



Learning Communities

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEARNING IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS
SPECIAL ISSUE: DECOLONISING RESEARCH PRACTICES



Number 22
DECEMBER 2017

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Publisher

www.cdu.edu.au/northern-institute/lcj

Northern Institute

Faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY

Darwin, Northern Territory 0909 AUSTRALIA

CRICOS Provider No. 00300K | RTO Provider No. 0373

ISSN 1329-1440 (online)

ISSN 2202-7904 (print)

Design and Print

The Exhibitionist

Phone: 08 8981 3166

Artwork Credit

Artist: Marina Strocchi

Title: Mystery Train 2007

Etching (workshop proof edn 60)

24.5 x 20cm [image]

Collaborators: Leon Stainer & Dian Darmansjah

Printer: Dian Darmansjah

Gifted by the artist & Northern Editions, 2007

Charles Darwin University Art Collection

CDU 1585

All research articles published in this journal have undergone rigorous double blind peer review, based on initial editor screening, anonymous refereeing by independent expert referees, and consequent revision by article authors when required. Please cite articles within this journal accordingly.



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**NORTHERN
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Authors

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Nia Emmanouil is a first-generation settler Australian born in Melbourne of Macedonian ancestry. Nia is an interdisciplinary researcher and educator who has spent the last 16 years working alongside First Nations and other communities in Victoria and Northern Australia. She is currently a researcher and lecturer at Southern Cross University working in the areas of Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous Jurisprudence.

Lisa Hall is a fourth generation settler Australian. She was born in Tasmania and grew up north of Melbourne. Lisa relocated to central Australia 18 years ago and has lived and worked in remote communities throughout the desert ever since. She has worked as a teacher, a curriculum advisor and a teacher-lecturer across many remote Indigenous schools and is currently working for Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education as a lecturer in the Preparation for Tertiary Success course.

Debbie Hohaia grew up in a working-class family in Aotearoa, during the 1960s. Debbie descends from her proud Taranaki heritage on her father's side and her British ancestry on her mother's side. Both paternal and maternal grandfathers served in their respective militaries, and it was simply a matter of time before Debbie would follow suit. Debbie is a member of the Australian Defence Force and currently lectures part-time in the field of Indigenous Knowledge and teacher education at Charles Darwin University.

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Robyn Ober is a Mamu/Djirribal woman from the rainforest region of North Queensland. Robyn has an extensive educational background, teaching in early childhood, primary and tertiary educational contexts in remote, rural and urban settings in Australia. She has a strong interest in both-ways education, educational leadership and Indigenous Australian languages, in particular, Aboriginal English. Robyn currently works as a research fellow with the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.

Sam Osborne has worked in Aboriginal Education since 1995 in a range of roles and locations, including teacher and Principal at Ernabella Anangu School in the remote North West of South Australia. He completed a PhD looking at education in the tristate remote region of Central Australia and is currently Associate Director for Regional Engagement (APY Lands) at the University of South Australia. He has worked in remote education research and evaluation, corporation interpreting and Pitjantjatjara Language programs within UniSA.

Moana Tane is an Indigenous woman from the Waipoua Forest area of Te Tai Tokerau, Aotearoa New Zealand. On her father's side she is Te Roroa and Ngati Korokoro and on her mother's side, she is Ngati Hine from the sub-tribe Te Kau i Mua. Moana currently resides in the Central Desert, in a small Aboriginal community called Warakurna, Western Australia. Moana acknowledges and pays respects to the Elders and Leaders from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations across this great and vibrant country and works collaboratively to improve health outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Editorial

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It is an exciting time for those working with Indigenous Knowledges. Now more than ever, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars are questioning the foundations, boundaries, limitations and assumptions of Western research and creating ‘spaces’ for Indigenous philosophies, research and pedagogies to live in the academy and other institutions. One such ‘space’ emerged through the creation of an Indigenist research cohort in 2011, within the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Education at Charles Darwin University. This special issue grew out of relationships formed between members of this learning community and an invitation to other Indigenous and non-Indigenous early career researchers to share their reflections on decolonising knowledge practices.

Much has been written, particularly in Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Canada, about the need to decolonise Western (dominant) research practices (Chilisa, 2011; Christie, 2014; Martin, 2008; Moreton Robinson, 2003; Sherwood, 2010; Smith, 2012; Smith 2002). Since Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s seminal text *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* was first published in 1999, the ‘Indigenous research’ landscape has shifted significantly. As Smith (2012) states, Indigenous peoples and communities have gone from being research ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’, with their knowledges subjugated, to now being recognised and taken seriously as agents and knowledge experts.

The work of Smith (2012) and other Indigenous scholars has provoked revolutionary ways of thinking about ‘the roles knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies and knowledge institutions play in decolonising and social transformation’ (Smith, 2012, p. 24). The articulation of Indigenist research practices (Chilisa, 2011; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008; Martin, 2008; Rigney, 1999; Wilson 2008) has offered both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers a theoretical framework and research methods for carrying forward this decolonising movement. Yet, to what extent have developments in decolonising and Indigenising research practice transformed us as researchers and the institutions within which we work?

This special issue offers insight into the transformative potential of doing decolonising research: for the researcher, their collaborators and the relationships through which their research is enacted. It also highlights some of the complexities and successes involved in undertaking and applying research that decolonises and evolves Western philosophy and institutions.

The articles in this collection make two distinct contributions to the literature on decolonising and Indigenising research: firstly, they sustain the challenge to the supremacy and privileging of Eurocentric ideologies within the academy, and secondly, they build on the foundational work undertaken by Indigenist scholars to evolve, adapt and apply decolonising and Indigenising knowledge practices to new contexts.

The scope of this issue focuses on recent research emerging from early career researchers and practitioners in the fields of health, education and defence. While these papers respond to Australian contexts, they also highlight a diversity of approaches being used in international contexts. Each in their own way, the researchers contributing to this issue explore how they encountered and navigated systemic barriers and systems of power as they pursued their research questions. Collectively, these papers reflect the philosophical work that is required for researchers to create space for difference and diversity, predominantly through approaches that generate ontological and epistemological openness. Working together, between and through multiple knowledge systems, is a strong common thread between the methodologies reflected upon in this issue. Additional core themes that weave together these contributions include, negotiating our situatedness to people, place and institutions, the central importance of relationships as part of the research process and stories acting as a place and space for research.

Storytelling as ‘yarning’ is explored by PhD candidate Robyn Ober, who in her paper writes about Aboriginal English as an academic discourse in Indigenous Tertiary Education. Ober unpacks her choice of this methodology, which for her was based on the cultural embeddedness of these approaches within Aboriginal society.

Similarly to Ober, Stuart Barlo reflects upon his use of yarning as a methodology in his own doctoral research, in this instance, to explore the restoration of contemporary Aboriginal men’s dignity. Barlo draws attention to the transformative potential of research, reflecting on how his collaborators trained him to decolonise his research practices and develop culturally safe and ethical research methods.

Ethical issues related to research methodology are further discussed by Sam Osborne, who reflects on his doctoral research, ‘Staging standpoint dialogue in tristate education: privileging Anangu voices’. With the distinct aim of privileging Anangu voices in the research, Osborne adopts the Pitjantjatjara language term ‘kulini’ (*listen to, hear*) to articulate how he performed ‘ethical listening’ as an ‘outsider’ located at a cultural interface.

Exploration of the strengths and limitations of insider/outsider perspectives is taken up and further developed by Debbie Hohaia in her paper. She highlights some of the advantages and disadvantages of conducting decolonising research both within and external to two military organisations and a Yolŋu community in North East Arnhem Land. Hohaia explores the tensions and inherent roles and responsibilities she enacted as a researcher, employee of the Australian Defence Force and as Indigenous woman from New Zealand, when undertaking her doctoral research, ‘The potential benefits to the Australian Defence Force educational curricula of the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems’.

Also reflecting on research that deals with the key theme of insider/outsider perspectives are Indigenist researchers Moana Tane and Matire Harwood. They offer methodological insights from Tane’s pending PhD thesis: ‘Talking about Smoking in East Arnhem Land: Denormalisation, Stigmatisation and Leadership’. In this research collaboration around the deeper meanings and beliefs about ‘ŋarali’ (tobacco) within the context of Yolŋu tradition, history and culture, Tane and Harwood highlight the generativity of decolonising research for both researchers and collaborators.

Lisa Hall articulates processes that enable respectful and mutually beneficial collaborations with seven Aboriginal Teachers from central Australia, through her recently completed PhD, 'Moving Deeper into Difference – Developing meaningful and effective pathways into teacher education for Indigenous adults from remote communities'. Hall's insights point towards the generative potential of paying close attention to the ontologies and epistemologies that we enact when we work together.

Nia Emmanouil offers the final paper for this collection. She demonstrates how a methodology of ontological openness enabled her to decolonise her doctoral research practice and make visible the ontological politics of place being enacted on the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail, in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The methodology developed here points towards the broader implications of supporting respectful dialogue between Indigenous and Western peoples and realities. It challenges new forms of colonisation that continue to define engagements between Indigenous peoples and the State, particularly through neoliberal development agendas.

This issue provokes the reader to consider what *makes* research, or knowledge production, 'decolonising'. In presenting accounts and reflections of *doing* such generative work, these papers offer interventions for other researchers to deconstruct and disrupt their own research practice.

Dr Debbie Hohaia, Dr Lisa Hall and Dr Nia Emmanouil
Editors

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Kapati Time: Storytelling as a Data Collection Method in Indigenous Research

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Keywords: Aboriginal English, Indigenous knowledges, Indigenous research methodologies, storytelling, both-ways.

Abstract

There is currently a strong movement among First Nations researchers in Australia and globally to draw on their own epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies in academic research. It is evident that Indigenous researchers are pushing back the boundaries in the research academy to make space for a new, fresher way to do research by drawing on old traditional Indigenous ways. Our Indigenous ways of working, being and making-meaning appeal to me as a researcher, because these are my strength, these are familiar to me, these are what I know. By drawing on my own epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies, I am bringing my own thought process, ethical considerations, and culturally appropriate ways of carrying out research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait people.

Introduction

This paper will explore the place and space of storytelling in my current PhD research study titled, *Aboriginal English as an Academic Discourse in Indigenous Tertiary Education*. This is a qualitative study exploring the role of Aboriginal English as a cultural and identity marker and contributor to academic discourse in tertiary educational teaching and learning spaces.

Aboriginal English as a dialect of English, is now recognized as the first language of many Aboriginal Australians. This form of communication is rich, highly structured and a complex form of the English language, and it is widely appropriated in the social and cultural domains of Aboriginal people. (Ober & Bell, 2012, p. 60)

Storytelling or 'yarning' is embedded within the processes and structure of Aboriginal society. Stories are empowering and uplifting, giving access to layers of deep cultural and historical knowledge that make up the social and cultural identity of Aboriginal people. In this paper I will discuss the process and the purpose of using stories as part of my research methodology, drawing on the 'narrative enquiry' approach which I found to be more culturally inclusive and relevant to Aboriginal ways of being, doing and knowing.

Stories in Aboriginal Families

For many Aboriginal people, storytelling is often referred to as 'yarning', where people gather informally to relax and reflect on stories in recent or past history. Storytelling is also about creativity, it is where people come together to share knowledge through retelling, re-presenting

and creating new stories through new experiences, new people and new places. Significant family histories and old stories are retold in new ways as a way to bring greater understanding to younger family members who are still learning their social and cultural identity.

Aboriginal people often use humour to tell light-hearted stories, to retell a funny event, or even to show a comical side of a serious topic. Stories are often used to teach about cultural morals, behaviour, boundaries, rules, attitudes and values. In my own family I have observed my elders sharing short sharp oral recounts to guide younger members in culturally appropriate behaviour in particular social settings.

As Aboriginal families are traditionally quite large, they often have their own story tellers who are effective communicators within the social group. There are identified people who can retell stories in a unique way which totally captures the message, emotion, characters, morals or punchline of the story. When I think about ‘yarning’, I think about what I refer to in my family as ‘kapati’ (cup of tea) time. This is usually when family members (young and old) gather together for a kapati, a meal or feast. This is part of our family’s social engagement, interaction and the strengthening of kinship ties. There is something good, exciting and appealing about coming together as a family, but this is also true about coming together to tell stories. Kapati time in my family is really about making the space and time for social interaction in a culturally appropriate and safe way. The process of knowledge sharing is through family members interacting through negotiation, disagreement, debating and arguing within the kapati space. Topics of conversation can vary from reflections of the past, current family news, family gossip, sad news and celebrations. Music, song and dance are always a large part of Aboriginal family gatherings, where stories are also communicated through a fun, creative and enjoyable way.

I first became aware of the power, precision and purpose of storytelling in my family while undertaking a pilot study as part of the Masters in Applied Linguistics course. I had planned a structured interview with a set of eight specific questions related to miscommunication and misinterpretation within cross-cultural contexts. I had intended to interview a close family member to identify social, cultural and linguistic factors that lead to miscommunication and misinterpretation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. I carefully prepared my eight structured questions as part of the interview, anticipating a rich collection of data which would be recorded on the digital recorder. The following extract is from the ‘Research Design’ chapter of my PHD thesis, where I describe the discomforts experienced by an Aboriginal participant and myself as the researcher in the data collection phase.

I decided to interview a close older male family member. I chose to use the interview technique as the data collection method as this seemed to be a quick way of collecting the required information. We sat in the back yard of his house, and I proceeded to put on my researchers hat, changing my voice into an academic researcher which was totally foreign and strange to my participant. However, he continued trying to accommodate my requests as best he could. Ironically the pilot study was about ‘miscommunication and misinterpretation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people’. By the third question, he strongly stated with some aggressiveness, ‘look I’ll just tell you the story and you can work it out from there’. This last statement regarding stories led me to thinking about our ways of sharing important knowledge through stories as a research methodology.

Over the years I have reflected on this defining moment where I realised that there are alternative research methodologies that are a better fit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people rather than following a strictly western academic approach.

As part of the pilot study for the Masters of Applied Linguistics course, I was required to reflect on the positives and negatives of the interview, evaluating the effectiveness of the process. The following is a summary of the interview process from my perspective as a researcher but also as an insider to the Aboriginal community and family social context.

The interview began quite well, with a clear recount of a family situation, where miscommunication occurred between hospital staff and the extended family of the informant. Although the beginning stages of the interview were smooth with information flowing easily, it gradually became evident that the participant began to struggle when asked to respond to the next question in isolation to the previous one. The participant seemed to be uncomfortable with the short, sharp response expected from the researchers questioning structure and technique. There seemed to be some resistance by the participant to make isolated comments against each question without referring to what was previously stated.

As a result, the participant found it easier to just openly share the critical incident, and then give me the opportunity in collaboration with him to search for appropriate responses to the five-set question. Once the obstacle of responding to specific questions was removed, it was obvious the participants verbal accounts of the critical incident flowed freely and richly with a touch of humour. The verbal and facial expressions as well as feelings and emotions replaced the uneasiness and awkwardness. (Ober, 2011, p. 4-5, GCIK Assessment Task 2)

Language was also an issue between myself as the researcher and the participant, given our first language is Aboriginal English, specifically the North Queensland (Murri) variety. Therefore, it was strange and unauthentic to speak a form of Standard Australian English (SAE) in the actual interview, as this form of English is rarely spoken in our home language environment.

This was a challenging experience and forced me to ask questions of myself as a researcher such as, how can we work with Aboriginal people in a way that is supportive, respectful and understanding of our ways of carrying out research?. There must be a better way to undertake research with our people, without being forced into a mode of working that causes all involved to become frustrated, confused and angry. I have decided that the common-sense approach is to be true to yourself, don't forget who you are, bring your whole self into the research domain, to ensure you are working in an ethical, authentic, genuine and respectful way.

The Narrative Enquiry Approach

As a data collection method, the narrative enquiry approach was used as a way to better engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the research space. A narrative enquiry approach rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experience by the imposition of story structures (Bell, 2002, p. 207). In Australian Aboriginal societies, storytelling is a natural part of life; it is used to inform past histories, kinship structures, beliefs, values, morals, expected behavior and attitudes.

Story telling is a feature of Indigenous societies where oral traditions were the main form of transmitting and sharing knowledge with individuals and between groups. Through oral traditions information was passed down through the generations in the form of stories and songs. (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 38)

The Kapati Method

The Kapati (cup of tea) method of data collection draws on the narrative inquiry approach where participants' stories (individual and collective group) are collected and analysed to understand how participants (students) draw on their social, cultural and linguistic repertoire to make meaning of new professional knowledge. I have previously used the kapati approach in a project with Torres Strait Islander academic and cultural advisor, Noressa Bulsey, in the *Both-ways in Action* project (Ober & Bulsey, 2011-2012). As we were both from similar cultural backgrounds and geographical locations, we understood the importance of social interactions in our families.

kapati times in our family are an important and often enjoyable event. It is a time for social interaction; this includes a time to laugh, cry, gossip, be angry, be reflective, and simply to celebrate our survival as an Indigenous race in a culturally supportive environment. (Ober & Bat, 2007, p. 66)

As a child growing up, it was a common and expected practice for family members to invite visitors and extended family in for a kapati. Kapati time has become an integral cultural norm of Indigenous society, where the announcement of kapati signals yarn time. Yarn time means catching with family and community news, sharing stories, reflecting on the past, telling and retelling humorous stories; basically a time for strengthening family and kinship ties (Ober & Bat 2007 p.66).

Karpati in the East Kimberley

Aboriginal researchers in the East Kimberley (Western Australia) have also used the 'cup of tea', approach. Horstman and Wightman (2001, p. 102) explain that 'karpati' with Traditional Owners invokes 'remote localities, tucker boxes, shady trees, boiling billies, storytelling, and making the time to discuss plants and animals, land and sea management and a range of related issues'.

When somebody calls, 'karpati!' while travelling through country, it is time to stop and discuss where we have just been, or plan where we go next. The reasons for stopping may not be immediately apparent to the researcher, but are always important to the custodians. (Horstman & Wightman, 2001, p.103)

Social interaction and engagement is an important practice for Aboriginal families as I explain in a previous paper:

The need for social interaction over a kapati is embedded and intertwined within our social and cultural domain. We as family and community members have obligations, expectations, ethics, morals, roles and responsibilities that connect us to our culture. (Ober & Bat, 2007, p.67)

Horstman and Wightman (2001) further explain that 'the *karpati* approach is based on guidance by the senior custodians, embraces respect, balance, reciprocity, flexibility and time availability and of course a pannikin or two of tea' (p.103).

In the *Both-ways in Action* project Noressa and I understood that there was great value in making the space for stories to be shared, not just for the sake of it, but to bring about a deeper understanding of professional constructs through Indigenous ways of making sense

and meaning. By reflecting on our ways of sharing information in the home environment through storytelling around a kapati, we could then use a similar approach in the research space especially with Indigenous participants.

Student Kapatis

During the *Both-ways in Action* project I set up the kapati sessions with food, tea, coffee and water to re-create the home environment where Indigenous participants would be comfortable to converse and generate new knowledge. Noressa and I cooked chicken curry and chicken vermicelli with rice, damper and Johnnycakes to set the tone and mood for the kapati. We encouraged lots of social interaction ensuring everybody was at ease and relaxed in the kapati environment. Food brings laughter and humour, and lots of stories. This created a space where diverse voices, realities, truths and perspectives were shared in a culturally safe environment.

During the student kapatis in my current PhD study, I played excerpts from the video footage of classroom observations (from my research study) as a stimulus to encourage critical reflective discussion. I asked the following questions to stimulate conversation: what do you think is happening here? Why? What does it mean from a both-ways perspective? What counts? What doesn't count? How is this reflective of both-ways?

The purpose of this approach was to produce a richer, more authentic analysis as observed from the student participants themselves. Wilson (2008) states that, 'research from an Indigenous paradigm should aim to be authentic or credible' (p. 101). I wanted to see if the participants saw and heard the same things I did, or did they see and hear something completely different. We then collaboratively explored why? I wanted validation or contradiction of the themes, big ideas, and topics emerging from the data that I had identified. What were students thinking about this overall topic of culture, identity, language and learning in a both-ways tertiary educational context?

In the student kapatis, I noticed participants spoke in metaphors to describe an idea or concept. Metaphors are using something familiar in your world to explain and describe an abstract phenomenon to others in your world. In regard to stories, Kovach, a Plains Cree and Saulteaux First Nations scholar, explains that:

Within the structure of story, there is space for the fluidity of metaphor, symbolism, and interpretative communications (both verbal and nonverbal) for a philosophy and language that is less definitive and categorical. My sense is that in the old days as now, the skilled orators were able to imbue energy through word choice, and allow the listener to walk inside the story to find their own teachings. (Kovach, 2005, p. 12)

For a listener to walk inside the story is to bring greater meaning, awareness and clarity to the messages, the philosophy, values and belief of the story being communicated. In thinking about elders in my family, there are underlying messages being shared with the family, sometimes directly but often indirectly where we are expected to read between the verbal lines, to understand the intended messages.

The Guitar Metaphor

In the postgraduate kapati, a senior elder who is also a postgraduate candidate described the importance of language and cultural identity through the metaphor of playing a guitar. He cleverly likened the strings on a guitar to the diverse language groups represented at Batchelor Institute including forms of English language, Creoles and dialects.

If you look at those strings as people coming from different backgrounds, different language backgrounds or cultures see they come in from a knowledge base – whether the string is small string or it's a big string – it might be a big tribe or might be small tribe, but they all important, they got that value of importance. And to tune that guitar – right to that deadly tune you want to sing – the singer, the player must recognise that. (Post Graduate Candidate 1, Postgraduate Kapati 12-08-14)

This research participant is emphasising that all languages are of equal importance, and each holds credibility and validity, regardless of its status, significance or positioning in the institute. I see this as a holistic view, that recognises SAE as just one of those strings on the guitar, but it holds no more or less importance than any of the other strings. In fact, depending on your social contextual environment, it may hold less, or no, importance than the other languages depending on where you are situated. For example, in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where people strongly speak their own languages, SAE would hold little status, power or recognition unless used in formal contexts of Australian governance, or with organisations and service providers. This contrasts with SAE which is perceived as an elite language of power in most universities and educational institutions. Standard English brings an element of status, which implies other varieties of English are non-standard and therefore not valued or acknowledged. There is a mindset that, 'the acquisition of Standard English is considered to be one of the most important goals of formal education' (Siegal, 2014, p. 40). This may be true, but students' first languages also have a role to play in acquiring the second language or dialect of standard English.

The guitar metaphor provides a way of thinking about knowledge creation and production where knowledge holders are pushing the boundaries to incorporate both-ways teaching and learning in a real way. It is about working collaboratively and creatively knowing that everyone needs to contribute to create that deadly tune, whatever their language. The postgraduate participant is describing and articulating the linguistic repertoire of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a way that makes sense from his social and cultural positioning.

The guitar metaphor, as described in the postgraduate kapati, is powerful in relation to the co-presence of diverse yet significant voices. This metaphor shows that for the majority of Indigenous Australians, cultural and linguistic diversity is normal, acceptable, and to be expected, and as such it is to be valued and respected without criticism and judgment. It is even more than this. It also needs to be positively valued as an asset that students bring with them to the learning experience.

Conclusion

As an Aboriginal researcher I hold the cultural knowledge of storytelling in our families and communities and because of this I have chosen the narrative enquiry methodology as the most relevant and culturally appropriate approach for collecting data in this study. Stories make knowledge accessible, alive and real for Aboriginal people as they embed Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies.

As an Aboriginal researcher I can't help but draw on my epistemologies and ontologies, our ways of being, knowing and thinking, because this is me. I'm in this research as an Aboriginal person who is seeking to engage with Aboriginal participants, and to do that I need to be true to myself and draw on our ways of doing things. I am trying to expand the space to converse, to explore, to engage with multiple voices, perspectives, ideas, thoughts, and truths.

For Indigenous researchers, there is value in thinking about what we can learn from the home and community environment and bring into the teaching, learning and research space. We as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a rich, diverse, creative and vibrant culture. We can reflect, we can embrace, and we can bring our ways of making meaning and making sense into the research space. It is my goal to be true to our ways of doing, being and knowing in the research space, but also to push and forge through into new, untouched knowledge bases in the domains of language, culture, identity and learning. The research space can at times become tumultuous and unsettled, but it's always moving, emerging and evolving to generate new cutting-edge knowledge if the right conditions and space are provided.

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Lessons From the Participants in Decolonising Research

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Keywords: decolonising research, yarning methodology, Indigenous Knowledge, participant controlled research

Abstract

This paper reflects on research undertaken as part of a Doctor of Philosophy, focusing on the restoration of contemporary Aboriginal men's dignity. These reflections centre on how the research participants began to train this researcher in decolonising research practices. Personal discovery and growth, as well as developing strong, ethical and reciprocal relationships, are core to doing decolonising research. Yarning as methodology and art as a method of communicating research are presented as ways of building such relationships and promoting personal transformation in research. Key lessons from this research are shared and demonstrate that for this researcher, the greatest act of decolonising research started with addressing his own mindset, which led to the realisation that Indigenous Australia no longer wishes to be studied or seen as requiring someone to lift them up.

Introduction

While it was memorable and exciting to complete doctoral research, and be awarded a PhD, it was the process that I found the most rewarding. Within this process there is a large portion of personal discovery that has developed my understanding of research. It was the involvement of the participants and their willingness to share their lives, their understanding of the topic being discussed and their ability to train me in ways of Aboriginal research that opened my eyes and heart along with the importance of providing information back to the various stakeholders in a way that is appropriate in each setting. The people who took part in the research project all understood research as a colonising process, as they had suffered through the process a number of times. Smith (2012) argues that from an Indigenous perspective research is seen as a “dirty word” because of their previous experiences (p. 1).

Mora and Diaz (2004) believe that the entire research endeavour must be participatory in nature to produce qualitatively different research that is based on community-identified problems and needs. I would add that it is important that the methods used to gather the data be suitable for and understandable to the people participating in the research project. This article will reflect upon three aspects of the journey associated with my PhD that demonstrate how the participants helped me decolonise the research process and empower individuals and their communities.

