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Whose knowledge for what politics?

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Introduction

We find ourselves amidst an explosion of literature about how our worlds are being fundamentally changed (or not) through processes that have come to be clumped under the vague title of 'globalisation'. As we wander our way through this literature, we might find ourselves – with others – feeling perplexed and anxious about the loss of a clear sense of what politics is, where it happens, what it is about, and what we need to know to understand and engage in it. This in turn leads many of us to contribute to a slightly smaller literature, such as this Special Issue, seeking to theorise how the space and character of politics might be changing, and how we might adapt our research strategies to accommodate these changes and maintain the confidence that we, and the disciplines we contribute to, still have relevant things to say about international politics. While this is not a difficult thing to claim, and it is not difficult to find others to reassure us that it is true, I want to suggest here that it is worth lingering a little longer in our anxiety than might be comfortable. I suggest this because it seems to me that there is, or at least should be, more on the table than we're yet grappling with. In particular, I argue here that any attempt to theorise the political today needs to take into account not only that the character and space of politics are changing, but that the way we study or theorise it – not only the subjects of our study but the very kind of knowledge we produce, and for whom – may need to change as well. As many others have argued, the project of progressive politics these days is not especially clear.[1] It no longer seems safe to assume, for example, that the capture of the state or the establishment of benign forms of global governance should be our primary object. However, just as the project of progressive politics is in question, so is the role of knowledge, and knowledge production, under contemporary circumstances. I think there are possibilities embedded in explicitly engaging these questions together that are far from realisation. There are also serious dangers in trying to separate them, or assume the one while engaging the other, however 'obvious' the answers to one or the other may appear to be. Simultaneous with theorising the political 'out there' in the international must be an engagement with the politics of theorising 'in here,' in academic contexts. My project here is to explore how this challenge might be taken up in the contemporary study of

* Many thanks to those who provided me with critical perspectives on the argument developed here, in particular Jef Huysmans, Bice Maiguashca, Naimh Moore, Rob Walker, and Darrell Whitman.

[1] There are many possible reference points here, of course, not least: Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Zizek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), or Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000).

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politics, particularly in relation to emerging forms of political practice, such as those developed by activists in a variety of contexts.[2] My argument is for an approach to theorising the political that shifts the disciplinary assumptions about for what purpose and for whom we should we produce knowledge in contemporary times, through an emphasis on the strategic knowledges produced through political practice. Such an approach would potentially provide us with understandings of contemporary political institutions and practices that are both more incisive and more enabling than can be produced through more familiarly disciplined approaches.

The argument proceeds in four parts. I begin with a parable of sorts about the discipline of Anthropology and its knowledge politics, developing this as a reference point that might help us to better understand the terrains of knowledge politics at play in the discipline of International Relations (IR). The second part of the argument considers three efforts to develop the study of activism in the international, exploring the political terrains they explicitly intervene in, as well as those they might contribute to more unintentionally. I then move on to consider one way of shifting these political terrains through a different approach to the study of political practice in general, and activism more specifically, one that might provide a more satisfying answer to whom and for what political project we think we are writing, that might help us to think politically. The article concludes with a brief survey of some of the possibilities and limitations of this approach.

A reference point: the ambivalence of anthropological knowledge

The discipline of Anthropology developed as and through the study of 'culture,' in particular the cultures of distant or exotic – and often colonised – others. This brief led anthropologists into communities to observe the rituals and daily lives of these others, to speculate about their broader import, meaning and significance, and to record this for posterity. What this practice of knowledge production eventually led to at many sites is a rather antagonistic response from some of their subjects. Indigenous peoples in North America, for example, began to experience their relationship to anthropologists as one of frustration, betrayal and anger about the ways in which anthropologists appeared in their communities, observed their daily lives and cultural practices from the mundane to the sacred, gathered information, and disappeared, leaving no apparent reciprocal contribution to their communities.[3] Many indigenous peoples were yet more angered when they began to read what had been written about them, and to realise how it had been used to frame and justify particular social, cultural and political understandings of and policies towards them.

For their part, when they studied indigenous peoples, anthropologists believed they were contributing to an important and valuable intellectual project: not only

[2] Although I am interested in the study of political practice more generally, in this article I focus particularly on the study of activism and activist knowledge as this is the focus of those texts I engage. However, the approach I develop here is one that could be applied more generally.

[3] One well-known example of this kind of critique can be found in Vine Deloria, 'Anthropologists and Other Friends', in *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 78–100. A more recent version is expressed in Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999).

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were they contributing to the font of knowledge for all humankind,[4] in some cases they were the only ones who were seeking to understand, protect and preserve peoples, cultures and practices that were under threat, in many cases in danger of disappearing or being destroyed altogether either through violence, neglect, or 'the inevitable advance of civilisation'. Both of these projects, but the latter in particular, required that anthropologists write to communities other than those they studied. However, they did of course write to and for a community: a community of their perceived peers, and also a broader community of potential users, be they colonial administrators, museum curators, policymakers, or benevolent organisations campaigning for the protection of indigenous groups. Thus although they didn't necessarily write to indigenous peoples, they did feel they wrote for them, on their behalf, to other audiences.

In retrospect, and through rigorous and extensive critique (both from 'within' and 'outside' the discipline[5]), a darker side to their activity, as identified by indigenous peoples, has been exposed and struggled with, most seriously and extensively within the discipline of anthropology itself. These struggles unearthed and politicised knowledge/power dynamics within disciplinary methodologies and subjectivities, dynamics that were embedded in the colonial contexts from which the discipline emerged. As some argued, however benevolent or helpful anthropologists sought to be, their project itself contributed to a broader set of assumptions and practices that potentially reinforced the apparent inevitability and assimilative effects of 'civilization': the very force indigenous peoples were struggling to resist. Insofar as anthropological work was focused on the documentation of the 'cultures' of those who lived outside of 'modern' civilisation, it reinscribed their difference in ways that seemed to provide them with only two options: to live (irrationally) out of time or to become properly 'modern'. These were of course the options indigenous peoples had been resisting, as they fought instead for the possibility of being both different and modern, capable of managing their own affairs.

As welcome as a recognition of their participation in the colonial project was from the perspective of indigenous peoples, as the critical conversations within the discipline of anthropology continued, even this began to backfire on indigenous peoples. Insofar as anthropologists began to question the foundational assumptions of their own discipline, they also ran the risk of undermining their own authority to

[4] Including scholars of IR, who, along with other scholars of the modern social sciences, relied upon anthropologists to document the history of society while they got on with arranging the future of it. See, for example, my discussion of Hedley Bull in Karena Shaw, 'Indigeneity and the International', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 31:1 (2002), pp. 55–82.

[5] This is a large literature, but some influential critiques from within the discipline would include Johannes Fabian, *Time and The Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Stanley Diamond, 'Anthropology in Question', in Dell Hymes (ed.), *Reinventing Anthropology* (New York: Pentheon Books, 1972), pp. 401–29; James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority', *Representations*, 1 (1983), pp. 118–46; Thomas Weaver (ed.), *To See Ourselves: Anthropology and Modern Social Issues* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1973); James Clifford and George Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, CA:University of California, 1986); George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989). After these relatively early interventions, this debate blossomed not least in journals such as *Critical Anthropology* and *Critique of Anthropology*.

