We Are All Insider-Outsiders: 
A Review of Debates Surrounding Native Anthropology
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Abstract

More and more anthropologists are doing “anthropology of home” by researching within their own communities. Major methodological and theoretical contributions for researchers working in their home communities come from debates surrounding “native” anthropology. Since anthropology has historically involved going outside one’s community, the shift to research sites in an anthropologist’s home community has fostered debates about the application of traditional anthropological methods to one’s own community. This article outlines several important methodological issues that have been debated by native anthropologists including issues of distance, cultural competence, translation, and defining “native.” This article shows that native anthropology offers a critique of dominate anthropological practices by opposing the customary position of natives as objects and countering Eurocentrist domination in academia. At the same time, native anthropologists have been strong in voicing the fluidity of identity which shows that every researcher is both an insider and an outsider. These insights are important for every anthropologist of home.

Key words: native anthropology, anthropology of home, methodology

Introduction

Bernard Perley (2011) once told me about his first experience conducting fieldwork, an experience which he also describes in Defying Maliseet Language Death: Emergent Vitalities of Language, Culture, and Identity in Eastern Canada. One day when arriving to the classroom he was observing on the Tobique First Nation, he was told to sit across from the teacher and her assistant who sat down in the adjacent seat. Perley sensed something was up. When the teacher spoke, she demanded “to know the real reason” that Perley was there (2011: 25). Perley began to tell them of his interest in learning and helping when they started singing a couple of lines from the song, “Here Come the Anthros” which they followed with laughter. The assistant left, and the teacher went back to her work. As Perley describes, “I had just been told that I was an intruder and I was not welcome” (2011:25).

The song undoubtedly refers to the long history of exoticization of native people by white academics of anthropology, as is evident in the following passage:

Like a Sunday at the zoo
Their cameras click away -
Taking notes and tape recordings
Of all the animals at play.
Here come the anthros, better hide the past away.
Here come the anthros on another holiday.
(Westermen: 1976)

It is particularly interesting that this scene occurred even when the anthropologist in question, Perley, is a member of that tribe and grew up on the reservation. In the conventional sense of the term, he is a “native” anthropologist, an anthropologist who studies his or her own
community, commonly minority or marginalized populations. As a student who is planning to do anthropology at home in the United States, I became interested in native anthropology somewhat naively. I thought the term referred to anyone who worked in their native communities, and thus began to learn about the topic in order to inform myself of issues pertaining to my fieldwork interests. However, I quickly learned that the term “native anthropology” has a specific history and connotation connected to colonialism and marginalized communities. Throughout the article, I use the term “native anthropology” to refer to this specific situation, and the terms “insider anthropology” and “anthropology of home” to refer more broadly to people doing research in their own communities.

Debates surrounding native anthropology are important for anyone doing anthropology of home because they highlight tensions present in studying one’s own community. This article reviews major debates surrounding the following native anthropological research issues: distance, cultural competence, translation, and defining “native.” In doing so, I show that native anthropology offers a critique of dominant anthropological practices by opposing the customary position of natives as objects and countering Eurocentrist domination in academia. At the same time, native anthropologists have been strong in voicing the fluidity of identity which shows that every researcher is both an insider and an outsider.

**Historical Context**

The methodological commitments of anthropology have historically been founded on the image of “The Stranger” offered by Alfred Schutz (1964). As Schutz depicts it, the stranger entering a foreign environment becomes highly aware of aspects of social life that he would take for granted in his own society. He quickly learns that his assumptions about the social practices of the foreign group were incorrect and that he needs native knowledge to survive. Thus, he begins the process of learning the cultural patterns of life in this new community. The objectivity of the stranger allows him to see the cultural patterns underlying everyday life, which the native community takes for granted.