This article will encompass reflections on three research areas where the participants influenced my understanding of Indigenous research and the decolonising process. The areas involve lessons about the process and protocols associated with Aboriginal controlled

research, the development of a normal method of communication that has been used for centuries by Aboriginal people (known generically as yarning) into an effective and validated research methodology, and the use of art as a method of reporting results and progress back to communities and participants.

Wilson (2008) has said that “If research doesn’t change you as a person, then you haven’t done it right” (p. 135). This is a yarn about how my research has changed me and the three major areas in which my research has impacted me. The first and probably the most profound was the way the participants gave themselves to the project and began training me in Aboriginal ways of conducting research.

Lessons in Participant Controlled Research

Each of the men began by volunteering to be a part of the project. The men who participated in the research project substantially took it upon themselves to train me in the art of conducting decolonised Indigenous research. They did this through many impromptu lessons that unfolded during our yarning sessions. It is important to mention that I had known all the Australian participants for many years prior to the research project and as it turned out, each of the men had a connection with each other that I was unaware of at the time the project started. In fact, I didn’t become aware of this until the project was completed.

The first lesson came from someone I considered to be a dear friend and had known for 25 years. To set the scene, I live on the Far North Coast of NSW and my participant lives on the Far South Coast of NSW, approximately 18 hours away by car. After many emails and phone calls a date and time were set for our first yarning session. I had emailed the Elder the day I was leaving home to confirm that everything was still okay, and had received a reply stating that he was looking forward to my visit and was ready to be involved in the research. I arrived in town the day before the yarn, set up camp and let some friends know I was in town. Someone from the community told me he thought that the Uncle had left town that day and wouldn’t be back for two days. I chose not to believe him because the emails stating that he was expecting me.

The following day I arrived at the appointed time and place only to find that the Elder was nowhere to be found. I phoned him and he told me that he needed to go to Canberra and would be back the following day so we arranged an alternative time for the following day. Again, I arrived at the appointed time and place only to find that he had just left and would not be returning that day. At this point I was beginning to think that he really didn’t want to be a part of the project. I rang him later that day to give him every opportunity to withdraw if that’s what he wanted. Again, he assured me that he was very interested in the project and wanted to be a part of it, so again we set an alternative time for the next day.

Once again, I turned up and the Elder was nowhere to be found. This time he had returned to town as he had an appointment that he had forgotten and had taken one of the children from the property with him so I knew that he needed to return. So, I waited for him. During this time, I convinced myself that he really didn’t want to be a part of the research and these delays were his way of letting me know this, despite his assurances of the opposite.

When he did finally return he was smiling and ready to begin. Unknown to me, he had already set the fire and had a young man keeping the fire going while he was gone. The young man had been given instructions not to speak to me and that if I left he was to let the fire go out. I had seen this young man during the time I was waiting and thought that he was checking on me as he would appear then disappear. When he saw me sitting on a log waiting for him a smile came across Uncle’s face and he said that this research must be important for me to wait three days

to speak to someone who had demonstrated such unreliability. The Elder then took me to the place that he had prepared for us to have our yarns. The site holds special significance as it is where our Yuin Elders have in the past handed down some of their knowledge.

The Elder began to explain why he had delayed our meetings. He said,

that while I think that the project was very important, I need to know how important my involvement is to you and whether my involvement is important to the project or just easier to ask someone you have a relationship with. (Uncle Ossie Cruse, Personal communication, 20 July 2013)

He did go on to talk about how other researchers had asked him to be involved in their work, but only on their terms and at their convenience. For me, this encounter demonstrated how important it is to give our participants as much control over the process as possible. This encounter also helped me understand that the researcher does become part of the narrative. Additionally, as researchers, our behaviour can influence how our participants view the research and the information they are willing to share. With Western research the researcher controls the interview time, place and the type of information that is given. Uncle had given me an alternate understanding demonstrating a decolonising method, but the lessons did not end there.

To further emphasise these lessons another incident occurred during my second yarn with this Elder. We had been yarning for about an hour when for no apparent reason that I could see, he jumped to his feet and left stating the he would not allow me to change the rules associated with the yarning session without talking to him first. I was surprised by this as I was unaware that the rules had changed and followed him to ask what I had done that indicated that the rules were changing. He explained that in this type of formal yarning session the Elder is given total control of how the information is provided and in which direction the discussion headed; therefore, the Elder is treated with respect and is not interrupted or redirected.

At this point I need to provide some background to my relationship with this Elder. While he is my mentor and a senior Elder of my nation, the Yuin Nation, we have never been in this research setting before. The issue arose because I, as the researcher, had slipped back into a work colleague type of relationship, changing the power balance within the yarn. When we worked together I was in the position of responsibility requiring me to make decisions and elicit answers from my fellow workers of which this Elder was a member of the team. The Elder went on to take this opportunity to teach me about imparting important Aboriginal knowledge from an Elder's perspective. After he had explained how I was to behave during these times, we resumed the yarn.

A circumstance that involved another participant taught me a third lesson. I was yarning with an Elder and dear friend from the desert region of Australia. We had yarned for about two hours and had gone through all the ethics paper work prescribed by the university to give me permission to use his words/stories. A short while after the yarn had completed the Elder suddenly passed away. Neither his information nor my interpretations of what he had said had been checked, which is a vital aspect of maintaining accuracy and trustworthiness of the information. This raised a number of protocol issues culturally, personally and ethically.

From a cultural perspective after a death this information becomes part of the person's estate and is passed to his sons. Hence, I would need permission from the Elder's sons before I could use his yarns as his contribution to the research. This meant that a minimum of 12 months of sorry business would need to be concluded before I could approach the sons. I needed to decide whether his stories were necessary to be included. The wait to get permission would

delay the conclusion of the research project for over a year and probably longer as relationships would need to be established both with me as the researcher and the research project itself.

From a personal perspective, this Elder's stories impacted me more than any of the others, and had set off a chain reaction within me that changed my way of thinking about dignity (the subject of my thesis) and became a personal filter for the stories that followed. Therefore, I believed that the information was important, and I also felt it needed to be shared as part of the research. From the perspective of Western academic ethics, I had all the permission I needed to go ahead and use the material collected from this Elder. It is often believed that research data belongs to the researcher or to the institution from which the researcher has come (Fishbein, 1991), therefore, once a participant has told the story, custodianship of that story now sits with the researcher. This created some personal turmoil. My understanding of Indigenous Knowledge systems firmly places the custodianship of the stories and the knowledge within them with the Elder who holds the knowledge, and there are strict protocols about who can share the information. This case exemplified that simply because the information was shared with me, did not give me the right to share the information as I wished.

I searched the literature concerning ownership of research data. A university's perspective is that the data belongs to the university and they have the right to request the information and apply it to a different context (Fishbein, 1991, pp. 129-130; *SCU Research Responsible Conduct Policy*, ND). In this description, there was no mention of the participants. Sieber and Stanley (1988) indicate that the source of the data is not even considered in questions of ownership or custodianship.

After conversations with the other participants about this situation, it was decided that I needed to remove the content of the discussions with that Elder from the thesis and I should also strictly adhere to the protocols associated with sorry business applicable to his nation group so that the Elder could be honoured according to cultural norms and his family could be left in peace. It was also decided that the research should continue without delay as the other Elders who were participating thought that the topic was too important to not be discussed. This lesson taught me the importance of respecting knowledge and its custodians. I was also taught that as a researcher I have a particular role and responsibility in how I receive the knowledge and then transmit what has been revealed.

One of the most significant acts of decolonisation came when I started to explain to the participants that their names were not going to be used within my thesis. I had explained that this was normal practice and a way of protecting the participants from any backlash that may or may not come from the research (Crow & Wiles, 2008). Following this explanation one of the participants became upset and began to tell me how as a child he had been placed in a boys' institution where on his arrival he was given a number and while he remained at the institution he was referred to by that number and never by his name. He said that this made him and the other residents feel as if they were nobody and of no value. He then went on to tell me that the home had a dog and that the dog had a name. He added that he can still remember his number and the dog's name. While it is common practice for researchers to de-identify their research, particularly in Indigenous research, this practice is seen by many Indigenous participants as the continuation of the colonisation process. All of my participants requested that their voice be restored in my thesis. At this request, I returned to the SCU ethics committee and submitted a variation request to my research ethics approval. This request stimulated some conversation around whether or not the participants really understood that they would be identified as being part of the research and what this really meant. After I relayed this story, approval was granted. A decolonising aspect of this research was to give the power of the information back to its owners through allowing their voices to be heard as the knowledge holders.

These lessons developed during the progression of yarning in the collection of data. However, more than was expected was discovered out of this method and added a new dimension to my research. This led to the second area of my learning in the research. Over the time of the research the yarning process developed into a methodology.

Lessons in Yarning as Methodology

A methodology is a concept that contains a defined set of principles. It is these principles that provide the theoretical framework that sets the foundation for the chosen methods that will be utilised in a research project. It is this framework that provides a stabilising influence for the process of analysis and also provides a structure to test the validity of knowledge collection methods. There is a very strong ontological foundation behind the yarning method that supports understanding it as a methodology. Whether it is within a Canadian First Nation talking circle or an Australian Aboriginal yarning circle, there are ancient protocols that dictate behaviour. These protocols flow from the ancestors and are passed down to the individuals through the discussions that take place over a lifetime (Aunty Barb Big-Canoe-McDonald, 2014; Uncle Larry Kelly, 2012).

During one of the yarning sessions an Elder explained the yarning space from his perspective. He said that the yarning space is a protected space. Yarning was the chosen method of data collection as this concept has thousands of years of history as a communication tool within Indigenous culture. The power of yarning as a decolonising tool comes when yarning is understood as not only a research method, but also as a research methodology. Culture has always enabled men and women to interact with one another in many ways; they can sing, dance or play together with little difficulty. This ability to communicate together about subjects that matter deeply to them, however, seems invariably to lead to dispute (Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1991). Indigenous people have utilised yarning as a workable method to share, explore and learn since the dreaming and will continue to do so (Dean, 2010). Yarning reflects a process of sharing knowledge that is reliant upon relationships, expected outcomes, responsibility and accountability between the participants (Bessarab, 2012; Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Moreover, yarning can take on many different forms and structures, allowing it to be as diverse as the many Aboriginal nations that utilise it within Australia (Bessarab, 2012; Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010). The idea of yarning is simply an extension of the story telling tradition which has been part of the Aboriginal oral tradition for thousands of years (Neidjie, 2002). The telling of stories is used to teach children what is expected of them and how they are to behave in certain situations. Stories are also used to hand down and impart information. Bessarab (2012) states that "stories formed part of the Aboriginal cosmology; the dreaming stories informed people of how the world was created, set the protocols for behaviour and outlined responsibilities" (p. 22).

The term yarning is used as a 'one stop shop' to explain a multilayered and multifaceted way of cultural expression. Dean (2010) points out that there are many layers or types of yarns that range from a simple conversation between friends in an informal situation, to a setting where it is time to impart cultural knowledge by an Elder. Therefore, yarning can range from a group of friends sitting around a camp fire having a conversation, telling jokes and sharing stories, through to an Elder calling you aside into a formal setting where important cultural knowledge is handed down (Dean, 2010). These times are very formal and have ritual and ceremony attached to them. It is in the space between these two positions where research is conducted and where the knowledge holder has complete control and directs how knowledge can be shared.

This method will be referred to as yarning (Dean, 2010; Wilson, 2001, 2008b) and comes from a style of storytelling employed by Aboriginal communities when the intention is the impartation of information to the listeners (D Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Martin, 2003, 2008; Sandelowski, 1991). It is based on relationship and respect. In addition, the participant is provided with a culturally safe space in which to provide his/her story. In some circles, yarning is considered to be similar in its approach to the interview method known as in-depth interviews or unstructured interviews (Kohn & Dipboye, 1998; Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990). However, it really is very different and requires a specific set of skills that include a respect for the process and the protocols that govern it.

The yarning space is protected by seven principles and six protocols that come together to protect and enhance the yarning space. The principles are reciprocity, respect, responsibility, dignity, equality, integrity and self-determination. The protocols that are associated with each yarning space are as follows: the space is gender sensitive, it is inclusive, there is a gift within each one, each person has an opportunity to speak, the participants are in control of the yarning space and there is freedom within the space. The Elder with whom I was working emphasised the importance of these principles and protocols.

This protection allows the participants to bring their history, their ideas and any information that they wish to impart. I realised that the Aboriginal concept of yarning, as not only a data collecting method but as research methodology, had not been heard of, let alone considered by my university prior to my ethics application. This application sparked a conversation on the feasibility of using yarning to formally conduct research among Indigenous peoples. The power of yarning as a decolonising tool comes when yarning is understood as not only a research method but as a research methodology.

Over the last decade there have been a number of articles on yarning and it how works. There is a growing recognition that Indigenous communities have utilised yarning as a workable method to share, explore and learn for many previous generations and that they will continue to do so (Bessarab, 2012; Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010). Yarning reflects a formal process of sharing knowledges that is reliant upon relationships, expected outcomes, responsibility and accountability between the participants, country and culture. This process is valued by many other Indigenous nations. From the perspective of my university's ethics committee, one of the difficulties with yarning is that it can take many forms and structures, allowing it to be as diverse as the many Aboriginal nations that utilise yarning (Dean, 2010). From my perspective, as an Indigenous researcher, Indigenous research should reflect the authority and foundations of Indigenous Knowledge systems and yarning as a methodology can permit this.

Yarning is not only a data collection method. As a principle-based research methodology, it allows Indigenous worldviews to come to the fore in the research context. It also provides a culturally safe place for the knowledge to be shared and a culturally appropriate lens with which to analyse the information that has been shared.

Because yarning, as a research methodology, is framed by a body of principles, protocols and practices developed by Indigenous Elders, Indigenous Knowledge about the world is established as valid and trustworthy in an academic environment. This enables some aspects of traditional Indigenous Knowledge to be made known to wider communities. This methodology systemically advances the teaching, research, and practices of Indigenous Knowledge through rigorous inquiry that allows interaction to empower participants through a culturally safe and ethical research method. As mentioned earlier, yarning has a rich body of protocols, principles and practices that mandate how you should and should not behave during a yarning session thus leading to this culturally safe and ethical research method.

Yarning is therefore one of the most powerful tools used in the battle to decolonise Indigenous research. While yarning is often seen as a type of oral communication and is generally viewed as limited to this arena, this is far from the truth. Yarning does actually incorporate drawing, dance and singing. Yarning can be utilised as a tool for decolonising due to the fact that as a research methodology, it is based entirely in an Indigenous paradigm. It takes into account the relationships associated with the knowledge, the context that knowledge is found in and the participants as the knowledge caretakers. This brings me to the third lesson, where I learned about the decolonisation of research through the use of art to communicate research.

Art in Research

The third aspect of my learning about yarning as a decolonising tool, was its power to incorporate the medium of art as a way of illustrating the yarns (Bochner & Ellis, 2003; Leavy, 2017) and as a gift (Boydell, Gladstone, Volpe, Allemang, & Stasiulis, 2012). This seemed to be natural progression. Early in the research process it was suggested that I start using art to reflect on what was said during the yarning sessions. At first, I was reluctant to engage with this medium, but being a visual thinker myself, I agreed with this suggestion. The original purpose of the art was to help me to understand the concepts that were starting to come forward as part of the research. McNiff (2008) acknowledges this as an important concept in art-based research, stating that “artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts [offer] a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies” (p. 29).

There is a strong connection between art and research (Bochner & Ellis, 2003; Eisner, 2008). This visual representation of concepts allows an opportunity to provide a pictorial understanding of the research (Boydell et al., 2012; Leavy, 2015, 2017). This concept became apparent after showing one of the participants a couple of the drawings I had made after his yarning session. His understanding of the research went to a higher level and his willingness to share became stronger. He stated that he could see his stories in the drawings and he could see where he fitted into the research (Uncle Larry Kelly, Personal communication, 15 September 2014).

Over the length of the project, there were 20 individual pieces of art produced that became a very important part of returning the research back to communities (Boydell et al., 2012) in the form of a book. A second purpose for this art developed in relation to the wider community; this book became an example of how research can be illustrated and presented to Aboriginal communities in a culturally appropriate way where they are able to quickly identify an understanding of the research.

Traditional artwork has been used for thousands of years to communicate many different things, ranging from a simple map of the surrounding country to detailed information about how the culture itself functions on many levels. Elders have often used simple sand drawings or carvings on rocks and trees to provide educational opportunities for the communities and people around them. While in Newman, Western Australia, I witnessed a scene where an Elder was sharing a story with the people around him by drawing on the ground with his finger to emphasise various parts of the story. This form of iconography is often used to tell stories where words are insufficient. Artwork can also be used as a form of introduction such as that on message sticks.

The use of art has developed in two directions within qualitative research. First as a way of conducting research using art known as art-based research (Riddett-Moore & Siegesmund, 2012). Secondly, art is used to disseminate research results and knowledge that flows from the research (Boydell et al., 2012). Boydell et al. (2012) describe art in research as a way

of highlighting the complexities and multidimensionality involved in understanding of new knowledge. Boydell (2011) explains knowledge translation as harnessing that potential and bridging the gap between what we know and what we do. The way the artwork is used in my thesis is to aid in the distribution of the knowledge gained from the Elders involved in the yarnning sessions. Each piece of artwork has an explanation in English attached to it so people have a choice to hear the message from the artwork or through simply reading the explanations.

The effectiveness of this style of communication was demonstrated when a draft copy of the art book was taken to the Northern Territory and shown to a Jawoyn Elder. This Uncle was simply handed the book without any explanation and he was able to read the information presented in pictorial form, giving him an understanding of my thesis, the research methodology and the results. With great excitement, he took the book to the Land Council office and requested that all future reports based on research conducted in his community be presented in this format.

The effectiveness of this type of communication has also been affirmed by a number of non-Indigenous people who have seen the artwork and have expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to see research presented in this form. They have asked about the availability of the book in libraries and commented that their knowledge about Aboriginal people was increased through seeing the book and some have expressed the personal and emotional impact on them. This is testimony to the value of this research presentation method.

Conclusion

The three aspects described in this article demonstrate that if a researcher is prepared to take their time and listen to the Indigenous communities, they can start the process of decolonising their own research and create a positive narrative among Indigenous communities in contact with research. It is important for researchers to understand that these communities do not need them as their lives will go on regardless; it is the researchers who need these communities to partner with them in the research endeavour. The lessons I learned from the participants during and at the end of the research demonstrated that decolonising methodologies and methods are necessary for successful Indigenous research. The Elders demonstrated to me that the greatest act of decolonising research starts with the mindset of the individual researcher with the realisation that Indigenous Australia no longer wishes to be studied or seen as requiring someone to lift them up. What is needed is someone to walk beside them as equal partners. It is these types of partnerships that are needed for greater progress to be made.

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Kulini: Framing Ethical Listening and Power-Sensitive Dialogue in Remote Aboriginal Education and Research

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Keywords: power, Indigenous research, remote education, ethical listening

Abstract

Indigenous people often complain that they aren't being listened to, that researchers, institutions and policy makers aren't taking them seriously or listening properly to their concerns (Donald, 2016). In response, researchers, politicians and interested 'others' make commitments to do a better job. The language of 'better listening' is framed in terms such as to 'listen deeply' (Kohn, 2016; Wallace & Lovell, 2009), or listen 'truly' (Snowden, 2017), and in some cases, notions of 'listening' as opposed to 'hearing' as an act of good faith in responding to Indigenous peoples' concerns is argued (Davis, 2016).

As an 'outsider' working in Indigenous research, it is a primary concern to respectfully engage with, interpret, and ultimately, represent the voices and concerns of Indigenous people as ethically and truthfully as possible within a broader understanding of the limitations on us to do so well, if at all. In reality, this is a precarious negotiation at the best of times and requires careful ethical/methodological consideration to better represent claims that research is ultimately beneficial to participants and the communities they represent.

This paper adopts the Pitjantjatjara language term '*kulini*' (listen to, hear) to mark out the terms of 'ethical listening' at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007a) through an Aboriginal language lens. Ethical responsibilities for initiating dialogue towards action is then developed as a model based on Delpit's (1993) framing of ethical listening and action in educating 'other people's children'. Working from the *kulini* frame provides methodological cues that can orient research towards justice and more just possibilities.

Introduction

Indigenous people across the globe are frustrated that they aren't being listened to, that researchers, institutions and policy makers aren't listening or responding to their concerns (Donald, 2016). Commitments to listen beyond cursory, power-laden interactions are described in terms such as 'better listening' or to 'listen deeply' (Kohn, 2016; Ungunmerr-Baumann, 2002; Wallace & Lovell, 2009), or to listen 'truly' (Snowden, 2017). Some have debated the importance of 'hearing' as an ethical commitment beyond merely listening in responding to Indigenous peoples' concerns (Davis, 2016).

This paper presents methodological questions that arose in the course of my doctoral thesis (Osborne, 2016) where I endeavoured to privilege Anangu (Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, Ngaatjatjarra and Ngaanyatjarra) voices in education dialogue across communities in the tristate area of remote Central Australia (the region where the states of South Australia, Western

Australia and the Northern Territory meet). Globally, Indigenous scholars have repeatedly raised concerns regarding colonialist approaches to Indigenous research that ultimately diminish, even silence Indigenous voices, knowledges and aspirations (Bishop, 2011; Nakata, 2007b; Rigney, 1999; Sarra, 2011; Smith, 1999; Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005) leading to ethical questions of research and justice. Others question whether power-laden methodologies are at all reliable in working towards any sense of ‘truth’ (Haraway, 2004; Harding, 1992).

I have previously highlighted issues with outsider researchers’ attempts to ‘listen’ and ‘hear’ across points of power, epistemological and language difference in remote Aboriginal communities (Osborne, 2013, 2014, 2015a; Osborne & Guenther, 2013). In this paper, I propose working from the Pitjantjatjara language term ‘*kulini*’ (listen/hear) to frame a more culturally and contextually responsive (Guenther, 2015; Perso, 2012) methodological approach. In doing so, research must take account of the epistemological, ontological, axiological and cosmological contexts of the voices that are attempting to be heard. I then propose a model for informing institutional commitments to power-sensitive dialogue and ultimately, approaches to positioning research towards ‘more-just’ (Brennan & Zipin, 2008) possibilities.

Literature Review

Over the last few decades, Indigenous scholars have railed against colonial approaches to Indigenous research where (typically non-Indigenous) researchers and the institutions they represent tend to objectify Indigenous peoples, framing them within deficit assumptions and narratives (Bishop, 2011; Nakata, 2007b; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 1999; Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). ‘Outsider’ (Martin, 2006) researchers are urged to be respectful of Indigenous communities (Martin, 2006; Nakata, 2007b), their histories, values and epistemologies (Arbon, 2008; Smith, 1999), and to prioritise Indigenous methodologies for knowledge sharing (Ford, 2005; Lee, 2005; Moreton-Robinson, 1998; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009) in the research process. These are vital considerations in framing research that seeks to address these continuing concerns and promotes research-informed actions that are responsive to the culture, context and aspirations of Indigenous peoples.

The indignity and injustice of minority communities being framed as lesser objects in research is challenged by critical race theorists (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Milner, 2008), academics focused on addressing inequity in education (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Delpit, 1993; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), and Indigenous scholars (Moreton-Robinson, 1998; Sarra, 2011; Smith, 1999). In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars have argued the value of Indigenous standpoint theory in repositioning the cultural and knowledge foundations that inform research and knowledge production processes in Indigenous communities (Foley, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Nakata, 1998, 2007a). This builds on the work of feminist scholars who began to challenge notions of science and scientific truths as being somehow neutral and incontestable through articulating and working from knowledges and lived realities generated outside the locus of institutional power which tended to be the domain of powerful white men (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992).

It is not enough to merely include Indigenous voices as participants within a methodological approach that ignores issues of power, gender, culture, history, values, language and epistemology. Respectful dialogue is a process of negotiated dialogue where power is shared. Liberman (1980) explains that:

Conversation is a negotiation - one finds one's bearings by taking a reading of where the other person might be. Each party addresses himself [sic.] to the position, expectations, language, and "world" of the other in order to find a mode of discourse in which both parties can communicate competently. (p. 67)

In the ambiguity of conversation across points of power, language and epistemological difference, Liberman (1980) contends that Indigenous people adopt a conversational tool he terms '[g]ratuitous concurrence...a common strategy of oppressed peoples' (p.74), which 'is a structural feature designed to encourage the development of the conversation or [is] included to reduce the risk which any party might fear' (p. 74). This suggests that people may simply answer 'yes', or attempt to mirror their understanding of what the other person is asserting as a strategy for showing respect or avoiding conflict or confusion in conversation. This can be a strategy utilised in research dialogue between outsider researchers and Indigenous participants but suggests some sense of agency on the part of Indigenous participants despite the apparent power inequities constructed within the frame of research dialogue. Liberman (1980) goes on to explain that 'Aboriginal people find it a useful device to keep the European-Australians happy so that they will go away quickly without causing the Aboriginals [sic] any difficulty' (pp. 74-75).

Cowlishaw (1998) describes the institutionalised abuse of Aboriginal voices during the historical period referred to as 'self-determination' following the 1967 referendum - the era of remote communities being established and land rights. She describes an era of 'ventriloquism', where:

Government officials, pastoral advisers and accountants acted as ventriloquists in relaying to each other and to their superior officers the views and wishes of 'the community', which in fact originated in their own minds and were formulated in their own style. (p.153)

Research methodologies are needed that can free research dialogue from an epistemological frame that is distant from the logic and language of the location of the research (Guenther, Osborne, Arnott, & McRae-Williams, 2015; Osborne, 2013, 2014) and silences Indigenous voices in Indigenous research dialogue. Indigenous scholars such as Nakata (2007) and Smith (1999) argue that 'outsider' accounts of Indigenous peoples have historically been privileged over Indigenous peoples' accounts of their own lives, ignoring the epistemological, cultural and language context of communities, their knowledge and histories. This is one of the key motivators for Indigenous scholars advocating narratives as a more appropriate method of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Fisher, 1985; Ford, 2010; Lee, 2005; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). Smith (1999) draws attention to the centrality of narratives within Indigenous communities where:

Intrinsic in story telling is a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as Indigenous people, to ourselves and for ourselves. Such approaches fit well with oral traditions which are still a reality in day-to-day lives. (p.145)

Indigenous scholars have advocated a range of approaches to reposition Aboriginal voices and values as central to knowledge production in research, ranging from 'Indigenist' research methodologies (Rigney, 1999) where research is conducted by Indigenous researchers, a more nuanced approach to knowledge production and decolonising pedagogies at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007a; Nakata, Nakata, Keech, & Bolt, 2012), and the incorporation of Indigenous methodologies for the sharing and production of knowledge, in particular, the use of narratives as central to this process (Fisher, 1985; Ford, 2005; Lee, 2005; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009).