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speak as anthropologists, thus denying some indigenous groups of key defenders. This was particularly poignant in land claims cases which rested on indigenous groups needing to 'prove' the 'authenticity' of their culture in order to have their claims to their land recognised and acknowledged.[6] As more general anthropological debate brewed about the problems embedded in the concept of 'culture', exposed particularly by any cultural claim to 'authenticity', this ground for indigenous claims began to appear precarious. Suddenly, colonial as it may have been, 'bad old' Anthropology didn't look so bad, as it turned out that the evidence from this kind of Anthropology was necessary to 'authenticate' indigenous peoples' claims, to prove their difference, the coherence and consistency of their cultures, and thus the violences done to them by the failure to recognise their authority. The politics of knowledge is never straightforward, and anthropologists were in a bit of a bind: by confronting their colonial past, they ran the considerable risk of facilitating the advance of the colonial project.

What has emerged from this delicate political terrain is a highly charged and deeply engaged conversation about authority and disciplinarity, methodology and subjectivity, power and knowledge. What has also emerged is a series of careful attempts to negotiate the terrain, its pitfalls mapped at both the abstract and very immediate levels, as struggles continue about the viability of different anthropological authority in legal and political contexts. Anthropologists are not off the hook, from indigenous peoples' perspectives, but nor can indigenous peoples do without them: they are locked together in a complex attempt to decolonise the knowledge practices through which indigenous peoples have been known, have articulated their claims and produced their political subjectivities.

This has involved, among other things, indigenous peoples becoming anthropologists, anthropologists reconsidering what their discipline can and should do, and an extended conversation focused on who the knowledge anthropologists produce should be for, and what it means – how it affects the practices of research and the assessment of the quality and character of the knowledge produced – to shift the assumption of who knowledge is for from a community of intellectual peers, or a contribution to disciplinary conversations, and towards, for example, those who are studied. One consequence of these struggles has been a less coherent discipline, one less clearly identified with a single project, methodology or subject matter. Another consequence has been a more politically engaged set of practices and research communities. Thus although the relationship between indigenous peoples and anthropologists remains politically fraught, it is one that expresses the complexity and difficulty of thinking seriously about the politics of knowledge in changing global circumstances.[7]

[6] See, for example, James Clifford, 'Identity in Mashpee', in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 277–346. For more recent examples, see Dara Culhane, *The Pleasure of the Crown: Anthropology, Law and First Nations* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1998); Frank Cassidy (ed.), *Aboriginal Title in British Columbia: Delgamuukw v. the Queen* (Lantzville, BC: Oolichan Books & the Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1992) , or Noel Dyck and James B. Waldram (eds.), *Anthropology, Public Policy and Native Peoples in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

[7] For analyses of contemporary relationships, see Thomas Biolsi and Larry J. Zimmerman (eds.), *Indians and Anthropologists: Vine Deloria, Jr. and the Critique of Anthropology* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

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I've focused on the specific relationship between indigenous peoples and Anthropology; however, the struggle within the discipline has not been about a single issue or problematic. It has been about the complex rethinking of the practice of knowledge production in a changing world, in particular, in a world in which the political implications of the kind of knowledge produced had become increasingly obvious and increasingly unacceptable to both the producers of the knowledge and its 'objects' or subject matter. We can attribute the changes to the brave and clever anthropologists and/or to the obstreperous indigenous peoples who developed the critique, but the changes should also be situated within the context of changing patterns of power and knowledge at other sites in the world, expressed 'globally' through anti-colonial struggles and the emergence of post-colonial states, and 'domestically' though rearticulations of power relations through anti-war movements, the civil rights movement in the US, feminism, struggles for indigenous sovereignty at a variety of sites, struggles to create post-colonial political structures, and so on. These changing patterns of power have also provided the context for the discipline of IR for the past decades, of course, and the discipline has responded to them, adapted in relation to them, and continues to do so, as the brief of this Special Issue suggests. Given this, and given the important differences in disciplinary subject matter and subjectivity, what relevance might the narrative above have in relation to IR as a discipline, if any?

One might presume, from how I've proceeded thus far, that I intend to argue that the discipline needs to 'do the same thing' as anthropology in some way: to decolonise its knowledge practices. But it's not quite so straightforward. Although it shares contexts with Anthropology, IR has played a different role in relation to those contexts and has its own (although not unrelated) politics of knowledge. The story above suggests how interplay between contexts of knowledge and disciplinary structures shapes knowledge and its uses and usefulness, shapes relationships between researcher and researched, and in the end does this in ways that have unintended consequences. Most anthropologists did not seek to produce knowledge that reinscribed colonial relationships, in fact thought they were doing quite the opposite. With hindsight it is easy enough to be critical, but I'm not sure that the kind of knowledge produced through the disciplinary structures of IR provides an innocent ground for such critique. Of course, part of the lesson of the story above is that we simply cannot know with any certainty what effects our research will have – as it turns out much of the 'bad, old' Anthropology remains crucial to indigenous peoples' legal and political struggles, or is helping them to reinvent their societies in ways that they desire. However in order to contribute productively to indigenous peoples' struggles, to change the relationship between the discipline and its subjects in ways that enabled a more defensible or satisfying power/knowledge terrain to emerge, the very core of the discipline – its self-definition, subjectivity, methodologies, and aspirations – had to be thrown into question. One of the key questions that had to be posed (and answered in many different ways) in this process was the question of for what purpose, and for whom, anthropological knowledge should be produced, as this in turn was the prerequisite for conceptualising research programmes, for selecting sites and methodologies of study. As it turned out, and this is perhaps the most hopeful part of the story, this has considerably enriched

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and enlivened the discipline, enabling it to extend its relevance as well as opening possibilities for more politically engaged or relevant research.[8]

Activism and the politics of disciplinary knowledge?

Like Anthropology, the discipline of IR has struggled with the question of how changing global relations might require a shift in its subject matter and methodologies. This has been expressed not least in the exploding literature on 'globalisation'. One subset of this literature has focused on emerging forms of activism in international politics, exploring the forms this activity has taken, and what its causes, trajectories and broader implications might be, both for the study of IR and more generally. Thus we have seen the rise of debates about such concepts as 'global civil society', 'epistemic regimes', and 'transnational advocacy networks', as we struggle to integrate the study of these forms of activism into the discipline of IR. These emerging literatures provide an important site in which to examine the political terrains of knowledge: not only the explicit and intended effects of knowledge practices, but their broader unintended effects. The story above about the contribution of anthropology to the colonial project reveals the potential political potency of these unintended consequences. The enrichment of the discipline that has resulted from critical interrogation of these knowledge terrains also reveals the potential embedded in such interrogation. In order to respond to the challenges we face in conceptualising a progressive political agenda today, those of us interested in international politics may well need to continue to explore these questions, not least in relation to those seeking to enact such a political agenda in activist practice. Should we allow their activity to be 'colonised' by IR, allowing the discipline to essentially frame what is important about them, or do we need to consider whether they pose a more fundamental challenge to disciplinary and disciplining practices, and hold out possibilities for other ways of understanding their activity? An answer to this question requires an exploration of the broader terrain of knowledge at play here, a serious consideration of what purpose we think our knowledge is for, and for whom we are producing it.

