

# Our contribution, our imperative: an argument beyond inclusion

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## Constituting inclusion

In late 2014 a text on performance was released by ANU press called *Circulating cultures: exchanges of Australian Indigenous music, dance and media* (Harris, 2014). This is an important contribution to historical and contemporary understandings of Indigenous performance and the vibrancy with which our<sup>1</sup> communities engage in complex and varied practices. The text fills a significant knowledge-gap, and the contributors are drawn from a range of disciplines. It is understood through inquiry that none of the authors are Indigenous Australians and no authorship is shared with those providing content to the publication.

There is a contemporary rethinking that positions the inclusion of an Indigenous<sup>2</sup> voice, not only in the information told, but in the process of undertaking research amongst our Peoples (Fredericks, 2009, p. 20; Rigney, 2001, p.1). In contrast to this aspiration, there

- 1 *Our* and *We* is used as an active mode of positionality for the author, who belongs to the Wiradjuri community, and has a responsibility to the broader Indigenous and Aboriginal communities of the country now known as Australia.
- 2 Aboriginal and Indigenous are used interchangeably in this article and are placeholder terms for preferred community, tribal or language names. Named people should be traced in each instance to determine their current affiliation/s. The terms Aboriginal and Indigenous are capitalised for two reasons, the first that it shows a sign of respect as it swaps-out a collective proper noun for a specific naming. The second is that is that Indigenous when used to indicate a specific Indigenous group (i.e. Indigenous Australian) is a short-form for a proper noun and under rules of grammar should be capitalised. Similarly 'Peoples' operates as short-form for Indigenous Peoples.

remains research conducted with Indigenous Peoples that is outside of this Indigenous perspective on the epistemologies of engagement. Marie Battiste adds to this critical inquiry by suggesting that "...most existing research on Indigenous peoples is contaminated by Eurocentric biases" (2008, p. 503). Beyond a space of representation for Indigenous researchers, Battiste is suggesting that we bring an approach to research that potentially changes the outcomes of the research, the measures of engagement, and that disrupts some of the structures that apply within the academy.

The writers who contributed to *Circulating cultures* have undertaken significant research in their fields, are writing in a respectful and rigorous way, and are disseminating important information on the ways that Indigenous Knowledges are practiced and performed. Yet they are not Indigenous, and the academy that they work within allows limited capacity to formally understand or acknowledge their Indigenous engagement at a level of shared authorship, and there remains little requirement for a level of knowledge-transfer back to the community (Cadet-James, Wallace, & Watkin Lui, 2014). The academy provides another immersive barrier with ongoing references to the difficulty of locating Indigenous academic expertise across fields of inquiry, ensuring that the story told and the process of telling the story can remain legitimately within non-Indigenous purview (Rigney, 2001).

The example provided of *Circulating cultures* works within the disciplines in which there are an increasing number of Indigenous academics. Our capacity and our practice in working into disciplines do not, however, prepare us for the work required across all disciplines. Since the introduction of the requirements under the Bradley Report to support the embedding of 'Indigenous cultural competencies' across the disciplines, there has been a push in understanding how this can occur across every discipline in the sector (Bradley et al., 2008, p.27). The

desire for Indigenous inclusion can create a space in which Indigenous academics are expected to almost magically contain knowledge of a field in which we have not studied. I have frequently been invited to talk to people from the Maths or Science areas – areas in which I do not have even rudimentary knowledge – purely on the basis of my Indigeneity and availability. If taken up this could diminish the sense in students that Indigenous academics can provide a discipline-knowledgeable focus. Like many of the discussions across this chapter, these are resistible extrusions by the mainstream academy in reductively managing Indigenous Knowledges; a unique contribution is to ensure that in requiring inclusion, we also curate the context of this inclusion (Rigney 2001, p.2).