These ethical and methodological issues require reflection on the researcher's own position and representations including gender, race, epistemological orientations, power and institutional representations, and also regarding how methodologies might work to amplify

Indigenous voices rather than diminish them in the research process (Guenther et al., 2015). In the following section I describe my position and methodological considerations for privileging Anangu voices in the process of producing my Doctoral thesis.

Methodology

My position

Much of my work as an educator and researcher in Aboriginal communities has occurred in Anangu (Pitjantjatjara) communities. In this context, I would describe myself as a non-Anangu ‘outsider’ researcher with elements of insider access in Anangu community contexts through relationships, Pitjantjatjara language skills, significant time spent in Anangu communities, and family connections. In ‘Families as foundation’ (Osborne, 2015a), I have more fully discussed my position including the risks and opportunities these ‘entanglements’ (Adams, 2015) of relationships and family present in undertaking research in Anangu communities. In essence, being ‘known’ in Anangu communities and having a strong Pitjantjatjara language background offers expedience in terms of establishing relationships and getting research underway. These conditions, however, place a double burden of ethical responsibility on me in a researcher role to ensure, as best as possible, that participation in research is an experience that leaves participants feeling positive but also benefits participants, their family and community. Anangu scholar Simone Tur (Tur, Blanch, & Wilson, 2010) explains that in Anangu communities, relationships are set within a frame of reciprocal obligations (*ngapartji ngapartji*), which operate across professional and personal boundaries. These conditions compel me in my role as a researcher and educator to carefully consider the impact – positive or negative – my professional actions have on participants and communities as these relationships exist beyond the life of a research project timeline and are continued outside the domain and scope of the research project.

Privileging Anangu voices

This paper draws on findings and ethical/methodological considerations discussed in my Doctoral thesis (Osborne, 2016). Beyond a desire for the research not to cause harm or leave participants feeling diminished, it was a stated aim to privilege Anangu voices in the research. As a sole outsider researcher, I aimed to adopt a methodological approach that allowed participants to speak on their own terms, drawing on their own experiences, epistemologies and language to discuss young people, education and the future. Interviews were held in first language (largely Pitjantjatjara or Yankunytjatjara, although some participants preferred the use of English language at times) with relatively few interruptions to avoid channeling interviews towards dialogue constrained by gratuitous concurrence (Lieberman, 1980). Asking participants to speak on their own terms, and in their own language with relatively few interruptions allowed the unfolding dialogue to emerge on Anangu terms. I then asked participants to suggest Piranpa (non-Anangu) educators to interview – educators who have been ethical and committed in working respectfully with Anangu, taking account of community standpoints in their professional teaching role. I then located these educators and asked them to reflect on their role as educators in an Anangu context, with particular emphasis on taking account of Anangu narratives that had been recorded and describing their work in taking account of Anangu standpoints as educators in an Anangu context.

In my own experience as an educator and school Principal in Anangu communities, education conversations tend to be ordered by the policies and requirements of the system, and the demands of managing complex and very busy schools, so that even with strong community

relationships and a good grasp of Pitjantjatjara language, education conversations with Anangu were highly constrained. Issues of student attendance, managing student behaviour, dealing with community issues and family concerns, and staffing matters were examples among a myriad of other pragmatic and pressing concerns. Undertaking a Doctoral thesis enabled me to consider how I might reposition power-laden education dialogue to be responsive to the voices, epistemologies and aspirations of Anangu. In this sense, I joined the queue of educators and researchers wishing to 'listen' and 'truly hear' the voices of Aboriginal people.

I worked with eight Anangu participants and asked them to talk to me about their perspectives on young people, education and the future. Some of these interviews involved preparatory conversations and then a single interview and others took place across multiple interviews spanning a time period of nearly two years. These interviews were not ordered or channeled by sub-questions, encouraging a narrative approach to knowledge sharing. At various points I joined the conversation by way of asking a clarifying question or connecting the narrative to relevant themes before stepping back once again to allow the narrator to position the narrative as they wished.

As part of my commitment to the principles of *ngapartji ngapartji* (reciprocal obligation, see Tur et al., 2010), I committed to producing bilingual transcripts of the narratives each of the eight Anangu participants shared. In some cases, this took months as multiple interviews were conducted over a two-year period, and I attempted to refrain from interrupting participants for my own clarification. I wanted people to tell their own stories on their own terms. Some of the narratives involved historical recounts or childhood memories that occurred across tracts of country and spoke of place names seldom visited today. On many occasions, language or stories were shared that were difficult to understand. Pouring over the transcripts for context, further research and revisiting the stories with participants at a later interview allowed for a fuller understanding. These bilingual transcripts have been given back to the participants as resources to share with their families and communities as determined by participants themselves. Edited and collated translations are provided within the thesis (Chapters 5-9, Osborne, 2016) to fulfill my intention to privilege Anangu voices in power-sensitive (Haraway, 2004) education dialogue and to work from Indigenous standpoints (Foley, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Nakata, 1998). Narratives were edited to remove sections that were particularly personal, culturally sensitive, or where participants requested changes to be made on reviewing the transcripts.

From a personal perspective, the process of producing bilingual transcripts was labour-intensive and perhaps unnecessary in terms of fulfilling the minimum requirements of completing a Doctoral thesis in an Australian university. This process, however, was important in two ways: Firstly, this fulfilled part of my ethical commitments to privileging Anangu voices in the dialogue and producing bilingual resources to gift back to the narrators, and secondly, it forced me to wrestle with the depths and nuance of Pitjantjatjara language that can be brushed aside or glossed over in the course of conversation. Bourdieu (1999) describes the loss of meaning that occurs in dislocating narratives from their original context of body, language, tonality and emphasis in the transcription process. This is particularly true in cultures where the art of storytelling is embedded with narrative features and coded meaning not easily brought to paper. Some of these features, such as pulmonic ingressive phonation, repeated serial verb sequences and vowel elongation found in Pitjantjatjara narrative techniques are discussed in Chapter Three of the thesis (Osborne, 2016). The process of then translating into English from a language rooted in 'other' philosophies, values and epistemologies provides deeply ethical and creative challenges to accurately, or at least broadly, represent the original meaning and philosophical context of the first language (Jaivin, 2014).

Listening to the narratives, sometimes a phrase at a time, over and over in an attempt to represent the original ‘narrative-meaning’ as best I could in English allowed me to come to a deeper appreciation of key Pitjantjatjara language concepts that English language has significant limitations in coming to terms with, let alone expressing. In particular, the concept of *kulini* (listening/hearing) lacks cohesion of shared meaning. Examining the context of listening (and the nominalised form ‘kulintja’) from a Pitjantjatjara language perspective is useful for understanding Indigenous peoples’ frustrations at not being ‘listened to’, but also in framing richer methodological approaches for ethical and culturally/contextually responsive listening in Anangu communities. Later, I present a visual model arguing the need for educators, researchers, and institutions to put ethical listening into action; to be responsive to the voices, aspirations and demands of Anangu in Anangu education.

Discussion

Kulini – ‘listening’ through a Pitjantjatjara language lens

The concept of ‘listening’ is a well-established societal expectation on those with political or institutional power with responsibility to act on behalf of those with less power. One such example is an admission of error by an institution by saying ‘we’re listening’ which could well be translated as a statement of commitment to remedial action. According to the Oxford dictionary (2017a), the definition of listen (or listening) is to ‘Give one’s attention to a sound’. There are some minor variations suggested as alternative definitions, but essentially the scope of definition for the term ‘listen/listening’ is similar. Understandably, those in the business of learning to ‘listen’ across points of power, language, epistemological and philosophical difference seek other terms such as ‘hear/hearing’ (Davis, 2016), ‘deep listening’ (Kohn, 2016; Wallace & Lovell, 2009) and ‘truly hearing’ (Snowden, 2017) to make sense of what more-ethical listening might look like.

The definition of ‘hear’, or ‘hearing’ (Oxford Dictionary, 2017b) provides little more scope or flexibility than the term listen – indeed, at certain points the terms are interchangeable. Both of these terms do little to challenge the frame through which voices, or ‘sound’ is being filtered or interpreted. This is where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices claiming that they are not being listened to (Davis, 2016; Donald, 2016; Kohn, 2016) are both right and wrong. They are wrong in the sense that someone may well have ‘listened’ or ‘heard’ by definition. They are right, however, in that there is an implied expectation that ‘listening’ might include other things such as honesty, goodwill, being prepared to act on concerns, and stepping across points of difference. This is where the Pitjantjatjara language term *kulini* (listen/listening) can be a useful frame for redefining what ethical listening across points of difference might look like.

According to the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara dictionary (Goddard, 1996), the term *kulini* has nine meanings:

1. *Listen. To heed*
2. *Hear*
3. *Think about, consider*
4. *Decide*
5. *Know about*
6. *Understand*
7. *Remember*
8. *Feel*
9. *Have a premonition from a sensation in the body*

These meanings immediately provide far greater depth and direction to those wishing to ‘truly hear’ or ‘listen deeply’. Framing ‘listening’ through the lens of *kulini*, listening is an aural process. Listening is corporeal. Listening engages the intellect and draws on experiences and memory. Listening is also a process of engaging epistemologies (knowing) and cosmologies (premonition) that ‘outsider listeners’ may be completely unaware of.

From interview data generated within the thesis, the depth and power of the term *kulini* in its nominalised (noun) form *kulintja* became a point of focus and further reflection. The Pitjantjatjara dictionary does not record definitions for *kulintja*, but based on the use of the term throughout some 130,000 words of interview transcripts, I have summarised some utilisations of the term:

1. Thought, idea
2. Conceptual framework (an understanding)
3. Epistemology – knowledge system, collective way of knowing (eg. Anangungku kulintja), world view
4. Self-concept, mental wellbeing (e.g. kulintja pulka – [lit. heavy thought] is a term used to indicate stress or mental health issues – or kulintja wiru [lit. good thought] perhaps similar to positive thinking or disposition/psychology)
5. Decision, determination

This list is not exhaustive, as the term, like other Pitjantjatjara terms is malleable and adaptive, making context and tone of voice, among other things important in coming to terms with definition. The terms *kulini* and *kulintja* engage a depth of meaning including points of Anangu epistemology, ontology, axiology and cosmology that Indigenous scholars have argued are essential terms of reference for ethical research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Nakata, 2007b; Rigney & Hemming, 2014; Rigney, 1999; Sarra, 2011; Smith, 1999; Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005).

Painful listening

It is difficult for ‘outsider’ researchers, educators and institutions, anchored as they are in their own epistemological, ontological and axiological foundations, assumptions and experiences of the world to come to terms with the needs and context of what Delpit (1993) calls ‘other people’.

Delpit (1993) describes the process of ethical ‘listening’ across points of epistemological and ontological difference as ‘painful’, explaining that:

...to do so takes a very special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds. We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment—and that is not easy. It is painful as well, because it means turning yourself inside out, giving up your own sense of who you are, and being willing to see yourself in the unflattering light of another’s angry gaze. It is not easy, but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue. (p.139)

Delpit (1993) argues for a process of critical self-awareness and listening that hurts to ‘unsilence’ power-laden dialogue. This positioning is vital for researchers located within the ‘culture of power’ who engage with ‘other’ communities in research, but also within the context of Delpit’s original focus, education.

From listening to action in Anangu Education

Delpit (1993) argues that in schools where (frequently) non-local teachers are tasked with the responsibility of educating ‘other people’s children’,

... appropriate education... can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture ... [P]arents, teachers, and members of [these] communities must be allowed to participate fully in the discussion of what kind of instruction is in their children’s best interest. (p.138)

Full participation of Anangu families and communities in education dialogue brings Anangu values and epistemologies into visibility in otherwise (predominantly) Western education spaces. Anangu Education leader Makinti Minutjukur (Minutjukur & Osborne, 2014) reinforces the importance of Anangu voices and values in ordering the education process, expressing a ‘willingness to embrace the ... power that [Western] education offers’, but ‘this is not a case of “cut and run”’ (p.19). Minutjukur explains that, ‘As Anangu, we have our own power that we wish to retain and this power is to be carried forward in the pursuit of the power that education offers’ (Minutjukur & Osborne, 2014, p.19).

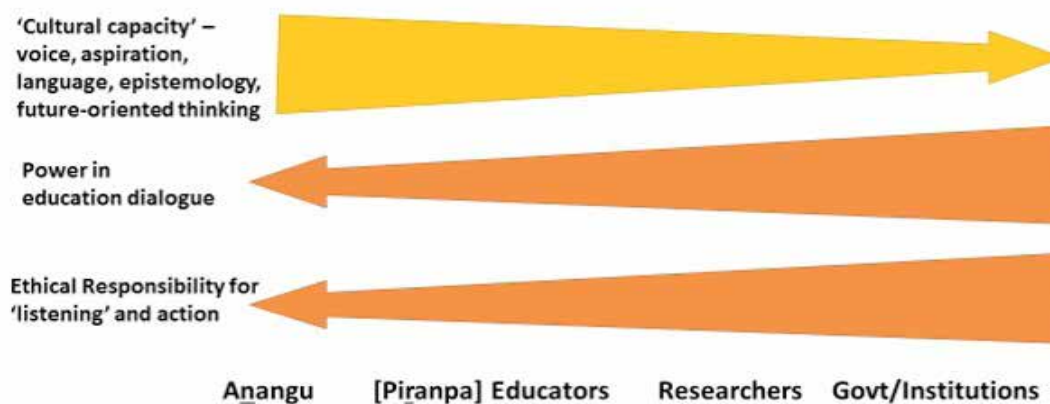
Institutions, and those with power in the institutions such as educators, researchers and government representatives, must pursue a process of listening that leads to action, if dialogue is to be mobilised towards justice in the fields of education research and policy making. Delpit (1993, p. 139) argues that ‘it is those with the most power ... who must take the greater responsibility for initiating the process’ of moving from ethical listening to justice-oriented action.

In the course of my research, I have developed a framework for negotiating dialogue (*kulini*) across power differences in Anangu education. Delpit’s notion, that greater ethical responsibility for ‘listening’ and initiating dialogue lies with those with the most power, is developed in a visual model for ethical listening and action in Anangu education spaces. This model (see Figure 1) maps where capacity, power and responsibility lies for informing and taking ethical action within the context of Anangu Education dialogue.

Currently, the institutions of government hold the most power for deciding what is to be taught, how it should be taught and what a remote education is for, but tend to hold others responsible for the perceived failure, or powerlessness of their own programs (see Abbott, 2015; Forrest, 2014). Under the model of ethical listening and action (shown below at Figure 1), venues should be explored for Anangu to speak on their own terms; that is, for power-sensitive dialogue (Haraway, 2004). Institutions need to act by stepping back and supporting the aspirations of communities.

Privileging Indigenous voices, epistemologies and scholarship in Indigenous research addresses, in some way, historical and continuing unequal power relationships. In Anangu community contexts, research must be undertaken with community voices and epistemologies as central to the work, because without engaging the depth and principles of *kulini*, it is impossible to get at any truth.

Figure 1: Power and ethical responsibility for listening action: applying the Delpit model to *Anangu* Education



Source: Osborne (2015b).

Piranpa (non-*Anangu*) educators enact power on a daily basis in the curricular and pedagogical decisions they make in deciding what the children of 'others' need from an education. Involving the children's family, the local community, and making room for local language, stories and story tellers values the community assets (Moll et al., 1992; Zipin, 2013) of family, identity, language and knowledges and brings both relevance and a sense of belonging to the classroom that cannot be endowed by 'outsider' educators.

Anangu need to seek venues for dialogue across the various standpoints (Nakata, 2007b), between and amongst *Anangu*, engaging with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoints, with educators and researchers, and with the institutions. It is up to institutions, those with the most power, to 'listen' and support community demands and aspirations by resourcing them. In practical terms, I argue that this is best achieved by taking a regional approach to structuring ethical listening and justice-oriented action in *Anangu* education. This means bringing *Anangu* educators, Indigenous scholars and institutional leaders together with the resources made available to enable *Anangu*-directed actions. While there is some movement towards structures for regional collaboration, there is more to be done in centring *Anangu* voices in shaping the nature of *Anangu* Education. The Commonwealth Government is best placed to create a venue for this type of dialogue as the region works across three state and territory jurisdictions. It is time that education and research in very remote central Australian *Anangu* communities leaves a colonial, power-laden approach to research and education behind.

Conclusion

Globally, Indigenous communities, leaders and scholars continue to argue that engagement with institutions of power and their representatives, including researchers, leaves them feeling that they are not being listened to; that their treatment is unjust and their true voices are being denied. The Pitjantjatjara language term *kulini* (listen/hear) requires 'listeners' to engage in an exchange of words, feelings, beliefs and knowledges. Using the *kulini* frame as a methodological cue, 'outsider' researchers must engage outside of their own epistemological frame and the logic and assumptions of the institutions they represent to move towards 'more-just' (Brennan & Zipin, 2008) research-informed actions.

Delpit's (1993) assertion that those with the most power have the greatest responsibility for initiating the dialogue-to-action process provides a useful model for ethical listening and power-sensitive dialogue.

Pursuing patient and power sensitive dialogue in remote education takes time and requires a different ethical/methodological approach to what we largely see in remote education policy and practice. But engaging the principles of *kulini* as a frame for ethical listening across points of difference in terms of power, epistemology, ontology and cosmology is worth pursuing because for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in remote communities, the future depends on it.

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Opening the Dialogue: Reflections of my PhD Journey 2010-16

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Keywords: military, Indigenous, research, methodology, institution, dialogue

Abstract

It is not an uncommon part of the human experience for casual conversations, serendipitous meetings and chance encounters to launch us in a new direction or to begin an extraordinary journey. (Bashir, 2010, p. xv)

The central aim of this paper is to highlight some of the challenges and opportunities I experienced in the field while conducting doctoral research. It focuses on some of the social and ethical issues associated with conducting research in two different Western military organisations and a remote Indigenous community in East Arnhem Land, northern Australia. Through the process of personal exploration and reflection, I seek to understand 'how and to what extent these challenges' (Barker, 2008, p. 09.1) shaped or impeded the research process and the ability to open dialogue regarding Indigenous Knowledges in military curricula. Using a decolonising lens, this paper analyses my journey in light of the methodology Institutional Ethnography, and the difficulties involved when selecting an appropriate research paradigm to suit multiple settings. It focuses on the interpersonal relationships between the researcher and participants; the strengths and limitations of insider/outsider perspectives (Barker, 2008; Innes, 2009); and the inherent roles and responsibilities of the researcher as a military employee and Indigenous woman from New Zealand.

Introduction

When I first began my PhD journey, I had little idea what the methodology might be. What I did know was that I intended to finish my doctoral research in a way that opened the dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and in ways that rejected the discourse of deficit. To bring Indigenous voices to the fore, however, working in two very different military establishments and a Yolŋu community in East Arnhem Land, Australia, was never going to be an easy task. Hierarchical and bureaucratic processes combined with cross-cultural research protocols made the journey particularly problematic. What it meant for me as the researcher was that I needed to choose an approach to the research that was not only acceptable in terms of the diverse groups of people that I was hoping to interview but robust enough to satisfy the ethical requirements of the Australian and New Zealand Defence Forces, as well as the university. I also wanted to challenge the 'norms' of Western research within a military context in ways that had never been considered before. Opening the dialogue to Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and experience, became an important part of the research process. As stated by Aboriginal academic and health worker, Juanita Sherwood (2006) 'I wanted to undertake research in a manner that was safe and relevant' (p. 211). While Dorothy Smith's methodology of Institutional Ethnography seemed well suited to the task, the

process and journey did not occur without many challenges. Institutional Ethnography allowed participants' experiences to speak as valid data, which was easily aligned with a decolonising framework. Such an approach allowed some of my own Indigenous epistemologies to guide me throughout the research process.

Coming to the research table

I grew up in Aotearoa (New Zealand) in the 1960s when many Māori families were moving to the city for employment. Known as the 'rural urban drift', New Zealand society was experiencing significant societal change at the time. Much of this change was due to an increased awareness of Indigenous people's rights, both locally and internationally, and the ensuing debate surrounding the differing interpretations of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi, 1840*. In education specifically, Māori students were being mainstreamed into the state schooling system where it was expected that they would 'integrate and assimilate' into the non-Māori world (Simon & Smith et al., 2001). I was privileged in that I had been taught by many of my aunts, uncles and elders in the traditional way and in ways that respected people-place relationships and Māori customs. However, as a Māori child with strong cultural connections to Ngāti Maru and Ngāti Ruanui people through my paternal lineage, I very quickly learned that to survive in an urban school in the 1960s, I needed to blend in with my non-Māori peers. The need to conform to Pakeha (non-Māori) values has had a profound effect on my life. Like Indigenous academic Billie Allan (2006) describes,

What I found, was that the Anishnaabe traditions and knowledge that I had been raised with were not really welcome in the classroom. At best, my stories or suggestions were met with polite smiles or blank stares and a quick change of subject. At worse, they were met with intolerance and racism, veiled to varying degrees. (p. 258)

Being a Māori student in an urban classroom in the 1960s was like being invisible. This was of course unless I pretended to be like the Pakeha students and disguise that fact that I was Māori. Allan (2006) and Hales (2006) describe this sense of exclusion as 'epistemological racism,' which unfortunately has changed little in recent years. Despite the introduction of multi-cultural policies and diversity initiatives, there are few institutions that draw effectively from the diversities and strengths of First Nations peoples including their languages. While the choice to be educated in the city was made by my parents, the assimilationist-type education (Metge, 2008) that I received has severely impacted on my sense of belonging to the Māori world. Choosing to work in mainstream institutions and immigrating to Australia for employment in recent years has further separated me from people and place (Barker, 2008) now for almost 40 years. Although cultural identity is still extremely important to me, I consider myself to be an 'outsider' to my own community but an 'insider' in terms of my research. My doctoral research provided me with the opportunity to explore some of these issues and return briefly to my country of birth. Through critical reflection, this paper is an attempt to explore some of the benefits and implications for insider/outsider research (Innes, 2009) while working within a multi-cultural international military context.

Choosing a Methodology

One of the most difficult aspects of social research is choosing an appropriate methodology. Shawn Wilson (2008, p. 39) explains that 'the methodology is part of the paradigm that guides the research' process. Methodology is perhaps best described as the science of finding things out, or the theory of how knowledge is gained. To find things out, it was imperative that I

considered the three different contexts in which participants were located. Because I wanted to explore the potential benefits of Indigenous Knowledges in military curricula, it made sense that I explore the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) first because the NZDF were well known for the success of their bicultural programs (Scoppio, 2007) and were willing to share their knowledge and experience. In many respects, the NZDF essentially 'opened the dialogue' in terms of my research. It was during this early stage that I began to understand more about research paradigms (Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wegner, 2008; Wilson, 2008), Indigenous standpoint theories, and how to apply for the three ethics approvals required to conduct the research. While most researchers generally only have one ethics approval to contend with, the international contexts in which this research was conducted meant a total of three was required.

Towards the end of the first year, I was ready to begin the interview process. With more questions than answers, I met a chance encounter (Bashir, 2010), a work colleague of mine, who was an ex-NZDF member. Happy to assist, this colleague provided a crucial point of contact in the NZDF. Without this vital support, particularly at the initial stages, the outcomes of the research may have been far less successful. Armed with what I thought were relevant questions, I set off on a two-week study tour to New Zealand in 2013 meeting people and being immersed in the NZDF culture. As everyone knows, hindsight is always a good thing. However, as all novice researchers inevitably find out, no matter how prepared you are, even when you think you have covered everything in your data gathering instruments and theoretical understandings, nothing can quite prepare you for the reality of the research experience. Social research practitioner Earl Babbie (2007, p. 4), believes, this is because 'Reality is a tricky business'. When research involves Indigenous people, the differing concepts of reality are even more complex. For instance, it is well documented that there is a deep distrust amongst Māori communities (and Indigenous peoples more broadly) of Western research and Western research practices (Smith, 1999, p. 173). This situation has come about not only because of the unethical and disrespectful conduct of non-Indigenous researchers but because the whole 'philosophy of research and the different sets of beliefs which underlie the research process are interpreted and approached differently' from Indigenous perspectives (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous people have therefore come to realise that 'beyond control over the topic chosen for study, the research methodology needs to incorporate their cosmology, worldview, epistemology and ethical beliefs' (Wilson, 2008, p. 15). Even though my research methodology was approved by the governing institutions, the participants themselves were unable to contribute to the development of the methodology in any way, shape or form (see Hales, 2006, p. 248). As a result, some of the questions that I thought were pertinent, while sitting in my ivory tower (Barker, 2008) thousands of miles away from the participants themselves, seemed far less relevant when conducting interviews face-to-face.