When perusing this emerging research into activist practices within the discipline of IR, there are some immediately obvious responses to my questions above, about the purpose and intended audience of the knowledge we produce. I'll draw on three recent works to illustrate this: Paul Wapner's *Environmental Activism and World*

[8] This research has not least begun to make a substantial contribution to our understanding of contemporary global processes. See, for example: Johantan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo (eds.), *The Anthropology of Globalisation* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (eds.), *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2001); Michael Burawoy, Joseph A. Blum, Sheba George, Zsuzsa Gille, Teresa Gowan, Lynne Haney, Maren Klawiter, Steven H. Lopez, Sean O Riain, and Millie Thayer, *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections, and Imaginations in a Postmodern World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); Roxann Prazniak and Arif Dirlik (ed.), *Places and Politics in an Age of Globalization* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

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Civic Politics, Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's *Activists Beyond Borders* and Robert O'Brien, Anne Marie Goetz, Jan Aart Scholte and Marc Williams' *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements*.[9] All three books develop arguments about the significance of activist practices to the study of international relations. Wapner's focus is on the contribution three environmental non-governmental organisations' strategies and campaigns have made to the development of 'world civic society'. By examining not only the immediate strategies of these groups, but also their broader implications in relation to the development of political cultures outside or beyond domestic civil society, Wapner develops an argument that these groups' activities are not only having an impact in relation to their immediate goals, but are having a wider-ranging effect on the development of international political institutions and practices.

> Transnational environmental groups not only lobby states but also directly shape the activities of other institutions, collectivities, and individuals. They do so by manipulating mechanisms of power that exist outside the realm of state-to-state relations. These include economic, social, and cultural practices that traverse countries and have an impact on public life.[10]

He argues that this, in turn, indicates the need to expand the study of international politics to incorporate a focus on world civic society in order to improve the ability of the discipline to understand and explain the functioning of international politics. 'My hope is that an appreciation for this dimension of global experience will sensitize people to the limitations of the traditional understanding of *world politics*'.[11] By extension, he also hopes to legitimise and encourage world civic politics as a crucial site for the development of global environmental governance.[12]

O'Brien *et al*.'s book also seeks to assess the effects of global social movements on international politics, this time more specifically in relation to the structure and functioning of multilateral economic institutions. Drawing on interviews with activists and with officials from relevant institutions, and observations of interactions between activist groups and these institutions as well as textual research, the book addresses questions such as whether multilateral economic institutions have

[9] Paul Wapner, *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996); Margaret E. Keck and Katheryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1998); Robert O'Brien, Ann Marie Goetz, Jan Aart Scholte, Marc Williams, *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Many other works might have been chosen; as mentioned above, there has been a veritable explosion of works on activism and international politics. See, for example: Jonathan A. Fox and David L. Brown (eds.), *The Struggle for Accountability: The World Bank, NGOs and Grassroots Movements* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998); Barry K. Gills (ed.), *Globalization and the Politics of Resistance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000); Alejandro Colas, *International Civil Society: Social Movements in World Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001); Ronnie D. Lipschutz, 'Reconstructing World Politics: The Emergence of Global Civil Society', *Millennium*, 21:3 (Winter, 1992), pp. 389–420; M.J. Peterson, 'Transnational Activity, International Society and World Politics', *Millennium*, 21:3 (Winter, 1992), pp. 371–89; Jackie Smith, Charles Chatfield and Ron Pangucco, *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics: Solidarity Beyond the State* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Leslie Paul Thiele, 'Making Democracy Safe for the World: Social Movements and Global Politics, *Alternatives*, 18:3 (Summer, 1993), pp. 273–305.

[10] Wapner, *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics*, p. 153.

[11] Ibid., p. 162.

[12] Ibid., p. 164.

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modified their behaviour as a consequence of social movement activism, what their motivations are in engaging with these movements, and what the broader significance of the relationship between these institutions and global social movements might be. 'We argue that there is a transformation in the nature of governance conducted by MEIs [multilateral economic institutions] as a result of their encounter with GSMs [global social movements]. This transformation is labelled "complex multilateralism" in recognition of its movement away from an exclusively state based structure.'[13] As with Wapner's book, then, their explicit aspiration is to make a contribution to broader disciplinary conversations about the significance of these movements and their political practices, and thus to contribute to a better understanding of international politics in and through the discipline. '[O]ur goal is not to account for state behaviour, but to better understand processes of global governance. Our argument is that some attention must be focused upon the interaction of multilateral institutions and civil society groups to understand the form and content of global governance.'[14] In their case, they hope to advance the understanding of multilateralism in the space of the international by developing the idea of complex multilateralism, a hybrid form of multilateralism which they argue provides a better way of understanding how political institutions and practices are functioning in the space of the international. Also like Wapner, however, their efforts are motivated by a desire to promote particular forms of global governance: 'Finally, our inspiration for this study derives … in concern to understand the ways in which non-elites can participate in the process of governing.'[15]

Keck and Sikkink's is in some ways less tightly focused on the disciplinary problematic than the other two, although it is primarily framed in relation to disciplinary struggles and arguments:

> Reconceptualizing international society does not require abandoning a focus on actors and institutions to seek underlying forces that make states and other forms of association epiphenomenal. We do find, however, that enough evidence of change in the relationships among actors, institutions, norms, and ideas exists to make the world political system rather than an international society of states the appropriate level of analysis. We also believe that studying networks is extraordinarily valuable for tracking and ultimately theorizing about these evolving relationships.[16]

Their research focuses on the structure of activist activity, describing the functioning of what they call 'transnational advocacy networks' and arguing for the importance of these networks in international politics.

> Advocacy networks are significant transnationally and domestically. By building new links among actors in civil societies, states, and international organizations, they multiply the channels of access to the international system. In such issue areas as the environment and human rights, they also make international resources available to new actors in domestic political and social struggles. By thus blurring the boundaries between a state's relations with its own nationals and the recourse both citizens and states have to the international system, advocacy networks are helping to transform the practice of national sovereignty.[17]

[13] O'Brien et al., *Contesting Global Governance*, p. 206.
[14] Ibid., p. 207.
[15] Ibid., p. 207.
[16] Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, p. 212.
[17] Ibid., p. 1–2.

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Their work is grounded in a wealth of research, particularly interviews with activists, observation of and participation in activist practices at a wide variety of sites. The book documents the emergence of activist networks, their strategies and effects, and their potential broader implications and develops this into an argument for the contribution of these networks to the formation of international society and to the practice of contemporary international politics.

> The concept of a transnational advocacy network is an important element in conceptualizing the changing nature of the international polity and particularly in understanding the interaction between societies and states in the formulation of international policies. It suggests a view of multiple pathways into the international arena, a view that attributes to domestic actors a degree of agency that a more state-centric approach would not admit. . . . This approach suggests answers to some of the questions about how issues get on the international agenda, how they are framed as they are, and why certain kinds of international campaigns or pressures are effective in some cases but not in others.[18]

All three works thus share this aspiration to advance the understanding of international or world politics. They each develop arguments for why we must take activist activity into account in order to have a sufficient understanding of world politics. They each contribute to the opening up of new areas of study in the discipline, not only by acknowledging and representing the experiences of a range of international actors, but also by enabling issues and practices previously excluded from study into the discipline to become part of its conversations. In this way, then, they share their primary audience – who the knowledge they produce is for – and their primary or explicit political terrain, or sense of the project to which their work is meant to contribute. Like the anthropologists, they write most immediately and explicitly to a disciplinary community, a community of their institutional peers. This is most evident in the tight disciplinary framing each book sets out in its introduction.[19] And the political terrain they intervene in most explicitly is also a disciplinary terrain: each seeks to improve the understanding of the functioning of international politics, to enable the discipline to better explain and understand the structures and functioning of politics in the space of the international. They seek to contribute to a better representation of the world through the discipline, while at the same time sharing a more implicit aspiration to shape the practices of global governance in particular ways.