Schutz’ depiction of “the stranger” largely parallels some of the tenets of fieldwork in anthropology. Traditionally, fieldwork involved going to a foreign place, living amongst foreign people, and then writing a description of them for an academic audience. Renato Rosaldo refers to the classic field situation as the “Lone Ethnographer” riding into the sunset “in search of his ‘native’” (1989:30). The Lone Ethnographer, like the stranger, must become detached and objective, and he must adhere to a strict division of labor between himself and his “sidekick” native (1989:31). He remains the final authority on the objective depiction of the cultural life of the native. This traditional image is a product, in no small part, of the colonial situation in which the discipline of anthropology emerged. Anthropology was a standard, institutionalized, degree-granting discipline at a time when colonial powers had a strong motivation to know more about the non-Western peoples they sought to manage. Anthropology was given what Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) calls the “savage slot” which became essential to its disciplinary identity.

However, several factors brought this image of the ethnographer under question for the discipline leading to shifts in the traditional insistence that anthropology’s object of study had to be foreign, non-Western cultures. In the sixties, there was increasing alarm that with native populations rapidly disappearing, anthropologists would quickly become obsolete (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Peirano 1998). Instead, anthropologists asserted that it was not whom they studied, but how they studied them – through a particular relationship between the scholar and the observed (ethnography), that truly defined anthropology (Peirano 1998).

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1 Perley does not refer to himself as a “native anthropologist,” but instead takes a reflexive approach to his identities as “both native and anthropologist” (2011:20-1).
Contemporaneously, decolonization and the increase in American imperialism fueled highly influential social movements in the United States such as the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War Protests. With social movements came increased calls for social analysis of sexism, racism, and homophobia (Clair 2003; Rosaldo 1989). Changes in the social sciences included an ongoing shift from making general claims to more particular interpretations. With a focus on the particular, objectivist notions of theory, language, and detachment slowly unraveled and the epistemology was destabilized (Clair 2003; Rosaldo 1989). Throughout the sixties, seventies, and eighties, there were increasing critiques of classical anthropology. These included critical review of the relationship between anthropology and colonialism (Restrepo and Escobar 2005).

Of consequence for anthropological methods, the distinction between the “ethnographer” and the “native” became blurred as the concept of bounded and homogenous cultures became untenable (Rosaldo 1989). In Reinventing Anthropology, Dell Hymes (1999) and others called for dramatic shifts in anthropology including a more reflexive anthropology that would consider itself as an object of study. As literacy spread to the non-Western groups that traditionally had been anthropology’s object of study, natives began to read and respond to ethnographies written about their own cultural histories and to offer alternative accounts (Kuwayama 2003; Rosaldo 1989). Increasingly critiques of power, knowledge, and cultural representation (for example, Said 1978), and postmodern contributions to theories of identity deeply complicated the concept of the “Other” (Clair 2003; Kuwayama 2003). Natives had typically been objects of thought, not the thinkers themselves (Kuwayama 2003), but these changes meant that anthropologists no longer held the “native discourse monopoly” (Trouillot 2003). With a rise in native anthropologists who were equipped with anthropological training to go back and study their own communities, Western anthropologists began to increasingly study themselves (Messerschmidt 1981a).

Early Debates

The historical moments described above, with the undercurrent of calls for increased reflexivity ever present, set the groundwork for a shift in the anthropological object of study, and more people began what was termed “native anthropology.” While other sporadic studies in insider anthropology had been completed previously (Mead 2000; Douglas 2002; Frankenberg 1966; Frankenberg and Gluckman 1957), the increasing numbers of people studying their own cultures led to a thorough and ongoing discussion of the methodological issues involved. Donald Messerschmidt (1981b) describes this as a shift away from cultures or places to an interest in issues. Debates then centered on the differences between methodological approaches of studying your own culture versus a foreign one. Some suggested that there was no essential difference between either site; both involved the same methodological commitments and challenges. Some deeply opposed the idea of “native anthropology,” while others debated the merits of each, pointing out strengths and weaknesses (Messerschmidt 1981a).

