies. Thus, theorizing Indigenous image and textual engagements with landscape art and landscape as locations where places and their meanings are made and remade as well as negotiated and resisted, Ohnesorge uses the examples of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Edgar Heap of Birds, and Charlene Teters to argue that “imagetexts are effective critiques of received truths about Native America” and that Indigenous artists are engaged in a sort of multivariate dialogue between the landscape genre and Indigenous arts. “In some cases they argue persuasively for decolonization of the land; in others,” she suggests, “they propose a new landscape in which the white body experiences the hardships of homelessness and exile.”

Shifting our attention from groundwork in the continental United States—in Indian Country—across the Pacific to the Hawaiian islands, Känaka Maoli and University of Hawai‘i at Manoa political science professor Hokulani K. Aikau similarly is concerned with negotiating meaning for and in places and spaces. Grounding her analysis of Hawaiian and Samoan oral histories in recent efforts emergent from Indigenous cultural studies, Aikau finds anticolonial, pro-Indigenous resistance at the crossroads where memory, story, and place making cultivate intimate bonds between imagined and material worlds. Facing her Känaka Maoli readers directly in “Resisting Exile in the Homeland: He Mo’olelo No Lä‘ie,” Aikau argues that “keeping alive the mo’olelo, the stories and histories that live and give life to the sacred places that surround us, is a necessary stopgap against continued encroachment of development of the 'aina.” Concentrating on stories that produce richly textured meanings and privileging the perspectives of the Känaka Maoli Latter-Day Saints of Lä‘ie, Aikau contends, monodimensional readings of Känaka Maoli interactions with and understandings of place and religious conversions are far too simplistic; “the relationships of power in Lä‘ie,” she suggests, “are not easily delineated between the church as colonizer and Känaka Maoli as oppressed.” Thus, to more fully appreciate the complex characteristics of Indigenous resistances to jurispathic and corpo-
rate place making and to more profitably understand relations between Indigeneity and modernity, she suggests, we “must also be attentive to the ways in which prior meanings continued to persist.”

Like Aikau, Arizona State University, West Campus professor and Diné Nation citizen Lloyd L. Lee similarly addresses the occupation of physical place and mental space. Lee does so from a location grounded at the crossroads of Diné epistemology and academically based Indigenous studies. He closes out the thematic section with “Reclaiming Indigenous Intellectual, Political, and Geographic Space: A Path for Navajo Nationhood” by linking the political groundwork of organic Diné Indigenous intellectuals and grassroots activists with the academically based works of Taiaiake Alfred, Jeff Corntassel, and others. He calls on Diné to think—to theorize and imagine a future—outside of the spatially restrictive limits imposed by U.S. law and back into a forward-looking Diné way of being that links past, present, and future generations. As a consequence of several factors that together amount to a whole society of colonized minds, Lee suggests, the time for “being Indigenous”—for being Diné—is now, thus offering critical reasons and a four-step process for decolonizing Indigenous/Diné mental spaces and explaining why promptly doing so is both necessary and urgent.

Lee points to compelling reasons why academically based scholarship that speaks directly to Indigenous peoples—both academic and nonacademic—as well as to academic disciplines that don’t think of themselves as necessarily (or by necessity) “including” Indigenous peoples is both critical and necessary. These collected essays work both ends of the “Indigenous groundwork” equation. Understood as situational interdisciplinaries, they occupy academic and intellectual spaces and envision a variety of possibilities for future interdisciplinary research. As their wonderfully complex and delightfully nuanced analyses suggest, future work in this field will require the sort of extremely complicated reimaginings and reinhabitings of space, place, self, and peoples that “Indigenous groundwork” requires of scholars who engage with it.

**THE FUTURES OF INDIGENOUS GROUNDWORK**

The many physical, material, psychological, and imaginary terrains covered here traverse and negotiate landscapes fouled and maligned by settler colonialism. However, they also reveal what we already know:
Original Peoples creatively negotiate and imaginatively resist colonialism by continuing to think spatially. When thinking as academically based intellectuals about *Indigenous groundwork* as this concept signifies associations of human beings—the Original Peoples of the planet Earth—to place, we think first of an intellectual project and a relational politics informed by the profound connections that human beings have as peoples to their many places of origin and the relations of otherworldly beings with the beings of this world. We think of physical landscapes and Indigenous geographies as they connect and constitute the world above, below, and on the earth as a series of mutually constitutive and inter-dependent relations. We also think of countless efforts, historical and ongoing, to exile—to delink and disassociate—Original Peoples from their responsibilities to their places.