As the journey progressed, it became clear that I needed to adapt the questions and approach to best suit the context. Of course, this had to be achieved without compromising my ethical responsibilities as a researcher, and/or the rights of participants. The ability to adapt the methodology to best suit the circumstance became fundamental to the success of the project (Hohaia, 2015). I also learned very quickly how important it was to have supportive contacts. Notwithstanding the usual dilemmas experienced by novice researchers, for example, changes to travel arrangements, interview timings, and 'no shows' to name just a few, momentum gathered and by the start of the second year, things started to fall into place. By way of another chance encounter, I met a whanaunga (cousin) of mine who was also conducting doctoral research in the Galiwinku Community, Arnhem Land. Indigenous networking and casual conversations (Bashir, 2010) soon resulted in meetings being arranged with Yolŋu research participants for the final stages of the data gathering process. The research had taken on a 'snowball effect' (Babbie, 2007) and by the end of the third year, I was writing the

first of multiple drafts. Keeping the dialogue open at every stage of the research provided the hermeneutic ability to articulate what it was I was trying to achieve and the ability to keep the 'final destination' in sight (Wilson, 2008, p. 39). Debriefing regularly with supervisors and contacts provided important opportunities for feedback.

Institutional Ethnography Within a Decolonising Framework

Despite ethical protocols and procedures being introduced into universities and research institutions in recent years, research continues to intrude into Indigenous people's lives (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Russell Bishop (2005, p. 200) illustrates this point clearly when he states:

Despite the Treaty of Waitangi, the colonization of Aotearoa/New Zealand and the subsequent neo-colonial dominance of majority interests in social and educational research have continued. The result has been the development of a tradition of research into Māori people's lives that addresses concerns and interests of the predominantly non-Māori researchers' own cultural worldview(s).

To select a methodology that would least intrude into peoples' lives, I chose Institutional Ethnography, within a decolonising framework. Dorothy Smith (2008) terms Institutional Ethnography as a sociology for people that begins within, and works from, peoples' embodied experience. By exploring the daily realities of participants' experience, Smith (2006) and other sociologists believe they can discover how institutional practices work that transcend the local, to coordinate with the activities of others. In other words, Institutional Ethnography explores how people participate in institutional contexts to see how these experiences relate to the bigger picture. Applying a decolonising framework meant that I could consciously seek opportunities to explore participants' learning experience, both historically and contemporarily, and in relation to the wider socio-political agenda, through the analysis of experience (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and text. However, while a decolonising framework was always at the forefront of my mind, this did not make it easy to navigate the 'trans-cultural' perspective of the research. I needed to reflect upon and highlight the fact that I was considered an 'insider' working and viewing one institution from both within and outside of it, while viewing the second institution from an outsider's perspective, albeit with significant insider knowledge. What I found from this experience is that there is a dire need for more Indigenous academic research to be conducted from both within and outside of institutions. Such research needs to challenge the discourse of deficit, and the tendency to see diversity and difference as something that needs to be managed. One way I achieved this during the context of my work was during the data gathering stage.

As the first stage of the research was concerned with exploring the experience of learning Māori Knowledge in the NZDF, it was appropriate to address the principles of Kaupapa Māori (Māori research theory), which was incorporated into the research process wherever practicable. Graham Smith (1990) states that Kaupapa Māori research:

- *Is related to 'being Māori'*
- *Is connected to Māori philosophy and principles*
- *Takes for granted the validity and legitimacy of Māori language and culture*
- *Is concerned with 'the struggle for autonomy over Māori cultural well-being'*

Interviews, particularly with kaumatua(s), elders in the NZDF, were usually conducted after a traditional formal 'powhiri' (welcome ceremony). While this was not always possible, the preferred method of interview for all personnel was Kānohi Kitea (face-to-face). Interviews

and the formal/informal sharing of stories and information were often followed by a short prayer and refreshments. Meeting people in person again allowed for the use of the snowball sampling technique, whereby the researcher was referred to other members of the target population group (Babbie, 2007). Being welcomed onto the NZDF marae (Māori meeting place) in the traditional way was a very moving experience. Lorina Barker (2008), a descendant of the Muruwari people of New South Wales describes a similar experience after returning home from a prolonged absence to conduct oral history research in her home community. Barker (2008) claims she felt a 'confused sense of belonging to place' and 'being disconnected to people' (p. 0.92). She wonders what strategies people employ to deal with these mixed-emotions and why, and if indeed, people want to rediscover and reconnect to people and place. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) explains that the need to reconnect is an important part of the decolonising process.

Gaining trust and developing strategies to deal respectfully with participants, including disclosures of negative learning experiences, were critical during the data gathering stage. It was here that I was able to draw from my own experience and the experience of being educated in different societies. In her article 'Nurturing the gifts of understanding different realities' Keiko Kuji-Shikatani (2013) explains that 'Years of living in different situations sensitized me to be respectful and first seek to understand the local protocol-the way people like to relate to each other' (p. 231). This included where participants considered contributing to the research by speaking in their own Indigenous languages. Other decolonising strategies that I was able to employ are perhaps best explained by Smith's (1999, pp. 142–162) *Twenty-five Indigenous Projects*, which included validating the principles of 'reclaiming, reformulating and reconstituting' Indigenous cultures and languages through the use of storytelling, connecting, and remembering. Although I worked hard to develop relationships of trust, I often felt that my inability to converse fluently in my own language and Yolŋu Matha, sometimes affected the quality of conversations, despite the privilege of having access to interpreters. I often felt restricted and disrespectful from constantly rushing about from place-to-place. Limited timings and financial constraints as well as the institutional requirement to present the findings in the English language added further complexity to the mix. I needed to write and analyse participants' stories from a largely Western viewpoint, rather than from within the worldview of some of the participants. This was a colonising limitation that I constantly grappled with, despite language barriers being partially alleviated by the requirement for all New Zealand and Australian military personnel to be competent in the English language. As Jennifer Hales (2006) points out, presenting different cultural understandings and narratives from a 'Western standpoint' is problematic because it can increase the distance of the 'Self-Other hyphen'. Ensuring that data from Galiwinku Community was presented as close to possible from participants standpoint became even more important as most of these participants spoke English as their second, third or subsequent language. Meticulous editing and constant 'checking in' with the multilingual points of contact was essential to presenting the analysis in a way that acknowledged and respected participants' stories and in ways that reduced the colonial impact. Despite these shortcomings, and the stark realisation that applying a decolonising framework requires a much deeper level of understanding than I could apply in my thesis (Hales, 2006), I was constantly inspired by participants' generosity and willingness to engage. Thus, I remained committed to applying a decolonising framework, wherever I saw the opportunity, and worked hard to pose and present the research questions and answers from a critical and Indigenous standpoint (see Hales, 2006; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

Interpersonal Relationships and Insider/Outsider Perspectives

The importance of interpersonal relationships and insider/outsider perspectives in academic research should not be underestimated (Innes, 2009). The ability to move simultaneously from and insider to outsider (Kikumura, 1998, p. 142) provided a distinct advantage (Barker, 2008, p. 09.6), which allowed me to work both intuitively and reflexively. For example, having an insight into the journey to include Māori Knowledge in New Zealand institutions, and the NZDF provided an important background of which I had some historical understanding. Being absent from place for over a decade, however, meant that I was being invited into the institution as an ‘outsider’ and could observe things that, had I been an ‘insider’, I might have missed (Innes, 2009). The research was conducted on three various levels: one as an Australian military member conducting individual study (insider perspective); two, having an insight into education and the military in New Zealand (insider/outsider perspective); and three, as an outsider to Galiwinku Community. I needed to remain cognisant of the researcher’s responsibilities and the worldviews of each group (Innes, 2009), and regularly reflect and critique my own ontological position to keep the research in context (Wegner, 2007; Wilson, 2008). While I considered myself to be both an insider and outsider at various times, the ability to adapt quickly to new surroundings helped me find something in common with research participants to engage in a conversation’ (Kuji-Shikatani, 2013, p. 231).

As a current Australian serving member, one of the advantages was that I could navigate some of the complex military processes as an insider. Like Barker (2008) who was conscious of ‘family alignments and associations and privy to information and knowledge’ while conducting research in her home community, I was recognised as someone who had shared part of the New Zealand bicultural journey. This made it easier for me to relate to the NZDF participants, with regards to historical, educational, military and marae protocols, although there was a perceived or assumed level of knowledge, such as te reo (language) Māori, where I had many gaps. During one interview with a kaumatua, for example, it was assumed that I was fluent in te reo. While I could understand some of what was being said, the esteemed elder soon realised that I was struggling to keep up with the conversation, and very humbly he switched to English. I will never forget the shame of not being able to converse competently in my own language, however, felt that this was one way in which I was being acknowledged as an ‘insider’.

Another example of being acknowledged as an insider arose when I was interviewing another kaumatua. We had been engaged in conversation for quite some time, when at the end of the discussion I realised I had not provided the consent form. I asked the kaumatua if he would sign the form when waving the form away he said, ‘why do I need to sign that, I’ve given my consent already by agreeing to talk to you ... I trust you’. While I managed to get the signature, as required by the research protocols, I understood the reluctance on the part of the elder to sign it. The form was likely seen as an instrument of continued oppression, reducing the kaumatua’s autonomy, and therefore was part of the colonial legacy. I was given the distinct impression that the decision to talk to me should be his and his alone and should not be governed by external institutions. This was not the only occasion this happened but was repeated by elders in Galiwinku Community. Ironically, ethical practices such as signing consent forms were largely introduced by Western academics trying to protect Indigenous people from the unethical practices of predominantly non-Indigenous researchers (see the irony of this situation in ‘Coyote’s story’, Wilson, 2008, p. 17). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) reiterates this point when she writes ‘Insider research has to be as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research’ (p. 139). I carried this responsibility throughout the research process, consequently making myself sick with worry that I would not be able to live up to the elders’, nor the institutional, requirements and expectations.

As an outsider to Galiwinku Community, I was acutely aware of the things that made me an outsider (Barker, 2006; Smith, 1999). Not only was I a stranger to the community, but I also had no vested interest in the community in that I was not working or living there. I was simply visiting my whanaunga, who kindly introduced me to some of the elders. I also had a secondary connection to some of the community military members. Their willingness to support me as an outsider (or stranger) was how I was taught by my own elders. For example, during one session, I was invited to sit on country at a special place when the elders wanted to show me some of the significant story sites. This was a profound experience that I will never forget. It was similar to how my own elders connected me to our place-based knowledge systems and the understanding that these systems can only be taught through using all of the senses, e.g. sight, sound, place, smell, touch and the spiritual familial connection to ancestors, environment and the greater cosmos. I hope that I have provided credit to their stories in my thesis and have since been able to reciprocate their kindness by sharing meals together, when they have visited Darwin. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states of this type of relationship: 'These were signs of respect, the sorts of things I have seen members of my communities do for strangers and the practices I had been taught to observe myself' (p. 138). Arbon (2008) also refers to drawing on all spiritual relationships and one's senses within research.

The Role of the Researcher

Conducting PhD research from within my own organisation came with its unique advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages was that the driving passion to complete the project came from within and was something that I was committed to, to open the dialogue for positive change. Having a vested interest, including access to systems, processes and potential participants made the journey relatively unproblematic, although difficulties arose at certain times for several reasons. For example, as an individual conducting personal research, opposed to being funded by the organisation, I needed to use my own funds and time to travel to where participants were best located. Throughout the research, I also noticed that there were certain people, or groups of people, who became personal mentors (Barker, 2008), while others seemed to challenge the validity and relevance of what I was doing. At times, there even appeared to be unnecessary hurdles to jump over and certain individuals who acted as 'institutional gatekeepers'. While these processes and people were few and far between, they suggest resistance to change, or unfamiliarity with critique from an 'insider/outsider decolonising' perspective. I was also made painfully aware that my work could be revoked at any time if it was perceived detrimental to organisational values. I encountered unrelated but equally potential work-stopping dilemmas on at least two occasions. Thus, one of my supervisors, an ex-military officer, constantly reminded me, 'we always knew that your work would be closely monitored' (personal comms. Dr David Bennett, 2016). However, it was at times like these that I could draw on the supportive network of some of my closest colleagues and supervisors, to whom I will remain forever indebted. My inner belief that the work was important, the strengths of my ancestors, and the use of the Indigenous academic fraternity was fundamental to completing the thesis.

Results and Discussion

Notwithstanding the highlighted issues of insider/outsider research and the challenges involved in conducting institutional research across two very different military organisations and a remote Indigenous community in East Arnhem Land, to be retained as an employee one of the most important lessons that I learned was that I needed to understand how my work would be interpreted by others. What I discovered was that credible research needs to explore, describe

or explain an area that is either new, or worthy of exploration; but more important than that, it needs to hold agency for the people and organisations concerned. Robert Innes (2009) sums up these phenomena well when he states:

My research experience mirrors the experience of other insider researchers. Like Gilbert, I found that my lived experience did not exactly match that of many of the research participants. But like other insiders I was able to navigate a research relationship that enhanced my insider status in a way that allowed the research participants to accept me as an insider despite those factors that made me an outsider. The notion that researchers should distance themselves from their research participants does have some merit, as the researchers should be careful not to undermine their research aims. Yet at the same time my “closeness” to the research participants aided my gaining both their trust in me and their interest in the project. (pp. 456-7).

Like Innes (2009), who expressed that the ‘closeness’ to some of his participants had enabled him to gain their trust, my own insider/outsider perspectives allowed me to interact intuitively and respectfully when working with participants. My research is only one example of how to work from an institutional decolonising framework within and external to two multi-cultural military organisations and is not meant to be ‘definitive’. Instead, it is meant to provide a pathway for the many possibilities that can occur when research moves outside of Western norms, and in ways that seek to validate the issues that really matter to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. If ‘we,’ as the next generation of researchers, are committed to making a difference, then we must seek out the sites where continued oppression and the silencing of Indigenous voices and languages reign. In doing so, we must reflect and respond to our own work, and the work of others, and ask how our work has brought credit to the Indigenous participants concerned? If, in answer to that question it has not, then chances are, we are perpetuating continued inequity.

Conclusion

The methodological, social and ethical questions and concerns that arose during the conduct of my research have strengthened me as a researcher. By sharing this paper, as Barker (2008, p. 09.8) has so aptly quoted: ‘I have revealed a small part of my journey in a personal story of the challenges, interspersed with a few moments of success’. It is hoped that this will assist other researchers to reflect on some of the relationships and experiences they have encountered during the conduct of their work. On that note, it seems pertinent to close the dialogue as it began in the words of Bashir (2010): ‘It is not an uncommon part of the human experience for casual conversations, serendipitous meetings and chance encounters to launch us in a new direction or to begin an extraordinary journey’ (p. xv).

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Decolonising Research Methodologies in East Arnhem Land

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Keywords: Indigenous, Aboriginal Australian, smoking, tobacco, culture, tradition, history.

Abstract

‘Talking About Smoking in East Arnhem Land: Denormalisation, Stigmatisation and Leadership’ was a research project that began in 2014 in East Arnhem Land, amongst the Yolŋu peoples. The study revealed a wealth of deeper meanings and beliefs about ŋarali’ or tobacco within the context of Yolŋu tradition, history and culture. In this reflective piece, the primary author describes a personal journey of learning through observations and discussions with Yolŋu informants who shared their values, expectations and obligations associated with ŋarali’, which over time, have become interwoven with Yolŋu ceremony.

Dedication

Qualitative research was considered to be the most appropriate methodology to seek insight and understanding from Yolŋu individuals, family members, leaders and employees of health services about ŋarali’ (tobacco). Yolŋu informants were interviewed in clinics, on verandas, under trees outside their homes, and in the home of the researcher, who together with two Cultural Mentors (CMs) sought to create spaces where Yolŋu informants were at ease, and felt comfortable to discuss the issue of smoking. In these places, they offered their perspectives on the cultural aspects of ŋarali’ (tobacco) and the responsibilities associated with maintaining its traditions. The Cultural Mentors gave invaluable support, taking charge of recruitment, and facilitating meetings with informants, Elders and leaders prior to and during the study. In addition, they helped the author review the audio recordings from interviews before analysing, interpreting, translating and negotiating shared and attributed meanings of words and concepts. With their help, I gained an understanding of the history, and the rich culture and traditions of the Yolŋu peoples concerning ŋarali’. *Buku-djulŋi!* This article is dedicated to you both.

Introduction

In 2014 while managing a small primary health care mobile service in a remote location in the Northern Territory, and with a decade of experience in tobacco control leadership and advocacy in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) and Australia, I began work on a research project for my PhD. The project was called, ‘Talking About Smoking in East Arnhem Land (EAL): Denormalisation, Stigmatisation and Leadership’. The study explored current tobacco control efforts in the region, and posed the questions: had the Indigenous peoples of EAL, the Yolŋu, experienced feelings of marginalisation and stigmatisation as smoking had become increasingly unacceptable in Australian society? What views and opinions had they formed of

1 This paper is based on the experiences of the first author as she undertook data collection with the Yolŋu peoples of East Arnhem Land, as part of her PhD research.

2 Dr Matire Harwood is a PhD supervisor for the first author and provided initial comments and feedback associated with aspects of Kaupapa Māori research.

these experiences? How did this impact on the way they sought help to quit smoking? How had leadership been engaged and what were the views of Yolŋu about smoking and tobacco?

My intention was to challenge tobacco control denormalisation strategies, which had in recent years become implicated with socioeconomic discrepancies in smoking prevalence because such approaches have historically had a greater impact on the better off (Bell, McCullough, Salmon, & Bell, 2010). Evidence showed that mainstream anti-smoking interventions to reduce smoking rates amongst Indigenous peoples had not impacted effectively on smoking (Bond, Brough, Spurling, & Hayman, 2012) but had contributed to the widening of health inequalities (Feldman & Bayer, 2011). I wanted to disrupt the view that social control and social exclusion of smokers was acceptable in achieving more smoking cessation and to advocate for alternative approaches within Indigenous communities, with their disproportionately high prevalence of smoking, as a direct result of colonisation.

I understood that to effectively understand and engage with Indigenous smokers, the socio-cultural context of Indigenous smoking and smoking cessation experiences needed to be considered – this meant listening to Indigenous smokers and their families, their views and insights. I wanted to use my knowledge of Kaupapa Māori Research (KMR) to explore the issues from a decolonising position, being critical of the power structures that have served to disadvantage Indigenous communities, and being mindful and respectful of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. I also wanted to affirm myself as wahine Māori (a Māori woman), with my own cultural practices and beliefs. These intentional choices influenced the research design and with the involvement of Cultural Mentors (DYM and RMN) and a Māori academic Matire Harwood with expert knowledge of KMR and the impacts of smoking on Indigenous peoples, I began the study in 2014. Of importance was my own practice of ‘tika’³ and ‘pono’⁴ values inherent in being a Māori woman and crucial to my role as an Indigenous researcher.

I did not realise when I began that I would re-evaluate my own understanding of the meaning of smoking and tobacco, nor did I imagine I would learn so much about the Yolŋu culture, focused as I was on ŋarali’ – but the two are interwoven. I am sharing this journey to encourage other Indigenous researchers especially those within my field of interest, to amplify Indigenous voices within the research academy, to challenge western power structures that privilege mainstream sensibilities and to advocate for Yolŋu to have greater control and decision making in all aspects of their lives. Together, we can uphold an Indigenous research agenda that serves and informs the political liberation struggle of Indigenous peoples:

It is a struggle for development, for rebuilding leadership and governance structures, for strengthening social and cultural institutions, for protecting and restoring environments, and for revitalising language and culture. (Smith, 2005, p. 89)

Background

The Yolŋu people of Australia are the traditional owners of large estates within Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory (NT), having occupied these areas for tens of thousands of years. With rich traditions, oral history and a dynamic, vibrant culture the Yolŋu maintain many traditional customs and practises, and distinct languages. All Yolŋu people belong to one of two basic divisions, or moieties, called Dhuwa and Yirritja. Yolŋu moieties are exogamous, patrilineal and all-encompassing (Morphy, 2016). Everything in the Yolŋu universe – Spirit Beings, plant and animal species, clan groups, areas of land and water are either Dhuwa or Yirritja and within each moiety, people belong to smaller groups

3 Tika = to be correct, true, upright, right, just, fair, accurate, appropriate, lawful, proper

4 Pono = be true, valid, honest, genuine, sincere

called clans, each having its own language. Children belong to their father's clan (and moiety), while their mother belongs to another clan (of the other moiety). Clan members own areas of land and waters in common, however the relationship is much more complex than just 'owning', or even 'caring for', the land (Hutcherson, 1995). Rather, the Yolŋu consider themselves as having come from the land, or of being the land, a familiar concept for Indigenous peoples and nations throughout the world, who seek to maintain a unique relationship with the earth, for the ongoing health and wellbeing of their communities and nations (Committee on Indigenous Health, 2002).

The Yirritja moiety are the Custodians of *ŋarali'* or tobacco and keepers of the *ŋarali'* dance, songlines and stories. Tobacco arrived to the northern shores of Australia in the 1700s with the Macassans, and its use was associated with enhanced prestige amongst the Elders and male leaders who had limited access to supplies through trading (McIntosh, 2013). Tobacco pipes were also acquired and were often incised or painted with totemic designs, transforming them into sacred items, the use of which could be restricted to initiated men (Toner, 2001). Donald Thomson (1901-1970), anthropologist and author of *Economic Structure and the Ceremonial Exchange Cycle in Arnhem Land* (1949), referred to the carefully moderated use of *ŋarali'* amongst males observed:

In a society in which generosity and sharing were pre-eminent values, this strategy enabled a man to conserve his tobacco and the means of smoking it, while being able to avoid any accusations of meanness (Thomson, 1939, p. 89).

In more recent years, *ŋarali'* has been integrated as 'a sacred part of culture and ceremony' (Kariippanon, 2014) and is described as *mulwatj*, which refers to anything that is culturally important (Toner, 2001). Today in Arnhem Land, it is possible to see Yolŋu dancers performing segments of the Macassan song cycle with actions that 'beg' and 'ask' (the Macassans) for tobacco (Brady, 2013). The tobacco song is also used in funerals to dedicate a grave:

Performers are given small amounts of tinned tobacco with which they dance, rolling it between their hands, and at the end of the performance the tobacco is sprinkled into the open grave (Toner, 2001, p. 262).

Given the Yolŋu's long association with *ŋarali'*, the integration of tobacco into culture and ceremony, and the effects of colonisation processes that used tobacco to pacify and control Indigenous peoples, it is no surprise that smoking has become ubiquitous and normalised within Yolŋu communities. The effects and harms of smoking on Indigenous Australians are well documented (Clough et al., 2004; Clough, MacLaren, Robertson, Ivers, & Conigrave, 2011; Kariippanon, 2014; MacLaren et al., 2010; Mulholland, 2008; Robertson, 2011; Stevenson, Bohanna, Robertson, & Clough, 2013), however, the juxtaposition of the common or profane use of *ŋarali'* and its spiritual and cultural aspects have not been fully explored or addressed in the context of tobacco control in Australia.

Research Aims

The study sought to explore from the Yolŋu perspective the meanings of *ŋarali'*, and to identify Yolŋu perceptions and experiences of quit smoking programs and policies, effective smoking cessation and what informants believed could be done to prevent young people and children from initiating smoking. These issues were explored during discussions with Yolŋu participants, who acknowledged the historical and social context of *ŋarali'* as an important introduced material culture, a unique locus within Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies.

The Context

East Arnhem Land (refer Figure 1) is one of the most remote regions of the Northern Territory.

Figure 1 Talking about Smoking in East Arnhem Land' research sites (in blue)



Source: Buku Larnggay Mulka Centre (2016).

During the 1980s many Yolŋu returned to their traditional lands to establish outstations or 'homelands' as part of a movement that saw many leaving the larger townships, often to escape social problems including alcohol and petrol sniffing (Morice, 1976). Today, Yolŋu are actively asserting their sovereignty, over their lives and their estates (Trudgen, 2000) under their traditional Ngarra law (Gaymarani, 2011). A council of Tribal Elders and leaders make up the Yolŋu Nations Assembly and in July 2016, they ratified a Constitution and declared:

We, as first peoples of Arnhem Land, have not been conquered. To this day we are a sovereign people. (Yolngu Nations Assembly, 2011, p. 1)

The Yolŋu Nations Assembly has representatives from eight different provinces of the Arnhem region: Miwatj, Laynha, Raminy, Marthakal, Gärriny Gumurr-Rawarraŋ, Gaŋtjirrik and Miŋiyirrk and they aim to provide a governance organisation for Yolŋu society. The intention of the Assembly is to remain consistent with the Madayin system of law (the traditional legal system of the Yolŋu people); facilitate the interests and rights of the subjects of the Madayin system of law; ensure compatibility with the Australian Westminster system of Government; empower existing tribal governance jurisdictions; act as a diplomatic agency for outside groups; and, to enable good governance outcomes that empower and progress Yolŋu society.

Elected leaders from the eight provinces hold authority for various roles within the Assembly including calling meetings, providing oversight, and representing on behalf of the Assembly. A well-known leader holding the position of Djawakmirr (person with authority to speak on behalf of the Assembly) is the Reverend Dr Djiniyini Gondarra. Gondarra is a Senior Elder of the Dhurili Clan Nation and Chairman of the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation who has called for recognition of the traditional law of the Yolŋu people of Arnhem Land:

There is no recognition of the fact that we have assented to our law for many thousands of years and we still consider ourselves a sovereign people who belong to different Ringitj Nation States. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012, p. 210)

The exploration of ŋarali' as an introduced material culture and the impacts of smoking on Yolŋu smokers and their families are addressed within this article in the context of the declared aspirations of the Yolŋu Nations to be self-determining and sovereign. While these aspirations are key issues for the Yolŋu, they are also applicable and of importance to Indigenous tobacco control researchers from other nations, who perceive smoking as a threat to health and wellbeing, and who also identify it as a barrier to Indigenous peoples reaching their full potential.

Addressing researcher reflexivity

I began the research as a member of the local health service, which afforded some distinct advantages. Access to the remote homeland communities remains at the invitation of local communities and/or organisations and as an employee of the latter, I was able to move freely around the region. This gave me time to approach Aboriginal organisations and their boards where I was hoping to conduct research, for their endorsement.