Proponents of “native anthropology” argued that “outsider” research was superficial as outsiders lacked the cultural competence to deeply understand the meanings and practices they witnessed. Insider findings would then be not only depictions of a culture but expressions of the culture. Similarly, they suggested that their unconscious inclusions are meaningful additions to the data as they were expressions of the native culture, whereas they are bothersome irrelevances in ethnographies written by outsider anthropologists (Messerschmidt 1981a). Supporters of native anthropology argued that their status as a member would lead them to blend in and not alter social situations in the way that a foreign person may (Messerschmidt 1981a). On a practical level, with decreased funding for trips abroad and less access to foreign
countries after decolonization, native anthropology was an economical alternative (Aguilar 1981). Additionally, application of anthropological skills to local situations was argued to be an invaluable resource for deepening understandings and finding solutions for problems of concern for anthropologists’ own communities (Messerschmidt 1981b). Finally, some early voices called attention to the ability of the “unique” native perspective to deconstruct colonial distortions on anthropological knowledge (Jones 1970).

Critics, however, asserted that an insider could never detach enough from their own cultural understandings to see the underlying patterns that are taken for granted in everyday interaction (Messerschmidt 1981b). The unfamiliar is easier to detect, they argued, and the familiar risks appearing to be true without question. Insiders, who are expected to know the norms, would be less likely to be forgiven for transgressions. Additionally, they suggested that being an outsider would provide more access to secrets, as an outsider anthropologist would have no reason to use such knowledge against participants. Being viewed as an objective observer, they argued, prompts participants to be more forthcoming in their disclosures (Aguilar 1981).

One of the key issues in the debate was the level of bias that might occur in native anthropology. Critics charged that insider ethnography would be inherently biased towards the native population. They raised concerns that insiders would approach their work as advocates, precluding them from the objective viewpoint required by science (Aguilar 1981). However, proponents argued that every ethnographer is biased, so “outsider” ethnography just slants the other direction. Some suggested that the role of a native anthropologist was to bring more perspectives into the discipline, so their inherent biases were welcome and important contributions (Jones 1970).

Largely these early debates centered on epistemological concerns. Those who opposed native anthropology still upheld the positivist values of objectivity and neutrality posited by conventional science. Proponents of the study of one’s own culture largely shifted away from those values (Jones 1970); instead they supported native anthropology as a possible “correction” of the historical exploitation of native people and employed a postmodern epistemology.

Current Methodological Issues

In the present era, more anthropologists practice “native” ethnography than ever before. The debate is not so much about whether should one study their own culture, but instead about what it means to study one’s native community. The issues emerging from early debates have evolved, and many appear in new forms in current methodological debates. Core concepts such as “culture,” “ethnography,” and “field site” were all subject to ongoing interrogations during this time, and their influences on the methodological aspects of native anthropology are clear. In current methodological debates, these core interrogations continue in the following threads: defining “native,” advantages and challenges of cultural competence, achieving distance, and translation. These are the focus of this section.

Defining “Native”

One current discussion involves the complication of what is meant by “native anthropologist.” The positioning of “native” and “non-native” is rooted in a colonial paradigm. Some early anthropologists (e.g. Franz Boas) worked with native assistants precisely because they could provide information that the anthropologist could not gather with their limited familiarity of the community (Stocking 1968). Critics of this practice point out that including early “native” anthropologists in academic circles was because of their ability to collect inaccessible data for white anthropologists (Narayan 1993). The relational opposition between
“anthropologist” and “assistant” indexed a conceptual distinction between “non-native” and “native.” This distinction continued as more people from marginalized populations became anthropologists who studied their own communities. However, with the postmodern view of identity as multiple, the term “native” is now recognized as a relational, and therefore fluid, category, and the non-native–native distinction is highly contested (Kuwayama 2003). This has shifted the debate from how insiders can contribute to the subjectivity of “being native.”

Applying the postmodern view of identity to anthropological methods, Kirin Narayan (1993) problematizes the distinction between “native” and “non-native” anthropologists, stating that other cultural factors, such as gender and social class, can outweigh the ethnic identities on which the distinction was historically founded. People have multiple identities, and are complexly located. Narayan describes her own experiences of having dramatic social class and cultural differences with her community of study regardless of her similar ethnic identity. Other native anthropologists describe similar complications in entering what is termed “their” communities (e.g. Jacobs-Huey 2006; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Perley 2011).