A strong and dynamic and living sense of place is at the very core of the existences of Original Peoples when those existences are grounded in the sophisticated intellectual authority of Indigenous epistemologies. Knowing where they come from and how they are connected to the places that are the origins of their human and other-than-human families—their kinship networks—is essential to knowing who they are as distinct peoples (none of whom are any more important than any other). Their homescapes enable a repudiation of the simulacra *Indian* and its many synonyms in the settler-colonizers’ self-serving and largely oppressive imaginary. The oral traditions, sacred histories, prayers, and songs of the Original Peoples, in the appropriate contexts, provide insights into the life of their various lands and their many historical and contemporary relationships to the places in and that are constitutive of their lives. And, transversely, homescapes literally call us to engage in behaviors and practices that constitute us as relatives with specific places and with each other as humans.

Forging an intellectual path forward from this situational intellectual space alongside and inside state knowledge systems and their academically based disciplinary allies, these four essays reveal that as human beings make place, so, too, does place fashion a people. As the contributions to this thematic section of *American Indian Quarterly* suggest, there are a variety of means of approaching and making sense of this matter. To the degree that the manner in which human beings encounter their worlds is framed by sophisticated interdisciplines—ways of knowing and being—articulated from homescapes, relational (or peoples) politics deployed
in and outside of the academy seem regenerative. Relational politics, at least in part, are grounded in the intellectual force located where the confluence of first languages, sacred histories, ceremonial cycles (including songs and stories), and familial obligations signify within the lingering residue of history and material conditions of colonization and more recently in the sorts of globalizations and transnationalisms that remap state sovereignty as multinational corporate control. Thus, as Shepherd, Ohnesorge, Aikau, and Lee compellingly suggest—and as we put forward here—Indigenous groundwork offers community people a robust and rigorous praxis; for academically based intellectuals it motivates the formation of compelling analytical frameworks and critical theories with broad and therapeutic applications and the promise of forging webs of relationship simultaneously inside and outside the academy. It is the basis for an Indigenous critical theory.

NOTES


9. See, for instance, the 2002 thematic issue of *Cultural Geography* entitled “North American Spaces/Postcolonial Stories,” edited by geographers Kay Anderson and Mona Domosh. See also Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, ed., *In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21st Century* (St. Paul MN: Living Justice Press, 2006) for a compelling example of Dakota groundwork—Dakota peoples laying claim to their ancestral homelands who as a consequence literally are freeing themselves from the shackles of the identities imposed by colonization and grounded in the constitutional authority of the state.


12. Craig Womack, review of *Anti-Indianism in Modern America: A View from T akekeya’s Earth* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001) by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *American Indian Quarterly* 28, nos. 1–2 (2004): 136. The intellectual force of Indigenous homescapes, understood as a theoretical construct and not as a place literally pinpointable on the ground, is located at the crossroads of colonization and the confluences of kinship networks, first languages, sacred histories, and ceremonial cycles that intimately and interdependently are interwoven with and emergent from the territories in which Indigenous people live.

13. The term colonial intersections signifies those sites on the ground and in the imaginary—those physical places and mental spaces—in which the settler-colonizer uses coercive and ideological state apparatuses to claim and rename, absorb and redesignate, displace and inhabit, all the while promoting spontaneous consent to these actions that disproportionately benefit settlers and colonizers at the expense of Indigenous peoples as natural and in the interests of a general good.

14. Although connected in U.S. law and in cultural matter that constitutes the simulacra “Indian,” here we distinguish Original Peoples, whose histories start at the beginnings of creation, from Indians, whose histories come into being with the European invasion of the Americas. Original Peoples (as opposed to “Indians” or “aboriginals”) name themselves, in their (our) own languages, by terms that sometimes translate into English as The People or as The Human Beings, that sometimes translate into English as entities associated with and connected to specific places, or in languages that resist easy translation into English.
When using the two words Original People, we are thinking of human beings who are claimed by one or more of thousands of distinct families, groups, kinship communities, clans, tribes, bands, councils, reservations, colonies, towns, villages, rancherias, pueblos, confederacies, and nations.


17. Literary studies of Indigenous literatures concerned with Indigenous nationalisms and nationhoods (what we here term peoplehood), in particular, have produced compelling work on this matter. See most recently, for instance, Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior, *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). See also Waziyatowin Angela Wilson, *Remember This! Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

18. In Washington DC the six of us were joined by University of Michigan psychology professor and A’aninin tribal member Joseph Gone, who read his paper entitled “So I Can Be like a Whiteman,” which is forthcoming in *Culture and Psychology*.

19. Understood as simulacra, “Indian” is a replication of an “original” that supplants and even brings into question the original. In a world saturated by imagery and infused with media, sound, and advertising, this simulacra of the real becomes hyperreal, *more real than real*. It presupposes and precedes the
real. Although most tribal people—the citizens of Indian nations—likely do not think in these terms, the designation “Indian” signifies profoundly contested space where authenticity must somehow be forged out of resistance to what we might term “the white man’s Indian,” which for the critical mass is the authentic representation. For more on simulacra see Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (1981; reprint, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). For an example of this point see Gerald Vizenor, “Socioacupuncture: Mythic Reversals and a Striptease in Four Scenes,” in The American Indian and the Problem of History, ed. Calvin Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 180–91.