As an Indigenous Māori woman from Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) and a guest in Arnhem Land, I was concerned with conducting Indigenous research that was 'ethically and culturally appropriate' (Botha, 2011, p. 314) and that was informed by Indigenous epistemology that acknowledged 'the interconnectedness of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of individuals, with all living things and with the earth, the star world, and the universe' (Lavallee,

2009, p. 23). My intent was to ensure that the study would be deliberately configured to privilege Indigenous voices, understanding the importance of centering the concepts and worldviews from their perspectives and for their purposes, rather than ‘problematizing’ them, a seemingly Western obsession (Smith, 1999). When it came to voice, I was especially conscious that while I as an Indigenous person might have empathy for the Yolŋu, it was their voices that needed to be heard (Rigney, 2003).

Although I was positioned with ‘insider’ status, by virtue of being Indigenous, and living and working in the local community, I had limited cultural and traditional knowledge, a risky proposition for undertaking local research. Seeking advice from local leaders and colleagues, I located a male Yolŋu person who was willing to work with me as a Cultural Mentor and who helped with advice and guidance on cultural issues and gender-specific protocols.

The second Cultural Mentor (CM) to join the research was female and having met, we quickly became friends. Our visits to the communities together for data collection were very productive and enjoyable and later, in the comfort of my home, we would review the recordings, while I took notes of her comments and observations. I recorded these sessions and later sessions with the male CM, to analyse their contributions as an integral part of the research. Their incisive, informed comments were key to the process of data analysis and coding that I was engaged in.

As senior Elders and leaders they gave credibility to the research and during the period of 12 months while we were collecting data, informants spoken honestly and openly about their deep and abiding connection to ŋarali’. Informants described in detail, the various roles and responsibilities of upholding culture and tradition especially those associated with funeral ceremony. I attribute the willingness of the Yolŋu to communicate with me, directly to the presence of the CMs and I could not have conducted the research without them.

When I first visited EAL, I was adopted into the Yirritja moiety. Over time, I was invited to a number of funerals, but had not felt comfortable to attend. As a Māori woman, my own cultural values required that I observe the kawa or protocols of: ‘tangi’,⁵ ‘tapu’,⁶ and ‘noa’.⁷ This was not possible however as I was without a male to perform the role of ‘taumata-korero’⁸ during ‘powhiri’⁹ or ‘tangi’ encounters. I did not choose to disclose my reluctance to attend funeral ceremony to any of my Yolŋu friends, for fear of giving offence. However, on one occasion at the direction of a senior woman, our whole organisation did attend and take part in a funeral. We were able to observe from the sidelines, the ŋarali’ bungul (dancing) and the ŋarali’ manikay (songlines). It was a moving occasion and later in privacy, I discreetly observed the cleansing and karakia that my culture requires after contact with a tupapaku.¹⁰

Growing up as part of a minority group in Aotearoa New Zealand the complexities of balancing diverse cultural expectations were not new to me, however, being an Indigenous researcher in Australia was. I was forced to regularly explore my ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status as a Māori woman living in an Indigenous community, which was not my own.

5 Tangi = to cry, to mourn, to weep; traditional rites performed during funeral

6 Tapu = sacred, prohibited, restricted

7 Noa = to be free from tapu, unrestricted

8 Taumata korero = distinguished orator

9 Powhiri = rituals of encounter

10 Tupapaku = deceased person’s body

The term ‘insider’ has been used in social research and is replete with meaning. Seminal research from Kanuha (2000) explored the roles and challenges of ‘insider’, ‘Indigenous’, or ‘native’ research, from the perspective of being an Indigenous researcher undertaking work with one’s own identity or cultural group. While an insider’s position is not necessarily an unchallengeable ‘true’ picture, it represents one possible perspective.

Being Indigenous from another country did not necessarily produce greater insight into the lives and understandings of the Yolŋu. However, it did give me access to observe, explore and interpret meaning from an Indigenous frame, based on first hand experiences. While authentic representation of the contexts and practises of Yolŋu regarding *ŋarali*¹¹ were best accessed by Yolŋu themselves (Bainbridge, Whiteside, & Mc Calman, 2013), I hoped that by working closely and collaboratively with the CMs we would bring new perspectives to the discussion, genuinely reflecting the concerns of the Yolŋu. Accepting the limitations of my ‘insider’/‘outsider’ realities was part of a dynamic process of learning and reflecting.

The personal experience of being *tangata whenua*¹¹ and growing up on lands that our tribe has occupied for a thousand years, has always been a source of strength to me, providing my whanau (family and extended family) and I with a sense of belonging and confirming our identity as Māori. I understood at a fundamental level the enormous value that the Yolŋu hold for their place in the universe, to be guarded and protected for the next generations. A well-known Māori proverb reminds us:

Whatu ngarongaro he tangata, toitu te whenua.

People perish, but land is permanent. (Williams, 2008, p. 1)

I rationalised that what strengthens and promotes a sense of belonging as Indigenous people is our knowledge of who we are as *tangata whenua* or people of the land. Mason Durie (Durie, 2004a), quoting Indigenous sources, describes the most defining element of indigeneity as a strong sense of unity with the environment:

People are the land and the land is the people. We are the river, the river is us.
(Durie, 2004b, p. 4, 18)

Knowing where I belonged helped me to find harmony in balancing my role as a researcher and my obligations as an Indigenous woman living as a guest in another country.

Decolonising the denormalisation debate

Coming to formal education late in life, I recall engaging with historic evidence of racism in Aotearoa NZ. Having grown up in a small, rural, predominantly Pakeha (New Zealander of European descent) community, I had my own memories of inequities and injustices, personally and involving my family and extended family, with the justice system, our traditional lands and our aspirations to be self-determining.

A critical review of the history of colonisation and the breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi that had begun almost immediately after signing (Belich, 2007; Orange, 2015), had the effect of validating my experiences and those of my parents, who were whipped for speaking their language at school. My studies at university revealed the extent of institutionalised racism and discrimination against Māori in Aotearoa NZ from first contact, something that even today

¹¹ *Tangata whenua* are people born of the *whenua*, i.e. of the placenta and of the land where the people’s ancestors have lived and where their placentas are buried.

many Pakeha deny, as it is contrary to the popular notion that Aotearoa NZ is a ‘bi-lingual’ utopia, where we all just get along (Albury, 2015). What has now been established is the fact that it is largely through societal systems of racism that material and symbolic, for example political privilege (Yin, 2016), are maintained. The experiences of Māori reflect those of other Indigenous peoples, with disparities across a broad range of indicators, most profoundly health, as a result of and directly related to the colonisation experience (Reid, Taylor-Moore, & Varona, 2014):

Indigenous peoples remain on the margins of society; they are poorer, less educated, die at a younger age, are much more likely to commit suicide, and are generally in worse health than the rest of the population. (International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), 2006, p. 10)

Complicit in the process of colonisation is the use of tobacco as a tool for trade, influence, and ultimately control of Indigenous peoples’ resources and their labour. Called the ‘gift from a distant land’ (Reid & Taniwha, 1991, p. 1) tobacco was used to ensnare Māori, creating dependency and addiction. The disproportionately high smoking prevalence by Māori today is testimony to the effectiveness of its initial introduction by colonists, reinforced by postcards and advertisements, which portrayed Māori tobacco use as a social norm (Barnett, Moon, & Kearns, 2004; Monin, 2001). This led to smoking becoming entrenched into the Māori way of life (Broughton, 1996). The speed with which this was achieved also reflects Māori society at the time with its well-ordered social structures, and strong kinship ties which facilitated the widespread sharing and use of tobacco.

In 2009, key Māori leaders leveraged political influence to advocate for an inquiry into the impacts of the tobacco industry on Māori, and in 2010, a Māori Select Committee Inquiry was established (Ministry of Health, 2010). Following this milestone, with optimism high, an ambitious goal to make NZ smokefree by 2025 was set by a cooperative of mainly non-Māori tobacco control advocates whose organisations later became the main recipients of government funding to achieve this, at the expense of Kaupapa Māori organisations such as Te Reo Marama and Te Hotu Manawa Māori (Confidential Source, 2009) both of which lost their major tobacco control contracts. In a recent book well-known investigative journalist Nicky Hager (2014) suggests these cut backs in Māori tobacco control were influenced by interference from a tobacco industry lobbyist with strong links to the Ministry of Health, and who had unrestricted access to run a smear campaign directed at these organisations and their representatives, through a blog (Slater, 2009).

Today, it seems that little progress has been made in reducing smoking prevalence amongst Māori and a review of the Smokefree Aotearoa 2025 goal showed that this key indicator will be missed by a substantial margin (Ball, Stanley, Wilson, Blakely, & Edwards, 2016). The result is hardly surprising given the lack of direct support to Māori tobacco control following the inquiry, however, the evidence also points to a failure by the NZ government at the time to adequately fund tailored and targeted approaches to smoking cessation interventions for Māori despite the urgent need.

Unfortunately, research has shown that there is a uniform lack of political will to address the needs of Indigenous smokers in other countries (DiGiacomo et al., 2011), distinguished by a failure to address the social-cultural contexts in which smoking is occurring or the use of culture as a strengthening effect on identity (Bond, 2007). Rather, we have witnessed over time, how government processes have tended to favour mainstream, whole of population approaches and especially so within the context of tobacco control, which seems dominated by a focus on denormalising smoking.

The denormalisation strategy in its original form used advocacy and policy change to shift social norms and eliminate the tobacco industry's influence at the local level (California Department of Health Services, 1998). Today, denormalisation has become strongly associated with stigmatisation. That is the spoiled identity associated with Goffman's theory of stigma from 'a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (Goffman, 1963, p. 3), has extended beyond the tobacco industry, and has alighted upon those who continue to smoke – many of whom are Indigenous. Today, tobacco control denormalisation strategies utilise increasing social pressure to quit through marketing campaigns, and increasingly stricter smoking restrictions, bans and regulations for public and private spaces (California Department of Health Services, 1998), all being delivered as part of a 'one-size fits all' dogma.

I entered public health and tobacco control in 2006 in NZ and immediately encountered fervent, well-meaning tobacco control advocates, whose main efforts were concerned with denormalisation strategies, all too often adopting a blaming and negative view of Māori smoking, with little regard for finding culturally appropriate solutions to address the issue. Despite the presence of persistent health disparities amongst Māori because of smoking, few acknowledged the origins of smoking within the context of colonisation.

I have because of these experiences remained strongly critical of these strategies within the context of Indigenous smoking. While widespread reductions in smoking prevalence have been achieved globally, these efforts have also contributed to widening health disparities with a marked social gradient emerging in smoking behaviour over the past several decades (Bayer, 2008a). Indigenous peoples and those at the lower end of the social stratification system in economically advanced societies such as NZ and Australia continue to smoke – and those who have more income and education are less likely to do so.

Credit must be given to many authors who continue to raise the question of denormalisation-associated stigma in tobacco control (Bayer, 2008a; Bayer & Feldman, 2012; Bayer & Stuber, 2006) and who have posited, 'Not can we, but should we?' (Bayer, 2008b, p. 463). They observe that increasing inequalities and the use of restrictive and burdensome public health measures designed to further limit prevalence of tobacco use will most affect those at the bottom of the social ladder – where the majority of Indigenous populations are represented. Investigating whether the initiatives and programs introduced to the Yolŋu communities where I lived and worked became of importance and interest to me in the context of these strategies, and was fundamental in prompting me to take up PhD studies.

Health disparities in Arnhem Land

The experiences of the Indigenous peoples of Australia through colonisation processes are characterised by greater impacts and losses in comparison to NZ, because of harsher government and settler interventions over longer periods of time (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1994; Department of Territories, 1967; Rowley, 1970; Tatz, 1979). The effects on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been well documented and in recent years, health researchers have clearly illustrated a powerful relationship between the health status of individuals or collectives and social, political and economic circumstances (Marmot, 2011; Marmot & Wilkinson, 2001). Most significant of these colonial impositions has been the forced removal of Indigenous Australians from their families (Young, 1998), from their communities, their land and their birthright connections to the land (Gardiner-Garden, 1999). Acknowledgement of the impacts that invasion, imperialism, colonisation, research and policy have had on the Indigenous peoples of Australia (Sherwood & Edwards, 2006) is crucial in addressing the persistent, pervasive disparity in health outcomes today.

The history of tobacco as a tool to assist in the colonisation of Australia is similar to NZ, however, there are some unique differences. Historically in Central Australia, pituri leaves containing nicotine, were chewed for their narcotic effect (Ratsch, Steadman, & Bogossian, 2010) and as described previously, tobacco first came with the Macassans to Arnhem Land. With the establishment of mission stations in Arnhem Land in the mid-1900s, Yolŋu gained regular access to tea, flour, sugar and tobacco in exchange for their work, a practice reinforced as part of government policies (Macknight, 1976).

One of the most confronting aspects of living in East Arnhem Land, was the regularity in the number of funerals that were held by the Yolŋu, often following illness from advanced and late-stage chronic conditions. Data reported in 2011 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011) showed that the difference in estimated life expectancy by Indigenous status is greatest in the Northern Territory, where male Indigenous life expectancy is 14.2 years lower than for non-Indigenous males. The largest differential in mortality rates is in age groups from 25–54 years, where Indigenous rates are 4–5 times higher than for non-Indigenous persons.

Smoking is the leading risk factor for Indigenous Australians, and accounts for 12.3% of the burden of disease, more than any other risk factor such as alcohol and illicit drugs combined. Smoking is related to cardiovascular disease, accounting for about 25% of all Indigenous deaths; and to cancer, the next most common cause of death among Indigenous people (20%, with lung cancer representing 4.9%) (Scollo & Winstanley, 2015).

In Arnhem Land remote communities, smoking prevalence between 68% to 83% in men and 65% to 73% in women have been reported with little change since the mid-1980s (Clough et al., 2011).

Methodology and Methods

In adopting a grounded theory methodology for the study, I sought to disrupt and challenge the many voices of tobacco control researchers and advocates who continue to maintain strategies of denormalisation, increasing restrictions, and stigmatisation of smoking and smokers despite the implications for Indigenous peoples and other disadvantaged groups (Thompson, Pearce, & Barnett, 2007).

The grounded theory methodology seeks out and conceptualises the latent social patterns and structures through the process of constant comparison of concepts (Glaser, 1978) derived from interviews with individuals and on some occasions, groups of informants. The method starts with the use of an inductive approach to generate substantive codes from the data, later developing theory to guide where to go to next and which, more-focussed, questions to ask. This method is ideal for ‘exploring integral social relationships and the behaviour of groups where there has been little study of the contextual factors that affect individuals’ lives’ (Calman, 2006, p. 3). The final product of a grounded theory study is the development of a theory or theoretical framework.

I began by recording interviews with Yolŋu and Njapaki/Balanda (non-Indigenous) participants and later transcribed these. Of the 22 Yolŋu who were interviewed, ten participants chose to speak mostly in English. I worked with the CMs who gave me advice and guidance prior to the interviews, and attended the sessions. The CMs translated the interview questions into a Yolŋu language for every session, and then interpreted answers for me to record. When I spoke during the sessions, it was in English and the CMs provided translations when needed.

During the transcribing process, and where participants had spoken in a Yolŋu language, one of the two CMs and I reviewed the recording later, often in the afternoon on our return from the community. Comments made by the CMs and insight offered were also recorded, transcribed and analysed later with their permission.

The grounded theory methodology gave me the tools to explore possibilities and propose interpretations that challenged the taken-for-granted notions of western tobacco control research. Staying close to and being grounded in the data, enabled me to explore and make sense of the informants' perspectives and to value these as useful and beneficial, seen from the point of view of the Indigenous peoples involved (Porsanger, 2004).

Qualitative interviews were conducted with informants in eight communities by the researcher (MT), with the support of Cultural Mentors. Interview questions focused on participants' knowledge, experiences and views of *ŋarali* including perspectives of local programs. The researcher encouraged them to 'tell their stories' about *ŋarali*, an Indigenous style of conversation consistent with local culture (Bainbridge et al., 2013, p. 284).

Sampling and Permissions

Engaging and consulting with the Yolŋu communities firstly required a process involving local health service managers, Aboriginal Health Workers (AHWs) and the CMs, to determine which communities would be interested in participating.

I was then permitted to travel with health service staff to meet the local Elders, where I discussed the research, answered any questions they had, and then requested permission to interview participants at a later date. I returned to the community one week later with a CM and we visited their contacts, or met clients at the clinic, who came for interviews. Interviews were conducted after participants signed an informed consent form. Open-ended questions were used throughout the interviews and were aimed at exploring from a Yolŋu perspective, values, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes to *ŋarali*, from a cultural and historical perspective.

I visited eight communities and conducted interviews with AHWs, administration staff (all Yolŋu) and with community members. Participants communicated their preferences on the location and setting of these interviews, depending on where they felt comfortable. Some interviews were held on the clinic veranda (if preferred by the informant) or in a consult room – a family member would often be present. Some of the Yolŋu employees that were recruited wanted to come to my house, so I conducted interviews there as well.

Prior to this, I obtained formal permission in writing from three Aboriginal corporations through their Boards and/or CEOs or managers, who provided a letter of support, and gave permission to interview their employees. In later discussions with researchers who had experienced barriers in recruiting research participants, I began to more fully appreciate the benefit of working and living in these communities. Ethics approval (HREC 2014-2169) was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee, Charles Darwin University and Menzies School of Health Research, in 2014. This was a relatively simple process once I had received permission and letters of support from the heads of these regional organisations and their boards. However, in keeping with local custom, I always sought permission first from the Elders of the communities, and would not have proceeded without their approval.

Analysis

Following transcribing, I conducted line-by-line coding of text using NVivo 10, a data analysis software program. This type of coding begins with naming small blocks of text in an inductive form of data analysis, thought to be more “grounded” in what participants have actually said (Berg, 1995; Lavallee, 2009). I began data analysis immediately after the first interviews began with a priori parent nodes. Over time, these initial codes changed as more data was analysed. I supplemented the coding with memo writing, reflecting and describing any changes in my thinking. Further analysis resulted in additional and amalgamated codes, to better describe concepts derived from the data. I made comparisons between the data, and the codes, and used memo writing to explore lines of inquiry to probe in subsequent interviews.

While it was my original intention to undertake theoretical sampling, my cohort of participants was somewhat limited. Once interviews had begun, we were able to use snowball sampling, finding new participants from communities where we had already been working in. This meant that we had sufficient informants for data collection and analysis and I reached saturation or the point where there were no new concepts emerging from participants with around 22 Yolŋu. At this point I had over 50 codes, and eight parent codes.

By this stage, I had become concerned that the voices of informants had been attenuated by the systematic ‘line by line’ analysis and I was anxious to uphold an Indigenous research agenda. By breaking the text into small pieces and then aggregating into one whole, I felt that I may have lost sight of the unique and individual characteristics and voice of the informants (Lavallee, 2009). Addressing this, I went back to the original interview transcripts and re-read each one as a whole, comparing and contrasting participant perspectives, writing higher level summaries and checking against the nodes to ensure that I had represented all the recurring and important (based on their context) concepts from the data. This process helped me to distil the data from 50 codes and eight parent codes, down to a total of 13 categories, which I was able to compress into three main themes. I was satisfied that I had not only represented the informants’ voices, but I had also reached theoretical saturation where all of the concepts being developed were well understood and could be substantiated from the data (Sbaraini, Carter, Wendell Evans, & Blinkhorn, 2011, p. 3).

I approached the next stage of my study, the development of a theoretical model, with enthusiasm. Drawing on a unique Yolŋu metaphor of ‘two-way learning’ (Morphy, 2002, p. 8), I created a visual depiction of a mutually beneficial exchange of cultural knowledge, between the Yolŋu and those involved in tobacco control in the region. Similar to the concept of ‘both-way education’ (Australian National University, 2017, p. 1) the approach recognises the relative autonomy of Yolŋu and European systems of knowledge. As Morphy observes,

It advocates teaching them separately, but in an environment where they can come together for mutual benefit. The philosophy was built around the metaphor of ganma, the process whereby fresh water and saltwater come together and become highly potent. (Morphy, 2016, p. 337)

I envisaged that this approach would lead to better communication and improved understanding, in a space created specifically for Yolŋu voices to be heard, and listened to. In such a setting, the resources and decision-making power needed to create culturally appropriate interventions and solutions would be accessed and shared, toward achieving a common goal of improving Yolŋu health outcomes, through smoking cessation.

Summary of Research Findings

The focus of this article is on my research methods and methodologies not on the research findings. The results of the interviews will be examined in more detail elsewhere. However, a brief overview of the findings is provided to inform the reflection on my approach to this research.

Informants freely expressed their views on issues such as smoking restrictions, policies in the workplace and tobacco price increases. Surprisingly very few Yolŋu described feelings of marginalisation or stigma in association with smoking – in the Yolŋu world, smoking is an everyday occurrence, and it is only when Yolŋu come into contact with the wider environment that it becomes an issue such as when they visit hospitals or have to attend work or meetings.

Comprehensive mainstream tobacco control programs have traditionally sought to address smoking at every level of society including through social influence, environmental restrictions and price increases on tobacco. Yolŋu informants commented that these measures had been somewhat effective (given that some had experienced feelings of shame) but that the mainstay of price increases and smoking restrictions, were largely ignored.

Many smokers who had been able to quit, had done so abruptly as a result of a health scare, or imminent hospitalisation for treatment – and they had achieved smoking cessation with little support, other than being told they needed to quit by a health professional. Some of the Yolŋu who were employed as health workers had not been offered support to quit smoking, nor had they requested help – but each of them expressed a desire to quit smoking, and disappointment that they had not been able to achieve smoking cessation.

Rather than drive toward the goal of ‘policy and programs to improve the health of all Australians by eliminating or reducing their exposure to tobacco in all its forms’ (Department of Health, 2017), Yolŋu intended to continue their *ŋarali*’ culture and traditions associated with caring for family, family leadership and responsibilities. Recognising that *ŋarali*’ would always be treated as *mulwatj* or precious with respect to traditional culture, both smokers and non-smokers agreed that it would remain ‘a sacred part of culture’, for all generations (Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, 2014).

Although cultural obligations were associated with *ŋarali*’, differences from the act of smoking tobacco were articulated by Yolŋu informants; smokers, and non-smokers reiterated that Yolŋu can celebrate and participate within the *ŋarali*’ ceremonies, without being a smoker. No immediate interest in putting aside these cultural aspects and obligations of *ŋarali*’, were reported by Yolŋu informants.

Discussion

The intention to address social justice and to explore the issue of smoking within the context of the history and traditions of the Yolŋu peoples of Arnhem Land was made at the beginning of this study, and this decision influenced the research design and methodology. Yolŋu informants interused their beliefs and values including those that of *ŋarali*’ which have been integrated into funeral rites and ceremonies, throughout their discussions and interviews. Analyses of these aspects of Yolŋu practices provide insight into their socio-cultural environment and reveal a stark contrast between current tobacco control efforts within the region and the aspirations of the Indigenous peoples for their families and communities to address the issue of smoking. Within the domain of tobacco control and public health, denormalisation practices that postulate increasing measures of social control and social exclusion of smokers, and that ignore the history of colonisation where tobacco was used as a tool to control, are incongruent with Indigenous histories, cultures and traditions, especially for the Yolŋu peoples of Arnhem Land.

In every community where this research was conducted, smokers described their lives, attitudes, beliefs and values in terms of their connection to their families and clans. A smoker was not perceived as a lone individual, but rather as a vital and integral part of their family, with roles and responsibilities acknowledged and well-described. This is contrary to the view of health practice which is concerned with an individualist approach, and which does not acknowledge remedies that are associated with land, language, identity and spirituality, but focuses on discreet interventions such as, eating better foods or giving up smoking as a panacea for addressing poor health outcomes. This approach has been criticised as it 'effectively blames the victim, disempowers the victim, and/or entrenches the very conditions that create adverse health outcomes' (Bond, 2007, p. 85).

The findings of this study represent a new opportunity for those working with the Yolŋu to engage in ways that are culturally responsive, sensitive to local needs and norms, and respectful in their approaches. Research has shown that these methods are most likely to be effective (Gould, 2014; Gould, McEwen, Watters, Clough, & van der Zwan, 2013; Johnston & Thomas, 2010; Stevenson et al., 2013). Increasing the involvement, engagement and ownership of Indigenous communities in finding their own solutions, may challenge the status quo in this sector, however, new elements for discussion in the context of tobacco control are urgently needed.

The notion of self-determination and being in control of one's future, resources and lands, and able to act sovereignly is challenged by the act of smoking, and many Yolŋu smokers were eager to quit, but felt that they lacked the support or capacity to do so, despite numerous attempts. Health indicators show that Indigenous Australians are over-represented by negative health statistics, bear a greater burden of disease, and experience disproportionately more losses through premature death from smoking related diseases. Given that these health outcomes are preventable, the research sought to explore alternative and acceptable approaches to support the Yolŋu to quit smoking and to prevent more Yolŋu children and young people from initiating smoking.

The idea that this research would benefit Yolŋu people, helped me to remain firm in my resolve to advocate in this space for better access to resources (Tane, 2014). Reciprocity and responsibility were key values that also helped me to remain resolute in presenting the findings from my research at national and international conferences (Tane, 2015 & 2016) to raise awareness and to call for greater understanding within the tobacco control sector. I did so because I owe a debt to those Yolŋu who participated in the research, for allowing me to conduct research within their country. They own the results of this study, and should be the primary recipients of any benefits, such as redirected resources, should these eventuate.

As an Indigenous researcher, the issue of ownership was a key concern, as it is for other Indigenous researchers. Moreton-Robinson (2016) discusses the involvement of non-Indigenous scholars with Indigenous peoples, studies or issues, and observes that while non-Indigenous scholars can participate with Indigenous analytics, they cannot by themselves, produce them. Smith (1999) recognises that there are 'powerful groups of researchers ... whose research paradigms constantly permit them to exploit Indigenous peoples and their knowledges' (p. 17). She advocates for Indigenous researchers and communities to have control of any studies involving Indigenous peoples. Rigney (2001) has argued that an Indigenist approach to research is formed around the three principles of 'resistance, political integrity, and privileging Indigenous voices' (p. 8). He connects research to liberation and to the history of oppression and racism.