Native anthropologists are sometimes positioned as insiders regardless of their complex backgrounds. For example, Nayaran’s (1993) German-American mother was ignored as it complicated the image that people held of her as “Indian.” Stanley Barrett (1999) describes the issues specific to “halfies,” anthropologists whose cultural identity is mixed because of migration, education overseas, or biracial parenting. He suggests that such anthropologists doing work in their own communities are both the “native” and the “outsider” and are pulled between two audiences. Jayati Lal (1996) also described her experiences with such issues. As a woman of Indian descent, her research in India was labeled native anthropology by academic audiences. However, she found that her shared gender, language, and Indian identities were not enough to outweigh the social class differences between herself and the participants with whom she worked. Thus she was dislocated “even within that space [she] had thought of as home” (1999:193).

Similarly, numerous anthropologists comment that their academic training alone complicates their “native” status (Foster 1996; Page 1988; Williams 1996). The effects of academic discourse on the production of knowledge and creation of subjects was theorized by Michel Foucault (1976) who argued that power is located in the discursive relations of institutions such as the academy. Engaging in academic discourses means engaging in “an anonymous field whose configuration defines the possible position of speaking subjects” (Foucault 1976:122). Native anthropologists often recognize that their academic training alters their social class and educational identities in ways that can make them increasingly alien to their “home” communities (Barrett 1999; Jacobs-Huey 2006; Narayan 1993). Even assuming it is possible to have an “insider” identity with a community, it is uncommon for any stranger to be accepted without reservation. Native anthropologists often are not immediately thought of as insiders by community members no matter how close their backgrounds might appear. Just as any other anthropologist, native anthropologists experience suspicion towards academics by many marginalized groups historically exploited by scholars. Additionally, there will always be things about even a familiar field that a “native” anthropologist does not know (Narayan 1993).

“Native anthropologist” is a fluid label that may be adopted by an anthropologist, or may be imposed by the academy. It may be accepted or rejected by the community in which an anthropologist works. In general, anthropologists increasingly question the idea that any fieldworker truly becomes a “native” of their field site. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) suggests that the traditional concept of joining a community to gain an insider perspective is condescending. How can anthropologists think that after a relatively brief time in a community (one or two years) they would be considered a full member? Debates around defining “native”
anthropologists complicate the traditional notion of fieldwork in anthropology in which the ethnographer joins the natives to gain an “insider” perspective by showing that identities are fluid and multiple in fieldwork. To categorize a researcher as “native” or “non-native” is a false dichotomy. Additionally, this debate moves away from the idea that an ethnographer can become a full cultural insider through participant observation and towards the idea that there will always be things that an ethnographer does not know about a community.

Cultural Competence

While what it means to be a “native” is contested, there are still particular methodological concerns named by those who identify as such. Debates in the eighties on the types of knowledge that can be gleaned from a native versus outsider perspective generally conceded that native anthropologists have several advantages due to their presumed cultural competence. Some possible advantages of cultural competence will be reviewed in this section. Additionally, some challenges that cultural competence can present for anthropologists will also be discussed.

Since language is a key way that anthropologists can build rapport and trust, native anthropologists, who are competent in both the speech and nonverbal communication of the participants, have an important tool available to them. Full communicative competence affords native anthropologists a faster ability to build rapport and deeper understandings (Kuwayama 2003; Jacobs-Huey 2006; Jones 1970). Similarly, cultural competence can increase one’s flexibility and access, and ability to collect data in the field (Messerschmidt 1981b). In African-American communities, for example, competence in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) can be an important aspect of establishing trust and rapport in fieldwork (Gwaltney 1993; Mitchell-Kernan 1971; Nelson 1996; Williams 1996). Lanita Jacobs-Huey (2006) explains that communicative competence does not just mean knowing a language. It was the subtleties of knowing how speech styles are used in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) that allowed her to build relationships with some of the most skeptical participants in her multi-sited study that examined the symbolic meanings of hair in African American communities. As she conducted her research both on the ground and online, she relied on cultural discourse styles, and used them strategically, especially when discussing sensitive issues.