This is a significant political terrain, and their interventions are likely to have a range of effects, some obvious and others less so; some intended and others less so. Perhaps the most immediate and obvious is that each book seeks to open up space for new kinds of research, to enable and inspire researchers to spend more time exploring actors in the international that have previously been generally ignored. In so doing they contribute to a pluralisation of the discipline, the development of new research programmes and conversations and a much improved representation of

[18] Ibid., p. 217.

[19] Keck and Sikkink might protest that their framing is trans-disciplinary, in that it explicitly draws from several disciplines and resists reducing its relevance to IR. However, the work is no less framed in relation to disciplinary concerns because of this: its significance remains articulated in relation to disciplinary conventions of knowledge production, if those of more than one discipline.

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politics in the international. Insofar as the discipline itself plays a broader role in reflecting, representing and legitimating changes in how international politics functions, this may have a wider-ranging effect as well. Disciplinary knowledge has played an important role in legitimating forms of international order, particular institutions and practices. The representations, legitimations and contestations effected by the discipline circulate not only amongst the immediate academic community, but into larger contexts, through practices such as international law, policymaking, the constitution, recognition and legitimation of political subjectivities, and so on. They express and reframe globalised efforts to establish grounds upon which differences can be resolved. So, for example, these literatures are not only documenting or reflecting changes in the structure and character of international governance, they also seek to develop arguments for the dangers and possibilities inherent in these changes and for how these dangers and possibilities might or should be acted upon. Their contributions are thus important especially insofar as global institutions are being restructured, and the principles by which they are being restructured and the question of what groups should participate in such a restructuring are far from agreed. Literatures of this kind may thus provide languages, logics and perspectives which might inform these restructurings, or persuade relevant actors that representatives of social movements, for example, have a role to play in such restructurings. These are important political terrains indeed.

So what of my earlier concern about unintended consequences of such forms of knowledge production – is there any reason to push our exploration beyond the obvious contributions such works offer to the development of more progressive disciplinary understandings and thus perhaps to more progressive structures and institutions in international politics? I want to suggest there is. Building on the understanding above of the primary audience for the work and the disciplinary knowledge politics it seeks to intervene in, as well as how this terrain might be useful or relevant to activist struggles, I move now to develop a reading of the potential limits to this framing of research into contemporary activism, to an exploration of some of the broader terrains of knowledge politics that might be foreclosed by foregrounding disciplinary struggles in this way. My broader purpose is not to discount the relevance of the explicit terrains discussed above, but rather to unearth other terrains we might seek to engage through the study of activist activity.

First, then, and perhaps most obviously, the choice of IR scholars as the most explicit audience has certain limitations, some of them quite obvious: it is a small, largely but not entirely Anglo-American, well educated community which shares a very distinct and reified understanding of its intellectual turf (thus the necessity of engaging in disciplinary and disciplining conversations). The authors of all three works suggest that they intend their readership to stretch far beyond this audience, perhaps to include the activists who they studied or others interested in the future shape of the international, and it well may. However, such readers are often put off by books that are so heavily shaped by disciplinary conversations, finding their relevance primarily embedded in the discipline and thus unclear to them. One of the reasons for this is that few potential readers, such as international activists, actually approach their activity from the abstract 'outside', from which our research usually begins. Activists are much more likely to be working from a particular context, with specific aims, objectives, resources, and limitations. From that particular context, our representations of the international might not only be of limited use, they may

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appear to be quite alien, bearing little resemblance to the world politics they see or participate in. But is this a problem? After all, it is a critique relevant to a large percentage of academic work, and as suggested above, the same actors who find the work to be of limited use in understanding the international may seize upon it to help articulate, formulate or justify their actions. In this way the books might provide legitimacy for the aims of such actors, for example, their methods or their articulations of possible broader contexts for interpreting and responding to their activities. Here, though, we should be careful of attributing too much one-way causality to the discipline. I made the argument above that the discipline has played a role in legitimating international practices. This is a plausible claim, but it's much less certain how much of a role this is, whether the discipline primarily reflects international events back to it, or actually helps to set discursive boundaries or norms that shape its structure. This isn't a question that can be easily resolved, but any resolution of it suggests important limitations to considering the discipline as a primary tool in a struggle towards progressive political institutions. As others have documented, there have been normative discourses in IR from the beginning of the discipline, just as there have been 'realist' or power politics discourses.[20] Although we might wish to put our faith in the eventual triumph of the former, as we can see from contemporary events around Iraq, such faith should not substitute for effective political analysis. So my first hesitation about the ways in which the works above frame their audience and political project in the study of activism would reside in my scepticism about whether the discipline provides the most effective of political terrains, either because of its causal strength or its broader role and effects in representing world politics.

Perhaps more troubling, to reinforce the authority of the discipline as a legitimator of such activity maintains a certain idea of whose agency should shape the international: to what extent should we reinscribe the authority of our disciplinary conversations in this way, particularly when we own up to the relatively narrow intellectual and historic framing of the discipline? Here again we might reflect on the dilemma of the anthropologists: they sought to use their disciplinary authority to support the cause of people who they believed had little voice, but the unintended consequences of their actions played a role in maintaining certain forms of colonial relationships. Eventually, many recognised that it was as problematic to maintain the discipline in its inherited form as to relinquish responsibility entirely, thus posing them with the delicate political terrain they have since been struggling with, balanced between an effort to critically reinvent the discipline's authority and yet simultaneously maintain their commitment to support indigenous peoples in their complex political struggles. As suggested above, IR as a discipline is hardly innocent on these grounds. Similar critiques have been made of the extent to which the history and structure of the disciplinary conversations in IR have inscribed power relations in ways that have very real

[20] See, for example, Franke Wilmer's analysis in *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993) of the interplay between these discourses in relation to indigenous politics in IR, and my analysis of some of the dangers embedded in relying on the development of normative discourses: Karena Shaw, 'Indigeneity and the International'.

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political ramifications.[21] We may wish to dismiss these critiques, but to do so is to wander into the possibility not only of reinscribing unintended political effects, but also of rendering the discipline less and less relevant in a world where much political activity is focused on contesting these kinds of power relations. Even if we believe these critics, however, there is no simple way forward, as Anthropology's struggles can attest. Political terrains overlap, and to focus on one to the exclusion of others is to run significant risks. My second hesitation, then, involves the dangers of strengthening the legitimacy of the discipline, given the limits of its project and purpose under contemporary circumstances.

This leads to my third concern, which has to do with how the framing of research specifically in relation to the discipline of IR shapes its effects in particular ways. The creation of common reference points and understandings, of course, is what all conversation is about, and is not necessarily a bad thing. In the case of IR, this tends to work in ways that reify a particular 'subject': international or world politics, and a particular 'space' in which it happens. This 'space' may no longer be an assumed space 'between' sovereign states – the discipline has developed much more complex ways of delineating itself – but it continues to delineate itself nonetheless. In the books above this is indicated in part by the very choice of subject matter: *world* civic society, *multilateral* economic institutions, *global* social movements, and *trans*-national advocacy networks. Interestingly, in the Keck and Sikkink book, the imposition of these boundaries is explicitly resisted, not least as it becomes clear in several places that to measure the effects of transnational advocacy networks one must consider a spatial structure that ranges from the very local or particular right up to the international. The authors often seem uncomfortable with the task of assessing these networks' effects strictly by the criteria of their participation in the international, and in fact read them to be not only crossing the international-domestic-local divide constantly, but in this process also reframing the meaning of sovereignty itself. At the same time, however, the book concludes with an assessment of the contribution of these networks to *international* society, implicitly reinscribing a particular spatial, and disciplinary, framing. My concern is over what constraints we place on our subject matter, and its contribution to the development of diverse political terrains, in order to argue for its inclusion in a disciplinary conversation. We can certainly see and trace the activities of transnational advocacy networks at the international level, but does it make sense to primarily bound, measure, explain and understand their activity in this way? Or are these activists operating with very different concepts of political space, ones that are done a certain kind of violence by framing them into the international? The question here is whether it makes sense to stretch the boundaries of IR in our efforts to render it more inclusive, representative, or interesting, or whether we need to more rigorously reveal its limitations in order to enable a more substantial reconsideration of the political terrains effected by the contemporary disciplining of knowledge. On one reading, one that I don't think

[21] See, for example, R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Richard K. Ashley and R.B.J. Walker (eds.), 'Speaking the Language of Exile: Dissidence in International Studies', Special Issue of *International Studies Quarterly*, 34:3 (1990).