By conducting my inquiry in these remote locations firstly as a local employee, a resident, and an Indigenous person, I gained entry into the local social and cultural context. By meeting with informants in ways that were culturally known and accepted, working collaboratively with the CMs in the preferred language of the people, and immersing myself in the context of community, I was able to recruit sufficient numbers to inform the research. What the people shared with us, I recorded and later analysed, and the findings were fed back to the communities via the health services. This process served the purpose of advocating on behalf of the Yolŋu for what they considered to be solutions for addressing smoking, and its harms. It was also a means of honouring the voices of those who had taken part and acknowledging their ownership over their own information and knowledges. Having set my goal to uphold an Indigenous agenda, I re-affirmed my own identity as a Māori woman and gained invaluable insight in my journey as an Indigenous researcher.

These actions were deliberate as a means of challenging the Western research academy with its legacy of studying Indigenous peoples as outsiders: 'Indeed, many of the basic disciplines of knowledge are implicated in studying the Other and creating expert knowledge of the Other' (Smith, 2005, p. 87). As Smith (1999) wryly observed, 'They came, They saw, They named, They Claimed' (p. 80). We Indigenous researchers are always involved in a struggle to ensure that the Indigenous informants and participants of our research remain central in our focus, and that they are not excluded from discussions concerning who has control over, 'the initiation, the methodologies, evaluations, assessments, representations, and distribution of the newly defined knowledge' (Denzin, 2010, p. 298). The decolonisation project continues to challenge such practices.

The research represented an opportunity to explore alternative approaches by drawing insight and understanding from the perspective of the Yolŋu, reaffirming the need for approaches in tobacco control that encompass cultural strengths, identity and traditions. Aspirations for sovereignty and self-determination continue to be articulated at a political level amongst the Yolŋu leaders of EAL, and this is unlikely to change, despite a relatively recent history of invasion, imperialism and colonisation. Smoking tobacco as a separate act from its traditional use in Yolŋu ceremonies directly challenges the ability of Indigenous peoples to reach their full potential in terms of their health and wellbeing. While connections to culture and country are essential to the ongoing wellbeing of the Yolŋu the early onset of chronic diseases and deaths because of smoking, continue to harm families and clans, often leaving them destitute when Elders and leaders pass away prematurely.

Those Yolŋu participants who contributed to the research did so openly and willingly, and by their actions created expectations of reciprocity and a responsibility to share their views widely. From this perspective, I acknowledge an ongoing obligation to privilege the voices of the people from these communities, to speak up and support what they say and to advocate on their behalf, which is consistent with upholding an Indigenous research agenda.

Conclusion

In seeking to establish and maintain an Indigenous research agenda in this study, I sought to contribute to more meaningful discussions within the tobacco control sector about the use of diverse approaches to support Indigenous smokers to quit. I sought to gain insight into the lives and meanings of the Yolŋu with regard to ŋarali' and to question their needs and desires for improving health. I believed that this study would lead to finding ways to engage respectfully and intentionally, working collaboratively within the socio-cultural and political environment of East Arnhem Land. I wanted to diverge from the well-favoured denormalisation approaches within tobacco control that I consider as often inconsistent for working with Indigenous communities and to use a decolonised research methodology to reflect Yolŋu perspectives. The aim was not to compete with or replace the Western research paradigm but as Porsanger (2004) describes, 'to challenge it and contribute to the body of knowledge of Indigenous peoples about themselves and for themselves, and for their own needs as peoples, rather than as objects of investigation' (p. 105).

The rich diversity of Yolŋu insight and cultural knowledge produced fertile ground for new learning and their dedication to the cultural and historical aspects of ŋarali' was palpable. Their views have informed a re-evaluation of my own understanding of the meaning of smoking and tobacco. Of importance is that while the Yolŋu affirm the importance of ŋarali' within the culture and traditions of their ceremonies, a distinction is made between customary use and the act of smoking. An understanding of the dichotomous nature of the relationship between the Yolŋu and ŋarali' should remain at the centre of future tobacco control efforts in the region.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the following important contributors to this article: Rita Mukuruk Ngalmi and David Yangarriny Munyarryun. I am so grateful to have spent time working with you both and to have been guided and supported throughout this research, and during the years that I was living in Arnhem Land.

I would also like to acknowledge the following organisations and their leadership, for their support: Jeff Cook, Laynhapuy Health Service, Miwatj Aboriginal Health Service and Marthakal Homelands Health Service.

Special acknowledgement and thanks to my two PhD supervisors from Menzies School of Health Research and Charles Darwin University: Prof Dr David Thomas and Dr Marita Hefler.

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Anma, Marpla and Ngapartji Ngapartji: Insights Into how to do Research Together in 'Good Faith'

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Keywords: Research, Indigenous, education, time, relationship, reciprocity, good faith.

Abstract

This paper is a reflection and discussion on doing decolonising research in the intercultural space. It flows from a larger PhD research study on pathways for Indigenous people from remote communities into teacher education. Academic research is steeped in western colonised traditions and behaviours. Conscious of this, it was important while undertaking the work toward this thesis to pay attention to the process of working together within the research. This came out of a desire to embody rather than observe cultural and ethical guidelines about doing research involving Indigenous people and knowledge systems. Through a series of interrupting tools used throughout the work, some key insights were captured that were significant in illustrating one process for collaborative decolonizing research. Three insights in particular stood out as guides for how to do decolonising research in the intercultural space. This paper will explain and discuss these three areas and their implications for working in what Verran (2013) calls 'good faith'.

Note: While I (Lisa) acknowledge that I am the sole named author of this paper, and that carries with it an inherent hegemony, at various times in this paper I have used the collective pronouns of 'we' and 'us' to honour the collective process used in conducting this research with the teacher participants.

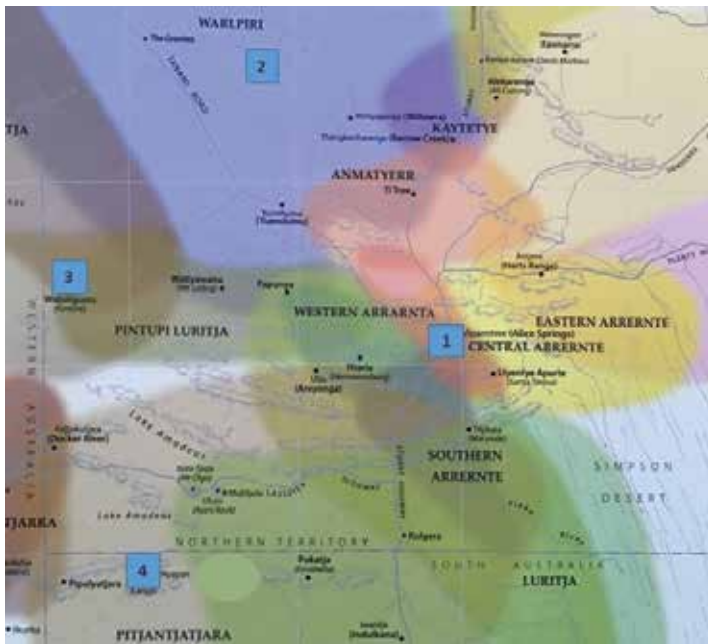
Introduction

This paper stems from doctoral research focused on pathways into teacher education for Indigenous people from remote communities in Central Australia. The principal, non-Indigenous, researcher worked with a group of Indigenous 'teacher participants' who are fully qualified teachers from the communities shown in Figure 1: Western Arrarnta (1), Warlpiri (2), Pintupi Luritja (3) and Pitjantjatjara (4), which are located in Central Australia (Figure 2).

Through a process of listening to, recording and analysing teacher narratives, the research explored the supports and barriers for Indigenous people from remote communities becoming qualified teachers. The purpose was to discern some of the reasons why so few young people from remote communities in Central Australia are completing teacher education. In considering how to explore this topic of common concern, it was important to acknowledge the inherent power relationship that exists in research work (Arbon, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2004; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). In the case of this research there was a specific power imbalance, that reflects entrenched hegemonies, given that the principal researcher is non-Indigenous and all the research participants are Indigenous. This type of power imbalance has wrought huge damage to Indigenous communities in the past, and it continues to impact on Indigenous

people. So it was equally important to all involved to ensure that this particular research project happened in a way that was conscious and alert to the colonised power relationships and practices of past research in this field. We tried wherever possible to operate in ways that did not perpetuate those practices. To that end, the research drew on the guidance of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars.

Figure 1: Central Australian communities of the teacher participants



Source: Institute for Aboriginal Development (2002).

Figure 2: The region known as Central Australia



Source: Wearne (2003).

Background and Rationale

Relationships were a central guide to how we worked together (Martin 2008). The idea for the research itself grew out of pre-existing relationships from previous work I had undertaken with these teachers. I had worked with them as their lecturer when they were studying. Through two and a half years of working together during the final stage of a teacher education degree I was privileged to hear the stories of how these mature-aged women became teachers in the first place. In some ways it felt like those stories were being entrusted to me to hold onto, to remember, to contextualise in my work with these women and their respective communities, and to differentiate from my own story and journey to become a qualified teacher. But it also felt like the women were giving me those stories to do something with them. In many ways this description by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 197) best describes this feeling:

I found that people entrusted me with information about themselves which was highly personal, I felt honoured by that trust, and somewhat obligated as well – in the sense of having to be very careful and very respectful about how I handled such information.

I have no proof or evidence that this is what the teachers were asking me to do with their stories, other than our collective ongoing commitment to the research, and an intuitive understanding that has not diminished over time. It was also an area I repeatedly sought guidance on from one of my PhD supervisors, Aboriginal scholar Dr Payi Linda Ford, as the process unfolded. So the idea for this research was born out of relationships. The PhD process was used as a vehicle to explore the wider learning that might be gleaned from these teacher stories.

In spite of, and perhaps even because of our existing relationships, the ethics of how the work was done became a central focus. This was of course guided by ethical guidelines for research that have been developed over many years. For my part, I had to be very aware of the need to remain conscious and alert to the assumptions I make based on my position as a non-Indigenous person from a white, middle class, English speaking background. To use Addelson's (1994) words I had to be conscious of,

...the society that we act and enact every day, that we generate and regenerate through our acceptance and reinforcement of the authoritative 'norms' and 'standards'. (p. 11)

Verran (2013), a non-Indigenous scholar who has a great deal of experience working in the area of generative research practices, suggests that knowledge work that seeks to decolonise needs to consciously employ 'interrupting tools'. This enables everyone involved to pay attention to and intentionally interrupt the research process to make space for difference and to enable the ability to work together in 'good faith' (Verran 2013).

A number of these 'interrupting tools' were developed as part of this research. Firstly, considerable time was devoted to exploring 'pre-methodological' questions, or 'the work before the work' (Palmer 2009). This focus on process required some unconventional choices within a PhD frame. Firstly, it required conscious attention to be paid to collaborative participation for the entire length of the process associated with the PhD study. Secondly, ongoing reflection and evaluation was an element that needed to be built into the design from the very beginning. This resulted in an action reflection cycle around the question, 'How do we do research together in the intercultural space?' Arbon's (2008, p. 34) work around 'reciprocal relatedness' informed the choices made around how the work was done. As knowledge authorities in this field, the teacher participants became the co-creators of the process and co-contributors

to the analysis work. Thirdly, at various times throughout the research the researcher and participants consciously and intentionally chose to talk and think together about what we were doing and how we were doing it. In Verran's (2013) language we were cultivating the 'collective disposition to interrogate the familiar' (p. 159). These 'interrupting tools' were used as mechanisms to ensure that everyone had a 'right' or 'good' feeling (Hall, 2016) throughout the processes and could come to the end of the process feeling that what had been achieved together was more than what could have been done alone. This is how Verran's term 'good faith' was interpreted in this instance. This meant that, in addition to the questions around supporting future generations of qualified teachers from remote communities, this doctoral research also offered a unique opportunity to inhabit, reflect on, evaluate and analyse ways of doing research that might offer decolonising strategies for future researchers.

Literature Review – Relational Research That Generates 'Good Faith'

The colonial legacy of research for Indigenous peoples is explored in great detail in Hall (2013). What is being explored here is how research processes can place relationships – between participants and between people and knowledge – as central to the work being done, with an emphasis on 'good faith'. Martin (2008) reminds us that when doing research with Indigenous people the research design must be co-constructed in order to remain open to the multiplicity of ways of knowing, being and doing. Wilson (2008, p. 11) suggests that the research itself must be considered 'ceremony'. Warlpiri scholar, Steve Patrick Pawu Kurlpurlurnu reminds us that for Indigenous epistemologies the knowledge lies in the relationships, not in the separate parts (Pawu Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes & Box, 2008, p. 15). de Crespigny, Emden, Kowanko and Murray (2004) also concur with this notion of relationality, as does Chilisa (2011, pp. 108-122), reminding us that it is not just about relationships between researcher and community, but more importantly about understanding the relational ontologies and axiologies of Indigenous peoples. In this paradigm the researchers' relationship to knowledge itself is and must be different. According to Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009, p. 6) Indigenous ways of knowing explicitly recognise that one cannot know everything, that everything cannot be known and that there are knowledges beyond human understanding. Additionally, they maintain that 'knowledge cannot be discovered or owned; it can only be revealed and shared. In research the Indigenous person is always the observer and Indigenous worldviews and perspectives are explicitly positioned as the lens through which the research seeks to reveal knowledge' (Moreton-Robinson & Walter 2009, p. 12). As Chilisa (2011, p. 99) points out, this Indigenous perspective of research being about 'unveiling knowledge' may pose some challenges for an Academy that has previously been focused on the 'discovery' of 'new' knowledge.

This focus on the relationship between people and knowledge was not the only area where this research challenged academic 'norms'. The presence of pre-existing relationships, often seen as a risk or threat in the positivist view of research, is commonly seen as something advantageous to the quality of the research when working within and Indigenous/non-Indigenous collaborative space (Chilisa, 2011; Wilson, 2008). Verran (2013) advocates that research involving the collaboration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people needs to have the intent of conducting itself in 'good faith' which means that at its core it needs to remain relational. Thrift (2004) talks about spaces of 'ethical encounter as being part of the real ethics of doing research. He suggests that things such as 'knowing when to wait for a response, knowing when and when not to foreclose a situation, knowing when to be playful and when to be serious...can open out the ethical possibilities of an encounter and allow both the researcher and the researched to trust their judgement' (Thrift, 2004, p. 120). He notes that these encounters expand our subjectivity, but do so in a frame of responsibility. This echoes Rose (2004) who talks about the need for an 'ethic of relational responsibility' as being central

to the work of decolonisation. But Rose says that we must no longer see ethics as a 'closed system' but rather as a 'way of living...in vulnerability and openness to others' (Rose, 2004, p 8). She further explains that this needs to be an ethics of responsibility rather than guilt and it should focus on developing a human condition of 'living with and for others' (Rose, 2004, p. 12). Finally, Rose suggests that ethics are revealed in our lives as they 'unfold within relationships of responsibility' (Rose, 2004, p.13). Moreton-Robinson & Walter (2009, p. 6) underline the important principles of respect, reciprocity and obligation. This conception of relational ethics underpinning research processes corresponds strongly with ideas expressed by Indigenous scholars, and is widely considered to be a key aspect of decolonizing research practices.

Method and Analysis: Co-constructing the Research Process and the use of 'Interrupting Tools'

The group of teacher participants involved in this research were already known to me and I to them. There is accountability to each other through friendship, collegiality and a shared commitment to education. These relationships have seen the development of a rapport that enables honest and sometimes challenging conversations to take place in respectful and responsible ways. Ensuring a process of free and voluntary consent and participation in the project for the teacher participants was very important. In particular, as the principal researcher I did not want people to participate out of obligation to me or to our friendship. Ensuring the participants felt free to enter into but also opt out of the project was an important part of what needed to be negotiated in an ongoing way. Also important was the provision of many opportunities for the teacher participants to negotiate aspects of the project so that the spectrum of consensual participation was not simply about opting in or out, but ensuring that the research was done in ways that everyone felt happy with.

From the beginning, it was imperative that the sole focus was not just on the outcomes of the research but on the process itself, and how everyone was experiencing that process. To keep this focus there needed to be mechanisms for checking on our relational accountability to each other. This ongoing and intentional dialogue throughout the research process provided what Verran (2013) calls 'interrupting tools'. She talks about the need in decolonising knowledge work to pay attention to moments of 'epistemic disconcertment' and to be alert to the differences we encounter. These intentional conversations about the research process helped us to 'go deeper inside the encounter' (Verran, 2013, p. 147) to explore how the way we did things helped us to work in 'good faith' with each other. These mechanisms, or 'interrupting tools', outlined below, emerged and evolved as the research progressed.

1. Conversational phase

An extended 'conversational phase' was allowed for at the beginning of the research process. This enabled everyone to do as much talking as they needed to about the research questions, the implications of participation and the process of gathering the data in the form of teacher narratives. It also provided the teacher participants with time to have conversations with family and community members about the research and their role within it. This was important as it often enabled the participants to embed their understandings of the project in their first language by explaining it to and discussing it with other language speakers. The conversational phase enabled the researcher and the participants to conduct one main group discussion about the project where almost everyone was present. A number of ad hoc individual and group conversations also took place during this phase. Additionally, it was during the conversational phase that conversations occurred with leaders and Elders in the respective communities to

explain the research we were doing and invite questions, conversation and input about the purpose and usefulness of what we were doing for people in that context. The conversational phase addressed a number of ethical principles for decolonising research practices, including showing respect for people and their communities, presenting yourself to people face to face, as well as looking and listening before speaking (Smith, 1999, p 120). It also allowed time for the development of agreements between two parties about the how the research would be conducted and disseminated and clarification of who was to benefit and how (Gorman & Toombs, 2009, p. 11).

2. *Reflective conversations*

Upon the completion of the narrative recording for each participant, a final one to one reflective conversation was undertaken. The focus of this conversation was to document how both the researcher and the teacher participants were feeling about the research process thus far. It was intended as a moment of ethical and relational accountability to each other, to ensure that the consent given at the beginning of the process still felt true for both parties. These conversations were recorded in audio form and transcribed with the full consent of the teacher participants. These reflective conversations also gave practical action to a number of ethical principles for decolonizing research practices. Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009, p. 6) underline the important principles of respect, reciprocity and obligation when undertaking research with Indigenous people. Smith (1999) and Gorman and Toombs (2009) both reinforce the importance of showing mutual respect. This practice also connected to notions of reciprocity spoken about by Arbon (2008) as well as tapping into ideas about 'ethical encounters' in research (Thrift, 2004) and an ethic of 'relational responsibility' talked about by Rose (2004).

3. *Shared analysis*

The analysis process used in the research was twofold. Firstly, transcripts from the recordings of our intentional reflective conversations, a total of seven documents, were uploaded into NVivo© software. Ideas that repeated in the texts were identified by the researcher, often using the words or phrases from the conversations themselves. By the end of this process there were three areas that repeated themselves often enough to make them stand out. These three areas related to notions of time, the nature of existing relationships and ensured that multiple needs were met by the work being done. Conscious of Addelson's (1994) warning about the 'judging observer', and Verran's (2013) similar criticism of the instinct for an analyst to think she can step outside the situation, it felt important at this point to explore these three areas collectively. Waiting and allowing time before 'coming to concepts' (Verran, 2013) was an important part of this stage of the process. This collective exploration and analysis happened both through one-to-one conversations where and when possible, and then again when all of the participants came together at a two-day analysis seminar in Alice Springs. It was during this latter period of discussion that the words 'Anma', 'Marlpa' and 'Ngapartji' began to act as reference points between all of us to discuss these emerging insights.

Findings and Discussion: Anma, Marlpa and Ngapartji Ngapartji – Insights Into how we do Research Together in 'Good Faith'

The findings discussed here were produced through the iterative conversations and analysis described in the previous section. While I acknowledge that I am the sole author of this paper and that carries with it an inherent hegemony, I have chosen to use the collective pronouns of 'we' and 'us' here to honour the collective process undertaken in developing these insights. Through paying attention to process, we were able to discover some important insights about

what made a difference when we intentionally set about to work together in 'good faith'. These discoveries are discussed briefly below as examples of how to generate new, shared understandings when working together in a decolonising knowledge space.

Anma

... not usually, you know straight answer 'No' but you know, 'anma, give me time

The first area that we needed to pay attention to in how we worked together was in our differing notions of time. Together we ultimately came to talk about the importance of 'anma'. This is a Western Arrarnta word that has equivalences in other local Indigenous languages. For example, a similar concept in Warlpiri is expressed with the word 'murnma'. In Luritja and Pitjantjatjara the word often used is 'wanyu'. There are also related concepts in other Australian Indigenous languages further afield. 'anma' carries epistemologically complex understandings and can be interpreted in many ways including: waiting, giving space, waiting for the right time, not filling up all the space, being patient and waiting until the other person feels ready. While it might be perceived as a passive term where nothing is happening, it is often quite an active space of preparation and foreshadowing.

We discovered that 'anma', or waiting, was an important part of our collaborative work. This waiting was a space that allowed time for many things to occur. It allowed time for good communication to happen and allowed everyone to feel ready and prepared. This was really important for meeting the requirements of the Western academic research consent process, but doing so in a way that was not pushy, rushed or false. Waiting for the 'right time' and until people indicated their readiness felt more informed, more like genuine consent and ensured that the data, in the form of the teacher narratives, that came from that process emerged comfortably and confidently. This perhaps indicates a point of difference in relation to ethics, which can be identified and granted into the future through a western metaphysics, but in Indigenous knowledge systems and understandings it is always provisional as reality itself emerges. Approaching things with 'anma' created a space for patience, consideration and a giving over of control when required. This enabled participants to have agency and control over their choice to participate far beyond the binary options of opting in or opting out of the research.. Participants continued to engage in the process until they felt the time was right, or their lives allowed enough time for recording the narratives. The teacher participants also felt a sense of control over their participation in the process. Working with a philosophy of 'anma' ensured a space that allowed for a respectful way of entering into work with people and provided enough time for everyone who needed to be involved in the process to be included. Often in research, the perception is that the principal researcher needs to be in control of the process. There were many times when I needed to give up control and trust in my research collaborators. Sometimes this was about letting someone else plan how and when we would spend our time together and being flexible when plans changed. Building a collective understanding of 'anma' gave us a way of thinking about time not as sequential and linear, but as patterned, seasonal and emerging. The research process became not so much something that we planned for, but rather something that we paid attention to and allowed to unfold. This allowed us to meet the work with readiness when the time was right.

Marlpa

...we can't leave you by yourself, we gotta use everyone's eyes and ears and search for it

The second area that we needed to pay attention to in how we worked together concerned the nature and role of our existing relationships. Together we ultimately came to talk about the role of 'marlpa'. This is a word that is used by Warlpiri, Luritja and Pitjantjara language speakers. It has equivalences in many other Indigenous languages, for example in Western Arrarnta the concept is often expressed using the word 'ilkwatharra'. It is often translated simply as 'company' but the epistemological understandings of this word go much deeper. At its core 'marlpa' is relational. It is about friendship, doing things together and not leaving anyone out. It is a way of being with others that ensures harmony, connectedness and relational responsibility. 'Marlpa' is often experienced bodily, as a 'good feeling'. It was of central importance to how we worked together in this research process.

There were pre-existing relationships between the teacher participants and myself, as well as longer-term relationships between the teacher participants themselves. This enabled us to operate from a position of relational trust, shared experience and commitment, and accountability to each other. Knowing each other for so long and with such familiarity enabled flexibility, gave us the ability to read the subtler nuances of communication and strengthened our commitment to working towards a common purpose. New work required additional negotiation, but it meant that we were starting from a place of knowledge and trust that does not exist if the researcher and participants are unknown to each other. A large part of the commitment of these teachers to work on this research was not necessarily about their relationship to me, but their relationship to each other. The teacher participants have a sense of community born out of their shared journey working in schools and undertaking their teacher education together. They provide 'marlpa' for each other that cannot be provided by other people, including me. Relationships and 'marlpa' provided an important accountability mechanism into the research process. This is important when considering the traditionally privileged and powerful role of the principal researcher. I was able to trust that if I was headed in the wrong direction, the strength of our relationships meant that people would find honest ways to tell me and show me that. The feeling of 'marlpa' was also an important reminder that it wasn't all about the research. Sometimes 'marlpa' was about making time and space to be together doing other things: storytelling, hunting, teaching or laughing. Mostly it was just about being together. These shared activities were also ways of entering into the research process more gently and comfortably; of starting from a point of 'marlpa' and re-establishing that trust relationship before the recording devices got turned on. It was important preparation work that needed to be done each time we came together.

Ngapartji Ngapartji

...my history is helping both you and me because that's like our country helps us to do our language and culture

The third area where we experienced both disconcertment and 'good faith' as we worked together was in our ability to ensure that multiple needs were met by the work we were doing. Together we talked about this using the phrase 'ngapartji ngapartji' which can be translated in many ways. In discussion we decided that the best translation to English to use was 'you give something to me and I give something to you'. Warlpiri speakers will sometimes borrow this phrase from Luritja, but will also use the word 'watinyarra' meaning 'equal' or 'level' to express

something similar. In Western Arrarnta it is often expressed as 'kapanha'. To encapsulate this concept in English we might talk about reciprocity or mutual generosity. In practice this concept was enacted in many different ways.

Through this process of exploration we came to acknowledge what mutual generosity actually looks like in an intercultural space. Helping each other out is about everyone getting their needs met with the collective resources that we possess. Finding ways to do this that are balanced and respectful of all can be challenging. At times doing so meant the difference between research sessions going ahead or not. Learning from each other was a defining feature of the reciprocity that existed throughout my time of knowing and working with these teachers and was a central tenet of what we did in this research work.

Reciprocity emerged through the sharing of ideas happened in everyday conversations about things that mattered to us, while driving somewhere or sitting together of an evening. Then there were other times when I was the one who was doing most of the learning through conversations with Elders, time spent on country and visits to significant places. It was through moments of 'ngapartji ngapartji' that I began to understand the research itself as being an embedded in the lives of participants, my own life, and in interconnected ways to the life of all those we came into contact with. The stories being told were indivisible from all knowledge for the tellers, and I needed to begin to understand this about the stories we were recording together. This was challenging for me as it seemed to increase my sense of obligation and responsibility to do it 'right', whatever that meant. Perhaps this points towards an ongoing epistemological disconcertment that needs to be dwelt in longer?