However, native anthropologists can still experience problems using native communication styles in their own cultural group. For example, African Americans who spoke varieties of English associated with academia had a hard time becoming accepted in the African American communities they were studying (Foster 1996; Page 1988; Williams 1996). Participants sometimes view African American researchers who use mainstream English varieties as “educated fools” (Jacobs-Huey 2006:136). Beyond communicative competencies, because community members may have specific expectations of native anthropologists, their insider status may be “tested” in unique ways. A participant asked Jacobs-Huey how she wears her hair, and she knew that the participant who asked this question strongly felt that “afro-centric” styles (for example, braids) were essential for black women’s empowerment (2006:135). Jacobs-Huey quickly picked up on this question as an evaluation of her cultural competency, and responded accordingly in order to build rapport with the participant (136). Her “insider” status had to be proven through, not just her identification as African American, but through her appropriate use of discursive styles and appropriate response to culturally specific questions.

An additional challenge that cultural competence can present for anthropologists is the massive amount of input that native anthropologists, who do not have to rely on translators, receive in the field (class lecture by Paul Brodwin on September 26th, 2011). Native anthropologists hear and comprehend everything, and the familiar social interactions that they are observing can appear natural. This even increases the basic task of choosing what to leave
in and what to leave out of fieldnotes, let alone the amount of filtering necessary to attempt at meaningful analysis (Becker 1971; Delamont and Atkinson 1995). One strategy native anthropologists employ to manage this issue is frequent assessment of what has been learned and what still needs to be uncovered in relation to the project goals (class lecture by Paul Brodwin on September 26th, 2011).

Though little attention has been given to this issue in the literature on native anthropology, an additional challenge that full cultural competence brings for anthropologists working in their own communities is to define the field of research. As Alessandro Duranti observes, “The more we study different societies…the more we realize that the homogeneous community where everyone speaks the same language (or dialect) and knows everything there is to know for daily survival is either a romantic idealization… or a collective construct...” (1997:88). When people study their own communities, they are faced with the native knowledge they already have about the fluidity of the “collective construct” of their culture, and they have to figure out some way of narrowing their focus (Duranti 1997:88).

To address this problem, some early ethnographies of home defined their community of study by focusing on the exotic in their own communities. For example, ethnographies of the Chicago School included studies of hobos, street gangs, or drug users (Davies 1999). While such delineations of home communities persist, native anthropologists are particularly sensitive to representations of their communities (Jacobs-Huey 2006). Additionally, in some academic circles, professional credibility relies on reinforcing some of the old ideas of foreignness and distance (Jacobs-Huey 2006; class lecture by Paul Brodwin on September 26th, 2011). Thus institutional and professional pressures to create an exotic subject of study still persist even with opposition.

Another strategy for addressing the heterogeneity one recognizes when studying their own community is to employ multi-sited ethnographic techniques. Jacobs-Huey (2006) participated in multiple field sites (e.g. beauty parlors, online forums, and standup comedy) in order to be inclusive of the complexities of her community. Lila Abu-Lughod (1999) also found that she had to move beyond the bounds of a rural village field site in order to understand the role of television (produced in the cosmopolitan capital) in village women’s lives.

**Distance**

While the cultural competence of native anthropologists proves advantageous overall, as anticipated by early critics, those who identify as native anthropologists cite detachment or distance as an issue in their ethnographic work. As critics of native anthropology suggested, when a person is already an “insider,” they sometimes struggle to see what they take for granted (Becker 1971; Kuwayama 2003). Some describe entering their field site, eager and ready to document everything going on, but quickly losing momentum as everything begins to seem “normal.” Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) describes how even after living in the United States for two decades, her ethnographic project in her home country, Japan, quickly fizzled as the sites and experiences melded into the “norm” after a month and a half. For some, leaving the field and returning to a Western academic setting is necessary to refocus on the academic task (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Jacob-Huey 2006).