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goes entirely against the intention of the authors, Keck and Sikkink's book provides ample evidence for the latter approach, even though it concludes with and is framed by the former. My third hesitation, then, is about how the framing of activist activity necessary to intervene in disciplinary knowledge politics disciplines our understanding of it in ways that might be problematic, or at least renders such activity less challenging or enabling than it could be.

In all cases, the books make clearly delineated interventions into disciplinary conversations, ones that are aimed at enhancing the engagement of activist work within the discipline by detailing not only its immediate and intended effects, but its contributions to the broader development of international politics. From a disciplinary perspective, their 'knowledge politics' are clearly towards the recognition of these activities, their legitimation and refinement. None of the works, however, read the activist activities to substantially reveal the limitations of the ways of knowing the international that are reified through the discipline in ways that *should* require more than an extension of the boundaries of the discipline: in the end each forwards a revised framework which reinforces disciplinary adequacy. None of them argues for more than an adaptation of the boundaries, an act of greater flexibility or inclusion. Nor is there much explicit concern about the limits the disciplining places on the understanding of or relationship to the subjects of study. Is this a problem? The answer depends on whether one believes it makes sense to think the political through the limitations imposed by these disciplinary histories and constraints. My concern with these limitations leads to my three hesitations, about whether the discipline has enough causal authority to make it an effective site for knowledge politics; about whether we want to enhance its authority and legitimacy, given the relative narrowness of the discipline and its structural role in the social sciences, and about whether this framing actually makes sense as a way of understanding the radical potential of these practices. Although each of the texts discussed above, to my mind, significantly adds to our understanding of international or world politics, and does so in ways that highlight the activities of progressive political agents, I'm not sure they help us as much in our efforts to theorise the political, or indeed to think politically, under contemporary circumstances. I want to continue here to suggest a different way of understanding these activist practices, a different model through which to analyse the political through their activities, one that I think might enhance the political terrains enacted by the works above.

Strategic knowledge and/of the political

Now we arrive at a challenge: what other kinds of projects are there to be pursued, what other possibilities are there for studying activism, and what do they offer to us? The analysis above is driven by a sense that there are other possible knowledge terrains we might seek to activate, other ways we might seek to study activism or frame our intellectual work in order to respond differently to the question of what and whom knowledge is for under contemporary political circumstances. There are of course many kinds of knowledge being produced about activism other than those produced in relation to the discipline of IR. Perhaps most obviously, there is the material produced by activists themselves, which often seeks to articulate logics and

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justifications for their projects, to make sense of their own activities, convince others to participate, or set out possible strategies or trajectories for change.[22] These texts tend to combine research and analysis with polemic. They, too, are geared to particular audiences and participate in terrains of knowledge politics. While they provide an important 'snapshot' on movements and are probably the best material to read to get a sense of the varying goals of activists, their self-representations, assumptions, aims, objectives and political discourses, they tend towards the manifesto rather than the sustained analysis and provide a very partial view of the terrain of struggle. In fact, they generally don't even provide a very good idea of the underlying political analysis that guides and shapes the strategies pursued by campaigners, and they certainly don't provide a basis upon which to evaluate their broader effects. There are also approaches which seek to bridge the gap between activist and academic literatures, insofar as they combine analyses of particular movements or activist projects, and indeed are sometimes written by activists, with more recognisably 'academic' research and often quite explicitly political as well as intellectual projects.[23] They tend to be aimed at a broader audience than the IR literature above, and to contain more breadth of analysis and research than the activist manifestos. There are also libraries of work focusing on social movements more generally, often emerging from other disciplinary contexts. All of these contribute in different ways to our understanding of activism, and they each inform in different ways my approach below, but I would also seek to distance my project somewhat from them. This is primarily because I'm less interested in activism as a phenomenon in and of itself, but more in what we can learn from activism and activists to help us think politically today. My interest in this latter question emerges from the two questions that are driving my analysis: my concern with the challenge of conceptualising a progressive political project under contemporary circumstances, and with the role that knowledge production might play in this process. I begin by briefly revisiting my first reference point: the ambivalence of anthropological knowledge.

Interestingly, the study of activism by IR scholars relies upon the development of a relationship between researcher and researched (scholar and activist) that bears some similarity to the relationship between anthropologists and indigenous peoples. It is not, in contrast to the anthropologist/indigenous relationship, shaped by colonial relationships; this is a very important difference. However, it is similar in

[22] Book-length examples specifically focused on anti-globalisation activism include: Emma Bircham and John Charlton (eds), *Anti-Capitalism: A Guide to the Movement*, 2nd edn. (London: Bookmarks Publications, 2001); Kevin Danaher and Roger Burbach (eds.), *Globalize This! The Battle Against the World Trade Organization and Corporate Rule* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2000); Naomi Klein, *Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate* (London: Flamingo, 2002); Colin Hines, *Localization: A Global Manifesto* (London: Earthscan Publications, 2000); Waldon Bello, *Deglobalization: Ideas for a New World Economy* (London: Zed Books, 2002), Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, Nicholas Faraclas and Claudia Von Werlof (eds.), *There is an Alternative: Subsistence and Worldwide Resistance to Corporate Globalization* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2001). Of course, much more of this material is available in other formats, particularly on the Internet.

[23] Relevant examples of this kind of literature would be Gills (ed.), *Globalization and the Politics of Resistance*; Michael Edwards and John Gaventa (eds.), *Global Citizen Action* (London: Earthscan Publications, 2001); Joshua Karliner, *The Corporate Planet* (Sierra Club Books, 1997); Robin Broad (ed.), *Global Backlash* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

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that both sets of researchers seek to understand and represent the meanings created by their subjects: the ideas that shape their actions, the strategies they use to achieve their goals, the networks and structures they create, their effects in the world, their imaginaries of the future. Anthropologists sought such knowledge from indigenous peoples in order to contribute to our understanding of 'culture'; IR scholars might seek knowledge from activists in order to contribute to a broader understanding of 'world politics'. In each case it is a relatively abstracted object constructed through the knowledge process – 'culture' or 'world politics' – that is being 'known'; the assumption is that the process of knowing and the knowledge produced are essentially neutral (or objective), and the beneficiaries of this knowledge are also essentially abstract: humanity in general. This is presumably knowledge that is valid from any perspective, in any context, to any reader. This is not to say that these constructions have no correspondence with or impact on the immediate lives of those studied; quite the contrary. It is to point out the particular dynamic of knowing that has been set up: in both cases the subjects are being studied in order to extract knowledge about something abstracted from them, something bigger than them, other than them. Their insights, practices, or knowledge are being objectified in a particular way. The similarity between the relationships in both cases can be extended in that both kinds of research require observation and engagement, involvement with and participation of the 'subjects' of their research, thus setting up an interesting question about reciprocity. This is highlighted by the fact that in both cases, researchers and researched have essentially different projects: indigenous peoples' cultural practices – and the knowledge of them and embedded in them – were performed for reasons quite unrelated to anthropologists' desires to know about and preserve them. Activists have their own political ambitions, and although they might find the discipline of IR relevant to them at some point, their primary concern is not the development of the discipline. In both cases, then, the activity of the researcher is in some way parasitic on the activity of the researched. However, the effects of parasites are not always negative for the hosts, as we saw in the reference point above; even 'bad old' anthropology has proved to be important to indigenous peoples.