Finally, the participants and I frequently discussed the 'good feeling' that we often had throughout the process. In some ways this is a type of reciprocity that lies in the well-being that the teacher participants got in return for offering their stories as the data for the research. At other times it was the 'good feeling' of working together on a shared problem that we all cared deeply about. Steven Patrick Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, a Warlpiri scholar from Lajamanu community, talks about this in his writings on Ngurra-Kurlu. He uses the following phrase to describe this 'good feeling', 'People tasted it, they liked that taste in their mouth and they came back for more' (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes & Box, 2008, pp. 7-8). This is similar to what Verran (2013) is referring to when she talks about doing things together in 'good faith' from which something different and interesting emerges.

Conclusions

The research process used in this study was not without fault. It was still confined and constricted by the trappings that come along with the PhD frame, and because of that was vulnerable to the neo-colonial reality of the western academic system. There were time constraints, language constraints and ethical constraints, to name but a few. All of these were limited by my capacity as a non-Indigenous principal researcher and by the administrative constraints of the PhD process itself. Even the process of writing this paper, and me being the only author, runs the risk of the teacher participants being 'written about' and some may perceive this as their voices being 'written out'. But hopefully the benefits of acting together in a decolonising way throughout the research, outweigh those risks. Perhaps by naming some of these inherent problems, the hope is that this will become part of an iterative process that informs other types of responsive research in the future.

Out of a desire to do research in a decolonising way, choices were made about how to interrupt the ubiquitous and powerful 'norms' of the research process. The focus was not solely on the outcomes of the research, but intentional space was made to notice how the work was done

together. In particular, time was taken to think and talk extensively about the work to be done together. Finding the 'right time' to do the work was prioritised and emphasised. 'Anma' provided an insight into how decolonising work can be done. The deep trusted relationships built over time acted as a compass to help navigate the right way to do the research together. 'Marlpa' was a force that shaped the decolonising research space. The immense knowledge, capabilities and experience that everyone brought to the process was valued. A spirit of reciprocity and generosity was honoured. Rather than the research process being a one-way street that only benefits the researcher, 'ngapartji ngarpartji' became a foundation through which the multiple needs of all participants could be met. Through the 'interrupting tool' of conversation both the teacher participants and I were able to identify that we have all been left with a 'good feeling' about what we have done together.

There is an inherent danger in labelling and categorising this learning. Anma, Marlpa and Ngaparji Ngarpartji are words that point towards something deeper, with multiple meanings and, in some ways, something that is unable to be known by those who were not inside the experience. They are used here not to establish them as a prescription for others. Instead they are offered as a kind of narrative that tells the story of the process. They were ways of doing and being that helped develop better understandings of our differences in how we approached things. This in turn helped us to find ways of doing the research that left everybody with a 'good feeling'. It is this relational, participatory approach, where the responsibility of participation and reflecting on our participation is collectively shared, which feels most important. It is the process and the approach that has that ability to decolonise our knowledge work. By intentionally setting up some 'interrupting tools' and by creating the time and space to talk together about how things needed to be done important insights about 'good faith' were gained. These insights into process have the capacity to lead to new decolonising knowledge spaces.

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Ontological Openness on the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail: a Methodology for Decolonising Research

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Keywords: ontological openness, ontological politics, Lurujarri Dreaming Trail, songline, Goolarabooloo, decolonising research, land use disputes.

Abstract

The Lurujarri Dreaming Trail is an ancestral dreaming track¹ near Broome in the Kimberley region of north-western Australia. Walked each *barrgana*² season by Goolarabooloo traditional custodians and non-Indigenous people, this trail was also recently the site of a major land use dispute. Conflicts over what the land is and how it should be valued have defined Indigenous-settler relations since the first wave of colonisation of Australia's First Peoples and their ancestral estates (Wilson & Ellender, 2002). At the heart of these conflicts are different ways of conceptualising and relating to the land, and ultimately, divergent ontologies.³ This paper reflects on my doctoral research and the recent dispute in the Kimberley which foregrounded my research, to contribute to conversations on how research methodology can recognise the ontological politics (Verran, 2007) enacted in place. It explores how I, as an ethnographic researcher, used ontological openness to work ethically and productively with the different realities being performed in place. It also explores the broader implications of this approach in terms of decolonising research practice and supporting respectful dialogue between Indigenous and Western peoples and realities.

Landing in Broome: Meeting the Goolarabooloo Community and Country

The flight into Broome always ends with a sweeping arc over the milky blue waters of Roebuck Bay (fringed by red pindan earth and mangroves) and a low fly-over Chinatown and the historic Sun Pictures. The intensity of these colours seared into my memory when I first arrived in Broome in the year 2000. I was an undergraduate student from RMIT University who had travelled to the Kimberley to walk the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail with the Goolarabooloo Indigenous community.

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- 1 Dreaming tracks trace the pathways of ancestral creators. Embedded within these pathways are traditional knowledge, stories, songs and law, which contain codes of behaviour for balanced relationships. In the West Kimberley, this body of cultural knowledge and law is referred to by the name Bugarrigarra (Wilcox, 2010, p. 26).
 - 2 Barrgana is the season when cool winds blow from the southeast (July – August). In the ocean *walgawalga* (salmon), catfish, *galbany* (mullet) and *jugan* (dugon) are fat and the whales are migrating north. On the land, *yarrinyarri* (bush onion) are plentiful and can be dug out of the shallow sands (Goolarabooloo, 2013). Indigenous language words written in this paper appear in italics and originate from the Nyulnyulan family of languages, including Bardi, Jabirr Jabirr, Ngumbal, Nyulnyul, Jugun and Yawuru (Muecke & Lowe as cited in Kelly, 2016).
 - 3 In this paper, ontology is taken to mean the nature of existence and being, which takes into account categories that structure what is (Fielbleman, 1960, p. 219). The term is also used to reference ways of being, and to provoke a questioning of the realities that people enact (Law, 2004, p. 162).

This year marks 30 years since Nykina and Goolarabooloo Elder Paddy Roe OAM established the cross-cultural walking of the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail. Paddy's motivation for inviting non-Indigenous Australians to walk the land with his people is evocatively captured in the statement:

This is why this [dreaming] trail I got. You know I was thinking about how we can come together and this [Trail] is the only way we can come together to look after the Country. (in Whitmont, 2010)

All journeys along the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail begin under a broad old tamarind tree at the Goolarabooloo Hostel in 'old Broome'. It is here that Paddy's family, the Goolarabooloo people, welcomes walkers hailing from many places and cultural backgrounds to Country.⁴ Over nine days and 90-kilometers, this eclectic 'mob' of walkers trace the pathways and patterns of ancestors and creator beings, camping in the same seasonal camping places that have been dwelled in for thousands of years. Located on the west coast of the Dampier Peninsula in the Kimberley region of Western Australia (see Figure 1), this ancestral dreaming tract, otherwise referred to as the Northern Tradition Song Cycle, is an entity that connects with other song cycles⁵ that cross the Australian continent. The Trail is a constitution of human, more-than-human and ancestral relations that are invoked and maintained as people walk *through*, *with* and *as* Country.

For nine days we walk along the Lurujarri coast, through *mayi* (monsoonal vine thicket) and along sandy beaches and rocky cliff tops. At sundown we unfurl dusty swags onto red pindan or white sand, tying mosquito nets to the branches of *murga* (*Melaleuca alsophylla*, saltwater paperbark). Smokey fires ward off persistent mosquitoes, infusing hair and cloth with the smells of *gunaroo* (*Eucalyptus zygophylla*, white gum) and *jigal* (*Bauhinia cunninghamii*). We sit grounded, cross-legged in sand and dust, amongst the *murga*. They fringe our camps, sheltering us from the south-easterly winds that blow across this country during *barrgana* time. Each year we return to the same *buru* (camping or highly significant spiritual place). The same ground is re-visited and old fires are re-lit, ashes mounding up. Remnant coals glow once more under fires that dot dry, sandy creek beds.

In walking the Trail I was one in a continuum of students to carry on RMIT's long-standing relationship with the Goolarabooloo community, a relationship that began in the 1990s through the friendship of Paddy Roe and Landscape Architecture academic Jim Sinatra. My first and subsequent journeys along the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail in the years 2007 and 2011, and further time spent camping on Country with Goolarabooloo families during 2000 and 2001, enabled me to form lasting relationships with people and place. These relationships 'called' me back to Broome in 2011, at a time when the Northern Tradition Song Cycle and Lurujarri Dreaming Trail faced a major threat from a proposed industrial development. It was in this context of such significant personal relationship, to both people and place, and the depth of concern I had for what could happen, that my research emerged.

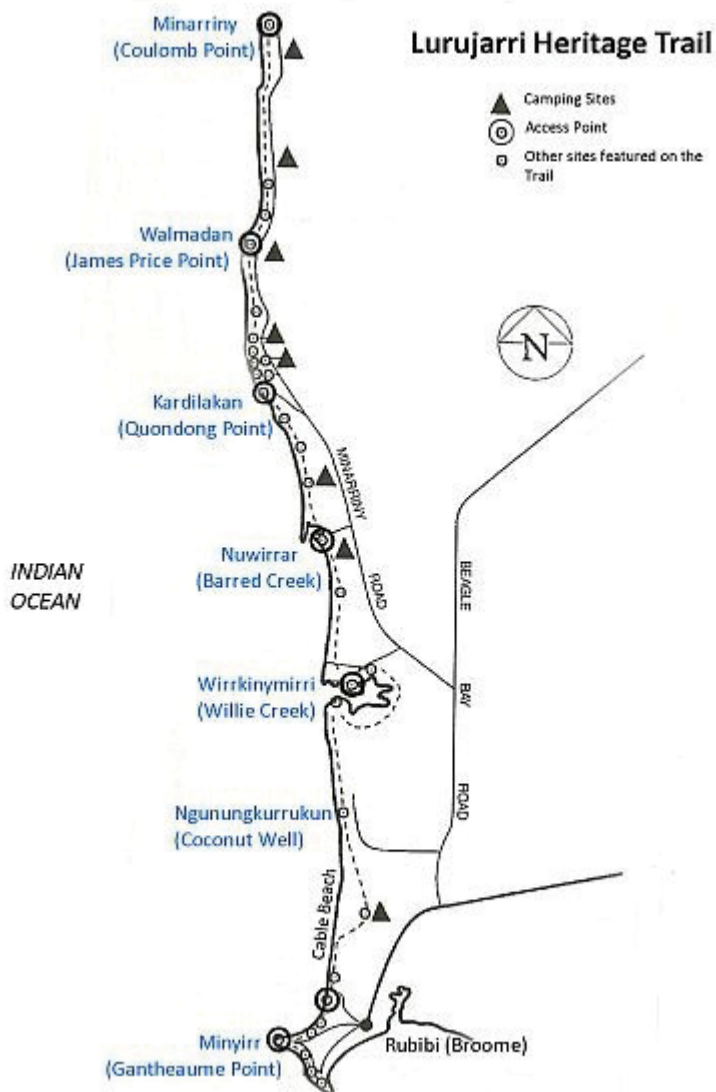
4 In this paper the term 'Country' refers to a place-based ontological entity that exists for Indigenous Australians. Burarrwanga (in Burarrwanga et al., 2013) describes Country as a totality of many things, including multiple layers of meaning: 'It incorporates people, animals, plants, water and land. But Country is more than just people and things, it is also what connects them to each other and to multiple spiritual and symbolic realms' (p. 128). Stated otherwise, 'Country includes humans, more-than-humans and all that is tangible and non-tangible and which become together in an active, sentient, mutually caring and multidirectional manner in, with and as place/space' (Country et al., 2016, p. 456).

5 Bradshaw and Fry (1989) describe song cycles as manifestations of the creative journeys of ancestral beings, through which 'stories, ceremonies, laws and rituals are passed between communities' (p. 7). These stories about the journeys of creative ancestors are invoked through song-poetry to form oral maps of the country. Wilcox (2010) states that 'a person who knows the songs can travel through the country and stay in a sustaining relationship with it' (p. 26).

Conflict, Ontological Politics and the Emergence of a Research Project

The context of this research was inextricably shaped by conflict and ontological politics over place. This conflict was sparked by the proposed siting of the Browse Liquefied Natural Gas processing plant at Walmadany (James Price Point), approximately 60 kilometres north of Broome, by the West Australian (WA) Government, Woodside and their joint venture partners.⁶ My research became a way to draw attention to a radical difference in the way that place was being enacted by different parties.

Figure 1: Map of the Lurujarri Dreaming (Heritage) Trail



Source: Goolarabooloo (2013).

⁶ The WA Department of State Development was the key proponent for the development of a land-based LNG processing plant at Walmadany/James Price Point. At the time of writing my doctoral thesis from between 2012 and 2016, the joint venture partners to this development were Woodside, Mitsui, PetroChina, Shell and BP. For many people in Broome and on the Dampier Peninsula, this development was colloquially referred to as 'The Gas'.

I mobilised the concept of ontological difference to reveal what was being missed in the conflict being played out around 'The Gas'. Proponents of this development and the Goolarabooloo people were enacting very different relationships with place. For the WA Government and the mineral resources industry the Browse Basin and land at James Prices Point (the place name used by the proponents) represented commodities,⁷ shareholder profits and mining royalties, pointing to a very particular ontological position. Yet, the Goolarabooloo people were 'seeing', relating to and speaking about the same place from a very different worldview: James Price Point was recognised as 'Walmadany', a highly significant cultural heritage site along the Song Cycle path where the Jabirr Jabirr ancestor Walmadany continues to live. The land was not a commodity to exploit, but 'Country', a multi-dimensional entity with which a person can experience reciprocity of care and to which they have a responsibility to maintain and enliven.

The Goolarabooloo people unequivocally opposed the industrial development of Walmadany (Whitmont, 2010). Such development posed an imminent threat to the integrity of the Northern Tradition Song Cycle, including, the law and culture that emerge from Bugarrigarra,⁸ which are embedded in and practiced *with* the Song Cycle, and people's material and spiritual connections with Country. In an interview with documentary filmmaker David Maybury-Lewis (1992), Paddy Roe emphasised the relationship between Bugarrigarra and law.

Law –

That's Bugarrigarra, Law –

I think English say–

'dreamtime' –

But we say Bugarrigarra –

Law.

Sitting on the veranda of his home in the Milibinyarri community, Paddy Roe's great-grandson Brian Councillor described this same relationship in the context of the Song Cycle. He stated emphatically,⁹

[It] is like a snake. You give [Woodside] that snake, he'll break him in half, it'll never join back together. That Song Cycle he strong right through from Swan Point right down to Bidyidanga. But [Woodside and the State Government] don't understand that. You break that snake, you break that Song Cycle, and then what we got left? Culture and everything will finish. It's just sad. That's what we live for. We live for our culture, our law. If our law and culture get broken, what we gonna do then? (in Emmanouil, 2016, p. 217)

7 Wilson and Ellender (2002) describe commodified land as 'something that can be bought, sold, exchanged and exploited, with no significant or lasting relationship between the 'owner' and the land other than a commercial one' (p. 56).

8 When Paddy Roe speaks about Bugarrigarra in *Reading the Country* (see Benterrak, Muecke & Roe, 1984, p. 78), he invokes his *jila* (spring) Country out on the Roebuck Plains and the *yungurugu* (Rainbow Snake) which lives there: a spirit being that emerges from Bugarrigarra, which can make cyclones and heavy rain. Paddy belongs to, has responsibilities for, and is located in Bugarrigarra, and explains in this text how Bugarrigarra still works: people are doing important work to keep it going and do their part in this process of ongoing co-creation, and the maintenance of culture and lawful relationships with Country. Paddy Roe's collaborator, Stephen Muecke (2017), describes Bugarrigarra as a legal institution that continues to come into 'friction' with colonial/settler law.

9 In my doctoral research Brian and several other participants shared their stories in Broome English, a type of Australian Aboriginal English that is distinct to the Broome area (Brumby as cited in Sandefur, 1986, p. 26). More broadly, the term Australian Aboriginal English is used to refer to a spectrum of dialects spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, each of which incorporates creole and Standard Australian English to varying degrees (Saderfur, 1986, p. 25).

Brian's story helped make apparent to me the contestation over place that was unfolding on the Trail; contestation over what the land is (e.g. Country and a Song Cycle, or, commodity) and what it does (e.g. provide reciprocity of care and hold Law and culture, or, offer a means of economic stimulus in the neoliberal sense). His and the stories of others walking the Trail drew my attention to the divergent values systems, metaphysics (including ontologies)¹⁰ and ontological politics¹¹ that were being performed in place. The apparent refusal of the WA Government to 'take seriously', or even acknowledge entities such as 'Country' and the 'Song Cycle', highlighted for me the ongoing ontological and epistemological dominance of a Western, 'Euro-centric' worldview, and the subsequent neo-colonisation (Dodson, 2007) of people–place, a phenomenon that Rose (1999) articulates as 'deep colonisation' and Muecke (2017) 'neoliberal extraction colonisation'. The ontological politics at play on the Trail offered a focus and context for doing research that would intervene in and disrupt this neo-colonial agenda.

Being a Generative Participant in the Collective Action to Protect Country

In 2011 my relationships with people and Country led me to Broome to support the Goolarabooloo-led community campaign¹² to protect the Song Cycle and the Trail. I soon realised that my involvement in this collective action offered me a way to situate myself as a researcher, in the role of a 'generative participant' (Addelson, 1994).¹³ By acknowledging myself as *already* a generative participant in the campaign to protect Country, I was able to intervene in issues (Addelson, 1994) and recognise the relational context (Wilson, 2008) of my research.

My friendships with the Goolarabooloo community, non-Indigenous walkers of the Trail and people protecting Country, along with my personal connections with place, meant that I held a relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) to both people and Country. Being relationally accountable meant enacting respect, reciprocity and responsibility towards my human and more-than-human (e.g. Country) research collaborators. A fundamental methodological question arose when I acknowledged this relational accountability. How could I, as non-Indigenous ethnographer, work ethically and productively with Country, Goolarabooloo people and non-Indigenous walkers of the Trail, their realities and the stories that emerge from people–place connections, when there were likely to be multiple knowledge systems and ontologies at play? My ethical accountability needed to go beyond merely avoiding ontological and epistemological 'blindness' (as exemplified by the WA Government in relation to the Song Cycle). I needed to ensure that as a researcher, I was able to translate my own and others' lived experiences of walking the Trail into stories that could do justice to the Trail as performing a profound politics. This in turn meant recognising the multiple Indigenous and non-Indigenous realities being performed as people walked *through*, *with* or as Country. Hence, it became critical for me as an ethnographer to question my own 'ontological openness'.

10 Noticing divergent ontologies being enacted in and with place is one thing, naming them in a text (like a thesis or a paper) is another. I deal with the issue of naming ontologies in the section titled 'Actor-Network Theory'.

11 On the subject of ontological politics Helen Verran (2007) emphasises the need for people to 'make explicit [their] metaphysical commitments and so interrupt and create possibilities for considering re-rendering [their] worlds' (p. 36).

12 The Kimberley 'No Gas' campaign enrolled diverse communities and groups of people, including the Goolarabooloo families, other local Indigenous and non-Indigenous families in Broome and on the Dampier Peninsula, local and national environmental organisations, citizen science groups, globally renowned scientists, scholars and performing and filmic artists, ex-members of the judiciary and supporters from around the world.

13 This positioning is distinct from the role that researchers are commonly expected to assume; that of the 'judging observer' who through a humanist lens, creates artificial divisions between themselves and the world.

Relationality was the core ethical principle underpinning my research. Along with respect, reciprocity, responsibility and deep listening, it also became the protocol that guided this work. After I invited Goolarabooloo people, non-Indigenous walkers of the Trail and allies of the Goolarabooloo who were protecting Country to share their stories about their relationships with Country (many of whom I had known for over a decade), we sat together *with* and *as* Country to record these stories. Attending to my relationships with not only human research collaborators, but also the Country and the stories themselves, was a practice that required me to listen deeply with my *liyan* (feeling, intuition, connection) (Roe & Hoogland, 1999). The storytelling did not happen (either at the direction of the participants or unfavourable circumstances) when the right *liyan* or ‘feeling’ with the place, person or time was absent. When the storytelling did happen with good *liyan*, the stories themselves seemed to carry something; keep something *from* Country *moving*.

Creating a Methodology for Ontological Openness

How could I perpetuate and continue on the political statement of the Trail in the face of the conflict over development? I needed a methodology that would enable me to demonstrate the importance of recognising the different way that place was being enacted on the Trail by the Goolarabooloo, walkers and protectors; an alternate reality that contested the version of place being ‘done’ by the WA Government and mining corporations. In responding to this question, I gravitated towards approaches that promoted ontological openness.

Several writers working in cross-cultural contexts offered insights into how I, a researcher located in and seeking to evolve a Western knowledge tradition, might embody ontological openness in my research.

Deborah Bird Rose (2004) highlights the tension between vulnerability and productivity inherent in approaching cross-cultural work with ‘openness’, in which ‘one’s own ground can become destabilised’ (p. 22). Being open to encountering and experiencing ‘other’ realities enabled me to negotiate my ‘metaphysical commitments’ (Verran, 2007, p. 39) and in turn, undergo ontological and epistemological shifts. Yet, these shifts only occurred gradually through being ‘there’ on and *with* Country (Wright et al., 2012) – camping, sleeping, storytelling and walking – and by listening deeply (Brearley, 2010) to the stories shared by Goolarabooloo storytellers *with* and *as* Country and the stories shared *by* Country itself.¹⁴

Lurujarri Dreaming Trail co-ordinator Frans Hoogland describes what the Goolarabooloo people hope walkers (perhaps even me as a researcher) will comprehend during their journey along the Trail:

People are introduced to the song cycle through direct experience of walking and being with it, trying to understand the living quality of that Country. That has to be experienced. It’s very hard to grasp that out of reading books or through people talking. It’s a very personal experience. (in Roe & Hoogland, 1999, p. 27)

¹⁴ Writing as ‘an Indigenous and non-Indigenous, human and more-than-human research collective’ Bawaka Country, Wright, Suchet-Pearson, Lloyd, Burarrwanga, Ganambarr, Ganambarr-Stubbs, Ganambarr and Maymuru (2015) acknowledge Bawaka Country as the ‘author-ity’ of their research and describe a process of co-becoming with Country, which enables deep relational learning and stories to emerge *from*, *with* and *as* place/Country.

Understanding the livingness of Country through the direct experience of being *with* and walking the Country might also be described, as ‘being and knowing ... intelligence and cognition’ (Banting, 2013, p. 428). As Frans critically points out, this cannot be apprehended through ‘reading books’, it must be experienced first-hand.

David Mowaljarlai and Jutta Malnic (1993) share another instance of ontological opening experienced in a cross-cultural context. Malnic, a woman of Western heritage, reveals a moment when she becomes aware of the shifts she must allow to ‘see’ the world that Mowaljarlai, a Ngarinyin Elder, is sharing with her:

In the darkness I scrawl some words into my notebook. In the morning they hang there like a magician’s rope, coming from nowhere, not touching ground, a reminder that I had understood something during the night - but what? The words read: “You can only see with your eyes closed. Be patient”. (Mowaljarlai & Malnic, 1993, p. 87)

Patience was crucial to my research practice, as was being open to learning in ways that I had never before imagined: through dreams (Turner, 2010), *liyan* (feeling and intuition) (Roe & Hoogland, 1999) and allowing things to be revealed *by* Country rather than ‘discovered’ (Graham, 2009). Doing ontologically open research forced me to de-centre the human as the primary source and holder of knowledge (Graham, 2009; Rose, 1988) and acknowledge the agency of Country to ‘share’ knowledge embodied within the land (Graham, 2009; Guyula, 2010; Turner, 2010; Wright et al., 2012). Hence, practicing ontological openness led to not only a recognition of Indigenous forms of knowledge production, but also the performance of such methods; it enabled me to know *with* Country.

Reimagining my own knowing (and being) with the world through the research process meant that I needed ‘new categories and ... [to rework] old categories in new ways’ (Verran, 1998, pp. 241–242) when telling ethnographic stories. Yet, which categories and metaphors would I use to render visible the realities that others and I were performing? Wright et al. (2012) also questioned the ontological limitations of attempting to describe human connections with the land and the agency of Country merely through Western categories. What I was coming to see was that ‘to describe the real is always an ethically charged act’ (Law, 2009, p. 155). As an ethnographer, I carried a responsibility for telling stories in a way that maintained the ontological integrity of people’s relationships with place. My storytelling needed to reflect a deep listening (Brearley, 2010) to people-place; those stories shared with me by storytellers on/with/as Country, including Goolarabooloo people and non-Indigenous walkers of the Trail, and a deep listening to Country itself. I listened closely to the categories and metaphors that storytellers used when speaking about place and their connections with place, which revealed the human and non-human entities that constituted people’s realities.

Well aware of the legacy of negative impacts brought upon Indigenous peoples by ethnographic research (Smith, 2012), I was responsible for finding ethnographic ‘tools’ that would enable me to work respectfully, ethically and with relational accountability with human and non-human entities made visible by participants’ stories, and through my own walking with Country. As a non-Indigenous researcher I was hesitant about appropriating an Indigenous research framework. In following the work of Verran (1998) and Nicholls (2009), who write about Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies as powerful actors, I was led to Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Verran (1998) used ANT to trace enactments of land ownership in Australia by pastoralists and Indigenous Australians and to question the ontological categories that inform people’s relationships with land. Nicholls (2009) took ANT into the Yolŋu township of Ramingining to explore the life of the computer amongst the powerful actors of gurruṯu (the

Yolŋu kinship system), moiety and online banking. These two instances indicated to me that there was a way to 'do' ethnography that could respect Indigenous peoples and place and the metaphysics they enacted.