Narayan describes how the native lack of distance alters research methods:

> In some ways, the study of one’s own society involves an inverse process from the study of an alien one. Instead of learning conceptual categories and then, through fieldwork, finding the contexts in which to apply them, those of us who study societies in which we have preexisting experience absorb analytic categories that rename and reframe what is already known (1993:680).
While issues of distance are a particular problem for native anthropologists, they need not be a limitation. As Narayan has described, native anthropology can involve interrogating what is “known” in a new way.

Translation

One of the biggest issues of concern for native anthropologists is how to “translate” findings for both their community and the academic world, especially when native voices have traditionally been neglected or misrepresented in academic environments. Translation, as it is being used here, is about the politics of representing findings for a particular audience. All anthropologists contend with representation issues and choices regarding whose voices to include, and what to leave in and what to leave out of ethnographic writing (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Hymes 1999). Laura Nader persuasively argued that anthropologists need to extend their study (traditionally of those who were colonized) and “study up” to complete more complex analyses (1972:295). Meanwhile, advocates of standpoint epistemologies argue that, “the activities of those at the bottom of such social hierarchies can provide starting points for thought…from which humans’ relations with each other and the natural world can become visible” in ways that those positioned at the top cannot (Harding 1993:54-55). Native anthropologists are uniquely situated within the tension that standpoint epistemologies present, so translation has several particular aspects for them which will be explored in this section.

The unique positioning of many native anthropologists often leads them to feel loyalty to more than one world. Not only do native anthropologists have to consider how to translate their work for their community members, they also have to translate native knowledge to academics who are entrenched in dominant Eurocentric ways of knowing. In other words, native anthropologists have to determine how to make the information accessible and acceptable for both an academic and a lay audience. Jacobs-Huey (2006) describes strong tensions in portraying her African American community for a white academic audience. As she has found, production of a text that uses highly specialized language, or of a text that does not sound “academic” enough, can both be suspicious for a native community.

Native anthropologists have the added concern of disclosing what many in their communities might consider to be the “dirty laundry” or the “family secrets” (Jacobs-Huey 2006; Visweswaran 1994). The pressure to resolve issues of representation is increased for historically marginalized groups who may expect the “native anthropologist” to take particular political stances. Additionally, because of previous membership in the community, the stakes are higher for native anthropologists who may accidentally offend their community of study. While anthropologists working outside of their communities also risk offending research participants, the stakes are particularly high for native anthropologists. As Perley states, “the stakes for the native anthropologist could very well determine whether the native can return home or not” (2011:21).

Key to issues of representation for many native anthropologists is the textual production of ethnography. While this topic has been addressed in previous sections of this article, there are a few points that deserve further elaboration here. Eduardo Restrepo and Arturo Escobar summarize changing theories of textual practice in anthropology stating:

Today, this critique could be seen as effecting a set of displacements from cultures-as-text (interpretative turn), to texts-about-culture (writing culture and the politics of representation), ending up with anthropology-as-cultural-critique (critical cultural constructivism) (2005:107).
Restrepo and Escobar remind readers that anthropology as cultural critique situates exoticization of the Other as primarily located in the construction of ethnographies. Reneto Rosaldo (1989) argued that moving away from exoticization requires shifting the ethnographic lens onto ourselves by writing the researcher into the ethnography (also argued by Davies 1999). This change has been encouraged by native anthropologists who suggest many alternatives to classic ethnography in order to accommodate the voices of native ethnographers (Perley n.d.). One very influential contribution has been bringing greater personal narration into all ethnography, which helps to enact multiple identities and to counter the objectivist tradition (Narayan 1993). Instead of assuming that somehow a native anthropologist can offer an authentic account of community perspectives, Narayan calls for depictions of the ethnographic author as, at the least, bicultural (Narayan 1993).

Native anthropologists living in non-Western countries have the additional complexity of contending with a global political environment that is dominated by Western culture. Takami Kuwayama (2003) describes the tensions, for example, that emerge when a native anthropologist is involved with native rights movements. Increasing opposition to Western political forces can lead to attempts to withdraw from dominant, westernized discourses entirely. The results of this can be detrimental to the interests of movement members; he states, “for people in the non-Western world... categorically refusing Western ideas is tantamount to depriving themselves of any intellectual power” (Kuwayama 2003:13). Since westernized discourses permeate life around the world, Kuwayama argues that involvement in them is necessary for empowerment.