So how might this similarity in the relationship between researcher and researched be relevant to my project here? Part of my answer is already perhaps obvious: at the same time as this kind of research produces a more sophisticated picture of world politics (or culture) in some ways, it also potentially reifies it in ways that render the knowledge useful primarily in reproducing a disciplinary conversation, a shared set of terms and assumptions that frame the subject matter. This keeps the knowledge one step distant from political terrains other than those discussed above. It keeps the knowledge one step distant from the immediate political terrains of the researched, for example. Further, although the research relies upon the generosity of its subjects, it often provides its subjects little agency in the way of shaping the research project to be mutually beneficial, leaving the subject at the mercy of the researcher, and the well-intentioned researcher to hope that the subject might at some point find some value in the research. But should we care? Surely, after all, the broader power relations are different – the projects of researchers in both cases, the projects of the researched, and the power relationships between researcher and researched are importantly very different. Activists haven't complained about this use of their knowledge, and are no doubt happy to have their work recognised and valued.

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However, one of the interesting developments in the anthropologist-indigenous relationship might suggest a different possibility inherent in the knowledge of activists, and the knowledge produced through the researcher-subject relationship. Over the last decade, there has been a wide-ranging recognition of the potential value of indigenous knowledge about the world on its own terms. There has also been a recognition of the distinct character of the kind of knowledge they hold, or the terms themselves. This is expressed not only in the scramble to document indigenous knowledge about particular flora and fauna – not least as guides to future pharmaceutical research – but also their knowledge about the ecosystems they live in and how they can be managed to be both productive and ecologically sustainable. This scramble has been characterised both by a recognition of the inherent value of this knowledge, but also an effort to ensure that it is protected, that it is not separated or abstracted from its holders, ostensibly for the benefit of all mankind, but more pragmatically, for the benefit of a relatively few investors. Indigenous peoples themselves appear happy enough to share their knowledge, but only under conditions which ensure that their communities benefit from it in some way.[24] Some anthropologists, particularly ethnobotanists, have assisted them in their efforts to ensure this by coordinating research projects, and structuring these research projects in ways that ensure the communities providing the knowledge see the benefit of their contributions, both through ensuring the results are reproduced in formats that the communities have access to, and by assisting indigenous peoples in securing patent protection of their knowledge, based in part on its uniqueness and potential value. This role contrasts with the earlier role of anthropologists in relation to indigenous peoples, not least in the kind of knowledge sought from indigenous peoples, and the relationship between these knowledges and indigenous peoples themselves. As indigenous peoples have become more aware of the value of their knowledge, and of the kinds of models available to protect it, they have become much more protective of it, frequently demanding a role not only in the distribution of benefits from the knowledge, but in the actual research projects. The politicisation of indigenous knowledge has produced a more constrained research environment for the researcher, and has produced very different kinds of research. Some researchers bemoan the constraints, others are distinctly aware that the research they produce – even as it may not be controlled by them in the way we might expect as academics – is being used by their subjects themselves for their own purposes, contributing to a more general empowerment of these communities in a variety of ways.

What relevance might this have for the study of activist knowledges? One hint emerges from an argument developed by William Chaloupka in relation to environmental social theory.[25] Drawing on the work of Foucault, Chaloupka argues

[24] See, for example, Marie Battiste and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge* (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Purich Publishing, 2000), or Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Totnes, Devon: Green Books, in association with The Gaia Foundation, 1998). For a more wide-ranging consideration of the relationship between contemporary researchers and indigenous peoples, see Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

[25] William Chaloupka, 'There must be some way out of here: strategy, ethics and environmental politics', in Warren Magnusson and Karena Shaw (eds.), *A Political Space: Reading the Global through Clayoquot Sound* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 67–90.

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that to theorise the political today requires that we think strategically, that we not only think about the ethical or structural characteristics of politics, but that we are attentive to its strategic character. On Chaloupka's reading, this requires attentiveness to relations of power, to their particular configurations at specific sites, and that we attune our analyses to these particularities, resisting the impulse towards more 'global' forms of analysis. It is this kind of strategic analysis which is likely to be effective in practice, not only the practice of activists, but also that of intellectuals seeking to understand contemporary relations of power. Chaloupka's analysis is directed towards both activists and environmental social theorists, as he feels that both are too likely to assume the strategic and focus on the ethical, on developing arguments for how society *should* organise its relationships with nature or with each other. He argues that this provides only a very limited approach to take if we wish to think politically today. His context is thus rather precise, but in some ways not that different from my own, in that the terrain I've set out thus far is very much about thinking between the disciplinary practices of IR and the political practices of activists. I want to explore here what it might mean to think and write about the strategic element of politics, and what opportunities this might offer as a model for thinking politically, for producing knowledge that responds to some of the concerns I've raised above.

In Chaloupka's chapter, he uses the example of specific activists' strategic thinking as a way of illustrating more generally what it means to think strategically about politics, and thus to think politically today. Crucially, then, he is not arguing that activists know the way forward, particularly, or even that we need to think like activists, but he is using the strategic knowledge of activists as a model for what it might mean to think politically today, or how the practice of the intellectual might need to change under contemporary circumstances. This intrigues me not least because it resonates with my reading of some of the potential embedded in activist knowledges as a way of knowing the world, and, in turn, of making an issue known to the world through campaigning. However, this kind of knowledge isn't easy to access: it doesn't often emerge in public, where activists are focused on the mobilisation of public opinion or the justification of their activities, and thus tend to rely more on ethical absolutes than strategic analysis. It is more often evident in informal conversations, or behind the scenes planning of campaigns. It is often knowledge that isn't explicitly valued by the holders of it themselves, or is downplayed in conversation: strategising tends to happen behind closed doors; it isn't the kind of knowledge activists like to present publicly. As such it isn't often studied or understood, is rarely taken seriously by academics and generally is kept behind the scenes by activists.[26] While this immediately suggests some challenges in writing directly about the strategic knowledge of activists, this doesn't necessarily imply that it isn't a model or kind of knowledge worth exploring further.

What are the characteristics of this kind of knowledge, though, that might make it worth pursuing further? Here my analysis builds on and extends Chaloupka's

[26] Interestingly, this isn't true of Keck and Sikkink's work, which uses activist campaigns precisely as a focal point for understanding activist networks. It is partly because of this that I find their book to be the most rich and provocative of those above, as it is capable of a counter-reading that situates it on a broader political terrain than the one it explicitly frames for itself.