Actor-Network Theory

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) enabled me to encounter and describe the different ways that place was being enacted, for example, by walkers of the Trail and by those who were proposing the Browse LNG development. Rather than assume that knowledge was being performed on the Trail through Western scientific practices, it allowed 'space' to consider alternate, and in this case relational (Indigenous) knowledge practices. Hence, as an approach to research, ANT became a way of identifying and mobilising difference. I was able to use ANT to show that realities were being enacted through knowledge practices; the actions of enacting Country through walking, camping and fishing on, *with* and as Country (and the Song Cycle) produced a differing people-place to scientific or other Western means for enacting people and place, which tend to be binary.

ANT emerged from Science and Technology Studies (STS) in the late 1970s and early 1980s and began as an ethnographic approach to sociotechnical analysis. My attraction to ANT as a form of 'relational materiality' (Law, 1999, p. 4) was due to its non-discriminatory, heterogeneous approach to entities; 'human' and 'non-human' entities were equally as likely to have agency, as long as they did some type of 'work'. ANT's willingness to take seriously the agency of all entities, including 'non-human' entities such as and within 'Country', meant that it presented an ontologically open, and I would argue decolonising, method for doing ethnographic research.

There was another key justification for selecting ANT as a research approach. In my reading of ANT and Indigenous philosophy (metaphysics) literature (Benterrak, Muecke & Roe, 1984; Mowaljarlai & Malnic, 1993; Rose, 1996, 2000, 2004; Turner, 2010; Ford, 2010; Bessarab, 2008; Hoogland & Roe, 1999; Kwaymullina, 2008; Neidjie, 1989; Harrison & McConchie, 2009; Bradley & Yanyuwa Families, 2010; Christie, 2007), it became apparent that four patterns or 'principles' were emerging from both: relationality, performativity, generative practice and situatedness/locatedness.

Each of the aforementioned patterns/principles contributes, in some way, to the relationships that Indigenous peoples (tend to) perform with Country. For example, Country, 'Dreaming' and story are powerful ontological concepts that inform people's meaning, structures, situatedness, identities, relationships with human and non-human entities and responsibilities towards co-generating the ongoing-ness of Country. Writing about ANT and its metaphysics, John Law (2009) identifies and draws links between the same four patterns/principles that underpin this method. He describes ANT as (note the underlined terms in the quotation below):

a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities, and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations. (emphasis added, Law, 2009, p. 141)

Framed in ANT terms, relationships are performed by actors through particular activities and in particular situations/locations, generating particular effects. Resonance between ANT and Indigenous philosophy, through these four principles, offered 'ground' on which ANT and Indigenous metaphysics could enter into dialogue and potentially 'work together'.

As an ethnographer, ANT charged me with the responsibility to look closely for the ‘observable traces’ (Latour, 2005, p. 53) that were left by *any* entities/actors,¹⁵ ‘no matter how vague’ an actor might be (Latour, 2005, p. 53). While many actors were easy to identify, owing to their material form, others were less palpable and tricky to name for some research collaborators, particularly non-Indigenous walkers of the Trail. Despite difficulties in naming some actors, I was encouraged by Fenwick and Edwards (2010) to persist with this approach. They state that:

Whether an object [or entity] is more or less abstract ... is not the point. The key feature is that it is identified, has reality, in particular networks of historical, cultural, behavioural relations that make it visible. (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 18)

While ANT was ontologically open and responsive to human and non-human, material and non-material entities that performed people–place relationships on the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail, constant work was required by me to ensure that I was staying open to any ‘type’ of actor that might ‘appear’.

What did appear through my use of ANT on the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail, was a vibrant assemblage of actors, including, Goolarabooloo storytellers, Trail walkers, red pindan cliffs, ancestors, *rāi* (spirits) a certain proximity to town, women’s places, *mamara* (spirit trees) and traditional camping places to name a few.¹⁶ What also became visible, were the associations between these actors, what held these connections together and at what cost. For example, *liyan* (as intuition and feeling) surfaced as an important and complex actor that supported both the formation and maintenance of people–Country connections, by enabling people to attune to the *liyan* (feeling) present in Country. Once awoken, through the process of walking Country and by the agency of the spirit world (*rāi*), a person’s *liyan* allowed them to engage with Country through inter-subjective encounters. The active engagement of both people and living Country in these relationships enabled powerful collaboration between these actors.

Furthermore, sustained connections between Country and people (Goolarabooloo and some walkers on the Trail), produced relationships of care, where mutual recognition and communicative engagement were also being performed. Despite threats to these connections, including from the proposed Browse LNG processing plant, human and non-human actors found ways to stay connected.

ANT proved to be a very useful lens and a practical set of tools with which to do restrained ethnographic work that held me back from making ontological assumptions. It enabled me as a researcher to listen and to watch; to see more actors than I might have otherwise seen, precisely because it did not prescribe any ontological categories that might preclude my ‘seeing’. In turn, no actors or voices were disallowed through the use of ANT.

Did this mean that I met, recognised and acknowledged everything there was to be seen, heard or perceived and understood in some way? Did I always acknowledge all of the actors at work in each scenario I researched? No. But this was not a limitation of ANT. Rather it is the lot of researchers to be constrained by time and place and influenced by interests. However, did ANT prove wholly adequate in doing ethnographic work with Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies on the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail? In short, yes. ANT’s instance on relationality,

¹⁵ Put in the simplest of terms, ANT uses the word ‘actor’ to refer to any human or non-human entity that does work.

¹⁶ These entities were identified by Goolarabooloo and non-Indigenous research participants.

performativity, generative practice and locatedness/situatedness, principles that resonate deeply with Indigenous ontologies, meant that it had the capacity to do respectful and honest work alongside Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies to explore the performance of *different* people–place relationships on the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail.

Perhaps most valuably, ANT allowed me to make visible in my academic writing the divergent ontologies being performed on the Trail. The WA Government, mining companies and others associated with ‘The Gas’ (e.g. economist and scientists) were performing their relationships with James Price Point through distance via their boardrooms in Perth, practicing what Latour (1987, p. 251) calls metrology: the process used to translate places ‘out there’ into paper forms, including maps, reports and charts on walls, that cohere with the paper world inside the boardroom. Meanwhile, Goolarabooloo people, walkers of the Trail and protectors of Country were ‘there’ on/with/as Country, walking the Trail, telling and listening to Bugarrigarra stories, sleeping under the stars, opening and waking up their *liyan* (feeling and intuitive connection) and connecting with and enlivening Country.

The ‘Goods’ of Doing Ontologically Open Research

Research methods, because of the metaphysics that they perform, are far from innocent. Not only do they detect, they also help to produce and amplify a particular reality (Law, 2004, p. 116). Hence, the ontological ‘goods’ produced by my ontologically open approach are evident in the stories/realities that were made ‘visible’ by the methodology I employed.

Articulating a relational ontology of ‘being with’

This approach revealed the enactment of a relational ontology of ‘being with’ Country that was expressed by Goolarabooloo people and walkers of the Trail, in varying degrees, through their stories.¹⁷ This ontology acknowledges and relies upon the agency of the non-human world and was demonstrated through the performance of inter-subject relationships between Country and people on the Trail. Stories in the research made clear that ‘being with’ Country transcends cultural boundaries.

People’s ‘being with’ Country on the Trail was performed to varying extents. Some first-time walkers of the Trail enacted their ‘being with’ Country through walking, listening to stories, sleeping under the stars, and becoming quiet and present to Country over the nine days of the Trail. For Goolarabooloo people others who had walked the Trail many times, and allies protecting Country, ‘being with’ (or as) Country was performed through mutual recognition, reciprocity of care and communicative engagement. Fundamentally, in ‘being with’ Country, people on the Trail recognised ‘place’ and the non-human entities within place, as ‘living Country’: a multi-dimensional actor-network of which they are a part. The three story excerpts shared below, each told by different research collaborators, elucidate the ways that different people on the Trail were being *with* and *as* Country.

17 The ontology of ‘being with’ emerging from this research is distinct from that presented by Martin Heidegger. A key, differentiating factor is that Heidegger’s (2010) ‘Being-with’ (Mitsein) only extends to ‘others of its kind’, with Heidegger refusing to afford ‘Being-with’ to relationships between humans and non-human animals or humans and non-animal entities. Whilst Simon James (2009, p. 40) accepts the potential for ‘Being-with’ to extend to relationships between humans and non-human animals, he too falls short of including non-animal entities in inter-subjective encounters with humans. The research reflected an Indigenous ontology and a philosophy of ‘living Country’ in recognising that ‘being with’ can indeed be afforded to relationships between humans and non-human entities, including trees, ancestors and Country.

Adriana, a university student and first-time walker of the Trail described her experience of walking Country with the Goolarabooloo people as a transition in how she and fellow walkers saw and related to the land:

I felt a shift ... A lot of people here I've spoken to have this feeling that the land is no longer just a landscape, but has become a living entity for them, but they can't describe in words what that actual feeling is. [For me] it's the recognition that it's not just a landscape anymore, it's living. It's a part of me and I'm also part of that cycle. [The Trail] is about reconnecting, not only with the people you walk with, but reconnecting with the land ... sleeping on the beach, seeing the stars every night. It's about placing a higher value on that. (in Emmanouil, 2016, p. 167)

For Adriana, walking the Trail led to seeing the land in new ways, as a *living* entity, which then enabled her to place a greater value on her feelings of connection with the land. It also helped her to realise that she could continue to see the land as a living entity and stay connected with Country, even when she left the Trail. Her shift in seeing led to new ways of relating; she saw herself as part of something bigger – living Country.

Karlien, an ally of the Goolarabooloo and protector of Country, mapped out in her storytelling the lengths she would go to protect an ancient *goonj* (*Celtis philipensis*) tree in Murdjal from the proposed gas development.

[My encounters with this tree happened] at a time when the [No Gas] campaign was really intense and I felt so strongly that I would give my life for this Country. It was at the stage where Woodside was releasing the perimeters of the Gas hub site and [at that point] it was planned to stretch south of Murdjal across the area with the tree. I thought, I'm just going stay in this tree and never move. I would stay there and no one would be able to move me. I felt like the tree also felt strongly that people needed to stand on this Country and that it would give them the energy to not move, to not be defeated. (in Emmanouil, 2016, pp. 245-6)

Karlien was prepared to defend the *goonj* tree and Country from the threat of clearing with her own life. Interestingly, she asserted that she would not be acting alone. Through her story, a co-creative aspect of her relationship with the *goonj* tree is revealed, that of people and Country working together towards a shared purpose.

Teresa, Paddy Roe's daughter and matriarch of the Goolarabooloo community, also shared with me her sense of being *with* and as Country. Returning to Bindinyangun to tell this story, Teresa was full of emotion; for her, being with this place evoked the presence of her parents and her deep ties to Country. Referring to herself as a 'Jabirr Jabirr girl', Teresa described the significance of this place and nearby Minariny to her sense of connection with her parents and Country.

[Those räi] [spirits] walk 'round, like us we walking around. But the old people who was in this Country, they tell [mum and dad], there's spirit girls in this Country. When my mum and dad was walking around here, they found us. They found me first, spirit children. Spirit go anywhere, walk around anywhere. I think in this Country now all the räi [are] in here. The spirit must be here, in this Country, Bindinyangun.

Well this is our spirit Country, now where my mum and dad find me and my little sister. [My dad and mum] come from two different languages, Nyigina and Karajeri.

My father see [two] Jabirr Jabirr girls and then they walked from this Country to old station, Denham Station. Mum was pregnant for me, I was born there. My little sister followed me from here, so we both born in Waterbank, in Denham Station. We been bush girls all our life.

Well, most [old] people said [to my mum and dad] that you got a spirit from this Country now, you gonna have two daughters. That's all they gave them, two daughters from this Country, me and my younger sister. And so mummy got me from there and my little sister followed me, to old Denham Station.

If no Trail you know, I'd still come back to this Country, 'cause this Country will bring me back ... When I feel lonely, thinking where to go and fish, I'll come right up here and I feel good and then I go back home. Shed tears around this place then go back home, because he remind me of my mum and dad. 'Cause my mum and dad found those two girls, from the last old people who was walking this Country. (in Emmanouil, 2016, pp. 196-195)

Teresa's relationship with Bindinganygun and Minariny stems from a particular type of connection – a *räi* (spirit) connection – that keeps bringing her back to this Country. This story about Teresa and her sister's *räi* coming from Jabirr Jabirr country, is one of many that underpins the Goolarabooloo family's sense of place; their being with, and perhaps more aptly, being as Country.¹⁸

Collectively, Teresa, Karlien and Adriana demonstrate that people on the Trail were being with and as Country by seeing the land as 'Country', a living entity with which a person might collaborate and allow themselves to be affected by (e.g. being called back to Country and feeling compelled to protect Country). These realities were detected and made visible through the research because of the ontologically open approaches used.

Ontological shifts

While an ontology of being *with* and being as Country was unquestioned by Goolarabooloo people involved in the research, I, and other walkers on the Trail needed to undergo an ontological shift in how we conceived of 'place' in order to experience 'living Country' and co-creating/becoming as a reality. These ontological shifts were significant; what walkers of the Trail felt and saw had the potential to change them and to alter what they sensed. This broader realisation of collaborating *with* and perhaps as 'living Country' by more than Indigenous peoples has big implications for the ontological politics enacted in place. It is significant because it demonstrates what would be – for most non-Indigenous people – a new, different kind of connecting and knowing with/as Country and that shared ways of understanding and relating with/as Country are possible. Walking the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail offered non-Indigenous people an opportunity to question what might be their 'colonising gaze' towards the land, and to foster 'new' or different ways of seeing and relating to place that respect Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

¹⁸ The Bawaka Collective (see Country et al., 2016) articulate being as Country as a co-becoming through which 'being is constituted through relationships that are constantly re-generated ... [whereby] more-than-humans and humans co-become as place/space, in deep relation to all the diverse co-becomings' (p. 456).

Texts that make difference visible

Another 'good' produced by this ontologically oriented research is this paper; a text that reveals and connects to the experiences of those who have walked the Trail. This text does not ignore or refuse difference. It makes visible a radically different experience of place than would have been had elsewhere. This is what ontologically open empirical research needs to do, allow for and keep difference (Verran, 2013), particularly in the analysis. The challenge of writing an academic text is remaining true to the differences and tensions of the field; this must be realised each and every time research is practiced (Verran, 2013).

Dialogue

In using ontological openness as a research methodology I was able to work respectfully, ethically and productively with the different and divergent realities being performed on the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail. This approach allowed for ontological and epistemological pluralism and hence, offered a means for decolonising knowledge production. 'Working together' knowledge systems gave me the capacity to recognise the different way that place was being enacted on the Trail; an alternate reality that contested the version of place being 'done' by the WA Government and mining corporations: people-place as living Country. Perhaps most significantly to the people and Country involved in this research, my adoption of this approach enabled me to perpetuate the political statement of the Trail, in the face of a significant conflict over place.

Not only did the methods employed within this research ensure that multiple realities were made 'visible', they also supported respectful dialogue between different types of realities (ones that are often called 'Indigenous' and 'Western'). The capacity for this methodology to support dialogue through 'working together' knowledge systems presents an opportunity for others working in cross-cultural research contexts to take seriously the multiple and divergent realities that people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and place perform in relationship.

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Reflections and Provocations

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There was a particular instinct that drove us to produce a special issue on decolonising knowledge practices. We thought that by paying close attention to how research is being done by researchers who are working intentionally to subvert some of the dominant Western paradigms and hegemonies, we may gain some insight into what decolonising knowledge practices look and feel like. This original instinct has been well and truly borne out by the wonderful contributions made by the papers in this issue. Each paper holds tremendous value on its own, but collectively, this issue provides us with a better understanding of the requirements and possibilities of doing decolonising knowledge work.

All papers discuss research that was undertaken in the intercultural space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. It is perhaps no surprise then that all papers explicitly name the need for decolonising knowledge work to actively challenge and disrupt the Western or dominant power relationships and worldview that so often directs research. In his paper, Stuart Barlo articulates that ‘the greatest act of decolonising research starts with the mindset of the individual researcher with the realisation that Indigenous Australia no longer wishes to be studied or seen as requiring someone to lift them up. What is needed is someone to walk beside them as equal partners’. Robyn Ober sought out methodologies that gave her alternatives from following a strictly Western academic approach. She states that as an Aboriginal researcher she is ‘trying to expand the space to converse, to explore, to engage with multiple voices, perspectives, ideas, thoughts and truths’. Non-Indigenous researcher, Nia Emmanouil also articulates the need to be conscious and resistant to the ongoing ontological and epistemological dominance of the Western Eurocentric worldview. Lisa Hall describes the need for non-Indigenous researchers to remain conscious and alert to the colonised power relationships and imbalances that exist in research work. Explicitly naming hegemonic issues and making conscious choices to subvert embedded power relations are thus demonstrated as important aspects of the decolonising work being undertaken by these early career researchers.

Relationality emerges as a core research principle for all the contributing authors, although practiced in different ways. As non-Indigenous researchers with ongoing relational entanglements with their respective communities and participants, Sam Osborne and Hall navigate the complexities of ethics and participation, as well as relationships between people and knowledge. Debbie Hohaia and Moana Tane both explore the relational and cultural complexity of being Indigenous researchers working within complex Indigenous knowledge spaces and examined how relationships and relational trust helped them to navigate this.

Ober and Barlo are bound by deep cultural protocols around relationships that pose both opportunities and challenges for the research work undertaken. Emmanouil's paper goes beyond the notion of human interpersonal relationships and asks powerful questions about our relationships with and relational accountability to Country.

Evident in all the papers is the notion that decolonising research work requires, and can result in, the transformation of both the knowledge and the knowers. Barlo writes openly about how his participants embarked on a process of training him as the researcher, while Hohaia remarks on how she learned to regularly reflect on and critique her own ontological position. Hall reports how collaborative research enabled her and the research participants to discover ways of 'being and doing' that helped everyone develop a better understanding of the differences in how they approached things. Emmanouil reflects on the need for patience and being open to encountering and experiencing 'other' realities. These papers make visible the need for researchers to be willing to undergo ontological and epistemological shifts as instigators and participants of decolonising research. Ober describes this shift within herself as learning to be true and bringing the 'whole self' into the research process, while Tane states simply that the research process itself changed her own knowledge about herself, which is fundamental to broader reaching transformation.

'Language' and 'voice' emerge as other distinctive features of doing decolonising knowledge work. Many of the papers in this issue wrestle with issues related to language and voice. Both Tane and Osborne identify the importance of research participants being able to participate in their own language and note that this requires the researcher to somehow address the depth and nuances of language difference. Such situations require acknowledgement of the fact that there are often no words in English that can accurately convey the meaning and depth of Aboriginal and/or Māori words. The word 'sovereignty' offers one such example. If issues pertaining to language and voice are not satisfactorily addressed in the research methods and methodology, a distinct loss of understanding and the perpetuation of unchecked power relations can occur between the researcher and participants. The need to amplify, privilege and convey accuracy of meaning to the voices of Indigenous participants in decolonising research practice is paramount. Hohaia addresses this in her paper when she highlights the need to 'bring Indigenous voices to the fore' by consciously seeking opportunities in the research process to 'open dialogue', for deeper understanding. However, despite best efforts to reduce the colonial impact, she finds the dominance of standard forms of English in academia and Western institutions to be a colonising imposition and limitation. Hall also encounters this issue in her research. She countered it somewhat by allowing enough time in the process for the participants to embed their understandings in their first language by explaining and discussing concerns with other language speakers. Ober identifies language as central to her research as well noting the importance of having a shared language, Aboriginal English, between her, as researcher, and the participants. Whatever the approach, conscious attention must be paid to the language and voice of participants in decolonising research work.

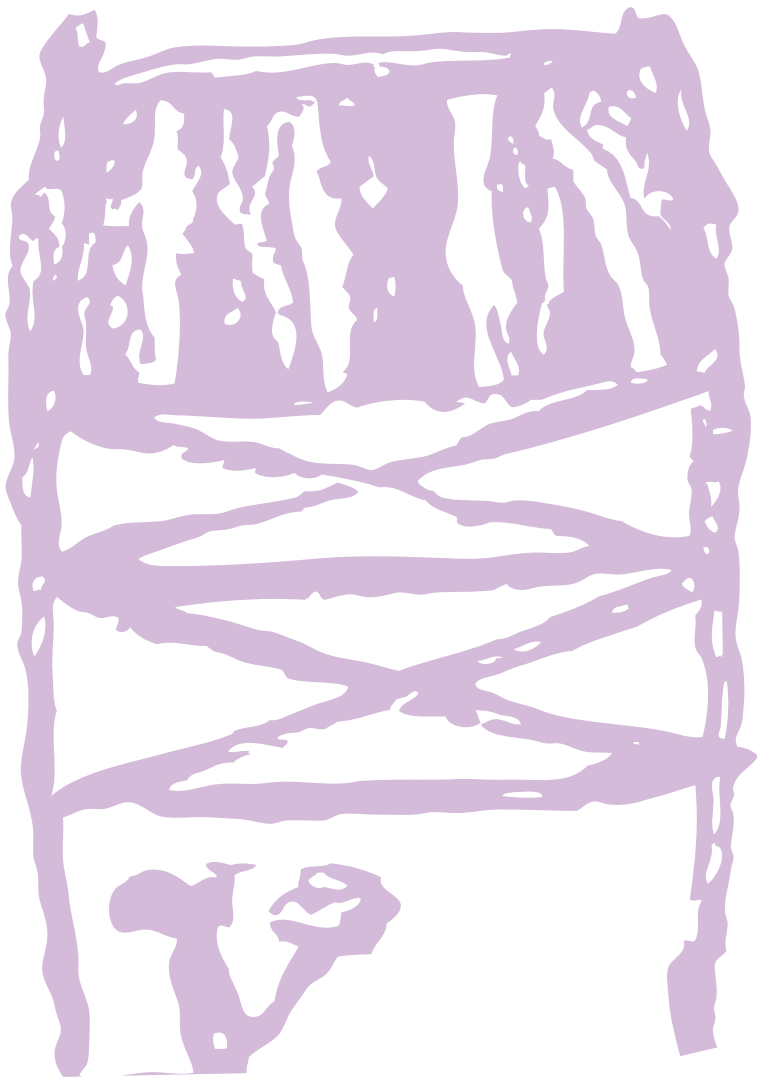
There are other aspects of decolonising knowledge work that stand out in this collection. For example, Ober, Barlo, Tane and Hohaia all undertook their research with a specific Indigenist focus. Tane asserts the importance of upholding an Indigenous research agenda, while Ober also acknowledges herself as part of a global movement of Indigenist research that is making space for new fresher ways to do research by drawing on traditional knowledge practices. Barlo highlights how Indigenous research can reflect the authority and foundations of Indigenous Knowledge systems. Hohaia reflects upon this within her choice of methodology stating that her research needed to incorporate cosmology, worldview, epistemology and ethical beliefs that were congruous with Indigenous Knowledge systems. The Indigenous researchers writing in this issue explicitly identify the need for the decolonising practices to adhere to and be respectful of the 'ancient protocols' (Barlo) of Indigenous Knowledge systems.

Exploration of the Insider/Outsider continuum emerges through several of the authors' reflections. Hohaia and Tane both describe their movement between these positions as they navigated their research terrain. Situations in which they were an 'Insider' or 'Outsider' were not always clearly delineated and involved careful and respectful negotiations. Encountering the complexities and power relations deeply embedded in institutions also required careful negotiation. Tane describes her experience of navigating these complex environments as part of a dynamic process of learning and reflecting. Ober and Barlo also confront the task of doing 'Insider' research with Aboriginal people while at times feeling like the 'Outsider' coming from a Western academic research world. Osborne reflects on this theme as someone who is a non-Indigenous Outsider who has overtime become an Insider through the entanglements of family and relationships and through speaking the same language. This dynamic and conscious movement between being an Insider and Outsider plays an important role in decolonising research.

Selecting a methodology was a critical choice made by the authors which informed how they attempted to decolonise their research practice. For most of the authors, their choices supported the development and strengthening of connections: between peoples, people-place and people-place-knowledge. Ober explains that her choice of the yarning methodology was made since storytelling, or 'yarning', is embedded within the processes and structure of Aboriginal society. She goes on to explain that stories give us access to layers of deep cultural and historical knowledge. Similarly, Barlo utilised 'yarning' as a methodology that enabled him, as a researcher, to become part of the narrative. Tane, Osborne and Hall gravitated towards storytelling because of its centrality to Indigenous ways of knowing and being and out of a desire to create space of cultural safety for research participants. For these reasons, working with stories emerges as an effective tool for doing decolonising work.

Questions of knowledge ownership and permissions are also central to working with Indigenous people and their knowledges. Barlo raises some vital questions about the ways in which Western academic ethical permissions can often conflict with Indigenous Knowledge-based understandings about access to and ownership of knowledge. Writing in the context of collaborative research, Hall describes the need to build into research ongoing mechanisms to check that the consent given at the beginning of the research continues to feel 'true' and 'right' as the process unfolds. Osborne raises the importance of 'reciprocal obligation – ngapartji ngapartji', emphasising the responsibility of the researchers to ensure that participation in the research is an experience that leaves participants feeling positive. Tane outlines the process she went through to gain permissions for her research by being guided by Cultural Mentors, while both Hohaia and Tane touch on the various ceremonies and cultural protocols they needed to observe above and beyond Western academic ethical consent processes. Finally, both Barlo and Osborne highlight the need to return research work back to community. Questions of permission and ownership of knowledge, data and results will continue to require careful consideration in any decolonising work.

It is our hope that these papers offer the reader an insight into the generative and transformative potential of decolonising research practice. We also hope that emerging (and experienced) scholars will contribute to the ongoing growth of such practices. If this issue offers one encouragement to researchers, it is to explore and name the boundaries and limitations encountered in knowledge production work and to offer these stories as examples of hope.



NOTES

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The *Learning Communities: International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts* publishes articles which advance our knowledge and understanding of social contexts in Australia and internationally with an emphasis on the socio-cultural dimensions of learning in these different contexts and configurations. We strive towards the publication of high-quality articles through the engagement of expert referees in a double-blind peer review process.



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