Many native anthropologists approach their work in ways that align with Kuwayama (2003) in the goal of dismantling colonialist discourses and bringing native knowledge into the academic canon. Jacobs-Huey describes this as a “corrective” agenda and delineates three themes: critical examination of historical subjugation, exploitation, and exoticization of people of color worldwide, incorporating research participant voices, and returning something of value to the community (2006:133). Restrepo and Escobar outline a similar agenda including: calls for the de-colonization of anthropological knowledge, the role of anthropologists in the reproduction (or contestation) of the status quo, and the epistemological and political aspects of “native” anthropology (2005:107).

The corrective agenda Jacobs-Huey describes (2006) can take on different forms for native anthropologists working outside of American and British academic systems (the two systems which produce the dominant discourses of the field). The construction of the “expert knowledge” of Eurocentric discourses of anthropology has involved “a double movement: first, and more conventionally, ‘familiarizing’ otherness; second, and more recently, exoticizing sameness” (Restrepo and Escobar 2005:106). Native anthropologists working outside of core academic spheres have to consider the dominant theories, methods, and writing styles in order to be included as legitimate producers of knowledge (Kuwayama 2003). This can create tensions for native anthropologists who have to enter the dominant discourses that historically exploited their communities in order to be heard and bring native voices into the discourse. The risk of doing so, as described previously, is a loss of the sense of self as a true “native.” As increasing numbers of people from historically marginalized communities are employed in higher education, this issue is pressing. At the same time, increasing exposure of native voices is slowly affecting the dominant discourses, especially as the “face” of higher education shifts to be more diverse (e.g. Jacobs-Huey 2006; Medicine 2001; Perley 2011; Visweswaran 1994).

Translation is considered to be at the heart of what anthropologists do (Agar 2011). As has been described in this section, there are several aspects of translation that are particular to the experience of many native anthropologists. From this unique positioning, native
anthropologists have both introduced a correctness agenda and native ways of knowing into anthropology.

Conclusion

Native anthropologists have made numerous contributions to the field of anthropology, and, in many ways, their concerns highlight issues that exist both for both “insider” and “outsider” anthropologists. Further, native anthropology debates demonstrate that increasingly the line between the two is blurred. Positioned at the heart of many important tensions, native anthropology has proven to be an invaluable tool for both understanding social life in general, and working on problems of consequence for marginalized communities. From reviewing several central debates around the methods of native anthropology, two unique contributions to the field that are of interest for a student preparing to do anthropology at home are:

1. Native anthropology opposes the customary position of natives as objects, brings native ways of knowing into academia, and thus counters Eurocentrism in academia. The project of native anthropologists has been part of larger critiques of “expert knowledge” from within anthropology. These critiques can be thought of broadly as epistemological and textual practices (where native anthropologies have been fruitful), and bringing native practices into academic institutions.

2. The ongoing, methodological issues raised by studying one’s own culture highlight the necessity of reflection and careful methodological planning for all fieldwork.

These two contributions from native anthropology remind all of us that academic knowledge is not immune to the social practices, tensions, and power we seek to reveal in all aspects of human life. These debates in native anthropology have laid out a path for all insider anthropologists that allow us to continue to seek “folk knowledge” that offers a critique and an alternative to the dominant “expert knowledge” of academia, and to reflexively consider our own position as insider-outsiders in the fieldwork settings in which we work.

I would like to finish by returning to the story Bernard Perley (who was starkly faced with resistance in his first experience as a native anthropologist, as described in this paper’s opening) told me. After sharing his experience with me, he imparted that I, just like everyone else, would encounter some situations in the field that I was unprepared for. If there is one universal experience of the ethnographer, whether she is the “Lone Ethnographer” setting off into the sunset, or the “insider” anthropologist turning to her own backyard, it may be just what Perley told me: every field experience will present you with circumstances you are not prepared to face, and it is the challenge of the ethnographer to critically and reflexively respond.

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