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insights, drawing on my own experience of a particular set of activist campaigns.[27] Some of the most obvious, but I think less distinctive, characteristics of this kind of knowledge are its very current, mobile, contingent and creative qualities. In order for activist campaigns to be successful, they must be built on some understanding of issues at stake that is persuasive to their intended audiences, which can be very diverse. This requires that activists have access to up to date research and are able to adapt that research to relevant audiences and contexts: perhaps a lay audience with no understanding of the issues one day, a debate with relevant experts in front of an audience with immediate familiarity with the issues another, policymakers with invested interests and yet a different set of concerns on a third.[28] Each of these contexts requires a set of strategic judgements about not only the background and understanding of the audience, but also its political salience: what kind of understanding of the issues they need in order to be able to act in ways that will enhance the campaign. These judgements rely on a broader reading of political terrains faced by the campaign, and the ability to produce relevant information and adapt it appropriately. The skills to do this are impressive, but the underlying reading of the political terrain – the strategic terrain – is what I think we can learn a great deal from.

In order to plan effective campaigns, activists have to have a complex mapping of the political terrain they face, beginning from where they perceive themselves to be in relation to the issue or problem they seek to address, and moving on to an analysis of how this terrain can be shaped or manipulated: what needs to change – policy, public opinion, political institutions, economic relations – in what combinations; what forces are likely to effect such change; what institutions or people can be pressured, and in what ways. One of the most important characteristics of this kind of knowledge is thus precisely that it is usually quite explicitly situated: it is grounded in a reading of a particular site or condition. It then moves out from this site to a consideration of how relations of power are arrayed, what the world looks like from there, in relation to particular problematics, campaigns, or issues. It thus seeks to negotiate from the particular and into a universal (not *the* universal). Why a universal? Because it seeks to mobilise forces, to produce agreement, to establish universals of particular kinds: definitions of human rights, practices of ecological management, enactments of equality or justice, and so on. Although there is a general tendency in both IR and Politics as disciplines to devalue situated, specific knowledges of this kind in favour of the 'objective', or distanced understanding of

[27] I have described one such set of campaigns in 'Encountering Clayoquot: Reading the Political', in Magnusson and Shaw (eds.), *A Political Space*, pp. 25–66. It is probably worth clarifying here that I am referring to specific activist campaigns rather than to general social movements – thus my choice of language throughout the article. Although there has been terrific work produced on social movements, in the context of the argument I am presenting here, a 'social movement' is no less an abstraction than 'international politics', and work that assumes and reproduces these abstractions potentially suffers from the same problematics identified in the previous section. Nonetheless, as suggested by the previous footnote, significant resources for studying activist practices are embedded in this kind of research.

[28] Sometimes they rely on academic research, but often they require research quite different from that produced by academics. Partly as a consequence, over the past few years, entire NGO operations have come to focus almost exclusively on producing this kind of research. Examples include Corporate Watch (http://www.corporatewatch.org). See also the kinds of research reports produced by Greenpeace (http://www.greenpeace.org/international_en/reports/).

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the political triumphed in social scientific literatures, significant arguments have been developed by theorists and others that this kind of knowledge has the potential to provide a kind of objectivity that not only addresses some of the major criticisms of the form of objectivity often pursued in the disciplines of Politics and IR, but also provides a more politically engaged and enabling form of knowledge. This argument, made perhaps most famously by Donna Haraway,[29] but in different forms in other literatures, emphasises the ways in which knowledge is always already situated – no knowledge is unmediated – and when the knowledge is explicit about its situation this enables a consideration of its situatedness to inform its interpretation. In the case of the strategic knowledge of activists, for example, this would open the question – and provide a basis upon which to evaluate – of what institutions were relevant to the particular campaign, and why. This in turn raises questions of what political institutions are for, what practices constitute them, what can they effect, and how they work. Thus, for example, if a campaign to change forestry regulations evades the body primarily responsible for making forestry relations – say, the sovereign authority, what does this reveal about the scope and character of the sovereign authority? Embedded in the strategic decision is a political evaluation, an assessment of how the institution does or doesn't work in relation to the issue in question. If we trace the campaign through, we can evaluate the judgement, assess not only whether it was an astute one, but what its broader implications are for understanding the processes and structures of politics, the relations of power that constitute the strategic field of politics. While the situated character of the assessment of the institution or site would obviously not be adequate as an assessment of that institution's political role or possibility – another activist campaign may find it to be crucial in its struggle because of the difference in the political terrain it faces – it does potentially provide us with a way to understand better in practice the relations of power that constitute and frame that institution.

This leads to a second characteristic of strategic knowledge that is important. In Haraway's development of the idea of situated knowledges, she emphasises that it is not only the situatedness that contributes to the form of the objectivity, but the ways in which that situatedness is revealed through encounters with other situated knowledges. In other words, no subject, or situation, is adequate as a site through which to know the world. It is in the encounter with other knowledges that one's vision, or objectivity, is honed, because the 'truth' of any subject can only be revealed from a wide variety of perspectives. So how does this relate to the strategic knowledge of activists? In its situatedness, its movement from the particular to universals, a campaign of course has to encounter and negotiate other particulars, other situated knowledges. Coalitions must be built amongst groups or individuals whose situation may coincide but differ in important ways. Strategies must be planned that maintain unities while respecting the diversities that result from different situations. Compromises must be struck that acknowledge not only shared distant goals, but differential resources, contexts, or abilities to work towards those

[29] Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 183–203.

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goals. So, for example, although a particular site or institution may be problematic from the perspective of one group or campaign, the same site or institution might be crucial for another, thus creating a tension over how that institution should be dealt with: should it be strengthened, and if so, how? Can it contribute to both projects? If not, what does this indicate about the compatibility of the projects, or about the adequacy of the institution? In the longer run – and here we begin to get a glimpse of the wealth that this kind of 'objective' evaluation of a political institution might give us – what tensions must an institution negotiate, what forces is it vulnerable to, what kinds of authorities might be produced through it and how would they be constituted? To 'know' a contemporary political institution or site – such as the Forest Stewardship Council, a sovereign state, the World Trade Organisation, a corporation – through a variety of strategic situated knowledges, such as those produced in and through campaigns, would be a valuable thing, providing us not only with a sense of the potentially diverse effects of that institution in the world, but precisely of the relations of power that constitute, enable and are deployed through it. This would be different from assessing, as some of the literatures above seek to, the extent to which these campaigns affect the institution, and in fact it would not necessarily provide a very satisfying answer to that question. It would be a very different kind of knowledge, a knowledge of relations of power, a knowledge that I want to suggest is vital to thinking politically today.

In addition to the insight provided by its situatedness and the interaction with other situated knowledges, there is another characteristic of strategic knowledge that I think potentially renders it valuable. It is a knowledge grounded in both research and experience, experience gained through multiple campaigns – successful and not – and through the campaigning itself, through interactions with others, collective strategising and decision-making, capacity-building. It is also a knowledge that comes to be expressed in the world through a campaign: an effective campaign enacts and changes relations of power; it restructures terrains of power. Campaigns thus constantly seek to, and frequently succeed in, politicising events, actions, institutions, practices; changing how they are perceived, authorised, and enabled, and what their effects are in the world. They create new nodal points or sites of power and authority. They change peoples' perceptions of their worlds and their material circumstances. As such they not only strategise across diverse contexts, spanning the local and the global, but they rearticulate relationships between local and global, creating new political spaces and sites. They link the local and global not only conceptually, but practically; they construct relationships that effectively reorder relations of power. This is by no means to say this is always effective, let alone 'progressive'. It is to say that they are one of the many sites through which the space and time of the political is being reshaped, and they thus express the logics and relations of power through which these reshapings are being effected.[30] Embedded in these kinds of knowledges, then, are perspectives about how relationships between universals and particulars are being rearticulated through contemporary practices.

[30] This latter set of effects – the ways in which these practices are reshaping world politics – is what most interests the authors of the texts discussed above. My approach would seek to extend this interest towards an engagement with the strategic reading of the political that shapes activist practice in this regard.

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The above is a quick survey of complex promise, admittedly, but I hope it begins to suggest some of the potential insight contained within of the kind of knowledge produced in and through the strategic thinking activists develop in order to forward their campaigns, and how that might contribute to the question of how to think politically today. I don't seek to suggest here that it is a sufficient understanding of the political, but I do think it expresses a kind of understanding of the political today that is importantly lacking in, say, the efforts of many of us to consider how processes of 'globalisation' are reframing political possibility, or to consider how to theorise the political. But my claim here is based on a sense of its promise, of how it can help us to think politically. The final section of the article explores this promise further, both in terms of the broader implications and challenges posed by the development of such approaches to theorising the political.

What knowledge for whom?

The article thus far has focused on illuminating a particular political terrain that I think could productively be engaged as we seek to explore the challenges posed by theorising the political today, and on gesturing towards one way this engagement might proceed. I began with the complex politics of knowledge production enacted in relationships between anthropologists and indigenous peoples, seeking to provide a reference point through which to consider the political relevance of terrains of knowledge production. It may seem to be a story far removed from the 'realities' of research in IR, but it suggests both the necessity and potential of interrogating the consequences – intentional and unintentional – of knowledge production, as well as the tensions embedded in any effort to do so. The texts I engaged in the second section indicate the extent to which the discipline of IR has likewise responded to some of the challenges posed by contemporary developments, revealing the limitations of inherited assumptions about the political inherent in the discipline, and effectively expanding this assumption through documenting a much richer set of political practices. My own work is parasitic upon this: they have opened the discipline in particular ways, but these openings still resist an explicit engagement with the questions of for whom and for what political purpose their knowledge is produced, even as the research is clearly motivated by explicit concerns in this regard. My efforts in the third section are towards identifying a different kind of knowledge, and practice of knowledge production, we might pursue in order to theorise the political, one that may enable us to respond more effectively to the dual challenges I identified at the beginning of the article, about the project of progressive politics and the role of knowledge and knowledge production under contemporary circumstances.

I've argued that there may be considerable potential embedded in the kinds of knowledges produced by activists in their strategising, that these knowledges can help us to think politically, or theorise the political today. Some of the potential embedded in this kind of knowledge is suggested above. In particular, insofar as institutions which in the past have 'bounded' our understanding of politics, such as the sovereign state, no longer provide the same kind of frame for this understanding, we need to open the question more rigorously of where and how we should look in

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order to understand the political. In other words, rather than looking in familiar places and documenting how changes in political practice are happening in them, beginning from the strategic maps produced by political actors might draw our attention to political practices and institutions where we wouldn't otherwise have looked. They might also help us to understand the relations of power as they are expressed at different sites in ways other than we are used to. Each of these would contribute to an understanding of the political today that might not only be more accurate, but more enabling, providing a better basis for understanding the relations of power through which political possibilities are being constituted.

Much as in Anthropology, those of us who seek to think politically today need to establish emerging conversations that are geared to different audiences in order to respond to changing knowledge/power terrains. Insofar as this kind of knowledge requires confrontation and engagement with other situated knowledges, it might also provide an important ground through which to constitute conversations in ways that could effectively disrupt the eurocentric character of the discipline of IR, or indeed, the political terrain enacted by the modern disciplining of knowledge. If an understanding of a particular institution or site of politics required engagement with a variety of perspectives, with the meaning of that institution in a variety of strategic political contexts, this would reveal the limitations embedded in the relatively narrow perspectives provided by the discipline. In order to understand the emerging practices and forms of international politics, we need to create conversations that will enable us to see the international from and through the particular, without assuming that any particular is necessarily representative of the whole. This kind of knowledge could be contributed to by some kinds of activists, who might be well placed to contribute to an understanding of the respatialisation of the international, to understand how politics is working, and what relations of power are being constituted through it. This in turn has the potential to enable conversations across different understandings and experiences of the international, conversations through which differences might be mediated rather than resolved.

Perhaps the most interesting potential embedded in this model resides in this question of who the knowledge we produce is for. If we pursue collaborative projects with activists, we may find our research practices and questions being significantly shaped by their concerns. I am not, however, recommending that we become 'hired guns' for activist research. As I suggested above, the kinds of research activists need differs in important ways from the kinds of questions we are used to posing, and this is not entirely a bad thing. As we saw in relation to indigenous peoples, it is not always obvious to us what kinds of knowledge we need. One of the interesting things about this approach is that it opens collaborative possibilities with others as well, not least students. In the complex and changing environments of university education today, we are often pulled in very different directions: should we be teaching skills or knowledge? What kinds of knowledge will be useful to our students? As we face agendas of widening participation, or the increased participation of groups previously marginalised from university education, we struggle at times to explain the relevance of the knowledge to which we seek to introduce them. The abstractions of IR, for example, have appeared to former indigenous students of mine to have about as much relevance to them as life on Mars. They were interested in how to help their communities to achieve self-determination; what relevance did regime theory have to this? One of the most effective ways I have found to enable

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them to find relevance in these debates is precisely to assist them to map strategic terrains of possibility for their aspirations. How? By tracing the routes taken by other communities in struggles they came to see as simultaneously similar to and different from their own; by confronting them with other situated knowledges and helping them to develop their own. Through such a pedagogical exercise, their own sense of the political terrains of possibility expanded. Suddenly they not only saw the relevance of institutions and sites of politics which had previously seemed distant and irrelevant to them, such as the United Nations, the Internet, major environmental groups, or international trade regimes, but also the value of understanding their contexts, functions and impacts. However, the resources to which one has access in order to develop such an understanding are relatively limited, and the interpretative work necessary to set this up as a project and to develop the analysis of the strategic terrain is significant. More research that is attentive to this way of thinking politically would significantly enhance teaching possibilities, potentially enabling the teaching of politics to involve a kind of politicisation and capacity building, to enable students not only to see their situation in the world more clearly, but in a more politically engaged way.

All of this is not to suggest that there aren't significant challenges and dangers posed by this model of knowledge, of course, or that we can be certain of the consequences of the terrains of power it might constitute. There is always a danger in triumphing a partiality of perspective; partial perspectives run the risk of myopia. Further, situated knowledges might challenge and enhance partial perspectives in ways that are enabling, but the reverse can happen as well: engagement with other situated knowledges can produce knowledge that continues to be partial and misleading in important ways. Understanding political institutions and practices in this way could disempower as well as empower, not least as relations of power are rarely neutral, never simple to untangle, and always ambivalent. The rigorous development of this idea of objectivity is thus crucial, not least beginning with the insistence that objectivity requires a broad range of engagement with other situated knowledges. As a criterion through which to evaluate knowledge claims it is no less workable than existing practices of epistemological evaluation; as a teaching practice it poses challenges of comprehensiveness and adequacy.

I began with the story about relationships between anthropologists and indigenous peoples not only as a cautionary tale, or indeed as a guide to a way forward, but as a reference point to consider as we try to think through not only how we produce our knowledge, but who we produce it for, and in what kind of responsibility or political terrain it is embedded. I emphasise the strategic character of activist knowledge not as a 'way out' or 'way forward', but as another reference point to consider as we try to perceive what the characteristics of the knowledge we produce are or should be. I think there are kinds of knowledge produced through these practices that have the potential not only to enhance our understanding of contemporary politics, but to help us think, act and teach politically under contemporary circumstances.

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