## **Inclusion, beyond representation**

This chapter is neither a plea for Indigenous inclusion in an academic text nor is it proposing that research projects about us are automatically enriched by our participation. The chapter instead focuses on the power of inclusion of the Indigenous voice in the practice of research, and proposes strategies to challenge and disrupt the academy-led precepts of Indigenous Knowledge(s) reporting that exclude citation and keep at a distance those whose lives are reported. Central to the question of Indigenous inclusion and citation is whether Battiste's (2008, p. 503) explication of a Eurocentric view forms a framework for dismantling the system of citation and the expectation of the academy. Can academic processes sufficiently adjust to permit academic work to source individual community members as more than a congregate representation, and as the source of knowledge itself?

In estimating the power of Indigenous engagement in altering the act of undertaking research, it is important to consider the work of Aboriginal academic, Lester-Irabinna Rigney in his framing of Indigenist research practice. His central theory explores agency and self-determination through a process underpinned by privileging Indigenous voices and understanding all researchers' positionality

(Rigney 1999, p. 110). Indigenist approaches also require a positioning that articulates relational power and the structures present that subjugate (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p. 73). In Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's seminal text, *Decolonising methodologies*, she discusses the over-worrying of positionality between the extra-cultural researchers to the 'researched' as an undisclosed precept. She argues that writers from outside of the culture are compelled to think about cultural sensitivity as a base level expectation (Smith, 2002). While for non-Indigenous people the process is often to articulate and acknowledge the distance, as Indigenous researchers we explain our connections, our responsibilities to our communities, and articulate our relatedness (Fredericks, 2009; Smith, 2002).

In early 2014 an email was generated within a group of mostly non-Indigenous writers for a book to be released by Springer on service learning in Indigenous communities. I was included in this email exchange and there was a robust discussion, led by Naomi Sunderland and Brydie Bartleet, non-Indigenous academics who argued for the importance of framing each writer's positionality. I, too, argued for this (Personal Group Communication, 2014). Their argument posited that while it can articulate difference, it also describes an upfront relationship to the communities with which we are working. For many of the respondents this was foreign and uncomfortable, but it became the framing for the publication and the approach of disseminating the information by providing an explicit context and a background to the perspective of each writer. It resolved an internal dialogue that I was having where as an Indigenous author who represents cultural difference to most of the other writers, I am often the only one who must frame and explain my cultural background. In doing so, it also addressed the issue that Smith raised of a constant state of management, by it moving from a background position to making the relationship between

writer and community explicit, where they are forced to remain present, rather than distanced, in their research reporting.

## **Whose work is it anyway? The risks and power of inclusion**

Universities are increasingly in the business of creating silos where knowledge is held and attributed according to requirements to build a strong researcher base, and they explicitly operate using these practices. For academics there is a 'publish or perish' (Laurence et al., 2013) imperative that drives the need to ensure their name appears on publications as an author. In academic contexts it is not the person who provides words or concepts but the author who can claim the overall work as theirs. Similarly these authors shape the context of how the work is received and how knowledge-transfer is accommodated. Indigenous Peoples around the world know this all too well, there are no more researched people than our communities (Martin, 2003, p. 1), and when the voices of those communities are not heard on what is - or is not - culturally valuable research, the arbiter remains the academy.

In recent years laying claim to ideas from Indigenous Peoples has been challenged, and the citation of ideas is expected practice. In noting this, there is no further expectation that authorship of an academic paper or book is shared with its subjects. Further, Australian universities explicitly benefit from an unshared citation, with a greater yield of research income paid to the academic's institution (HERDC, 2015). For Indigenous academics and writers, this presents both an opportunity and a challenge: an opportunity to contribute in a space that we were excluded from until very recently (Behrendt et al., 2012), and a challenge that many of us face in working with our communities and then recalibrating the work as our 'own'. For many Indigenous researchers, the notion of authority is neither taken without acknowledgement, nor without due care. Smith argues that for "...Indigenous researchers, sharing is about

demystifying knowledge and information and speaking in plain terms to the community" (Smith, 2002, p. 161), a notion seemingly at odds with the process of research dissemination to an academic community.

An academic author owns their published material. As Indigenous academics we can talk to Elders in our community, ask them questions and cite their contribution, but it is still considered by the academy to be our individual work. The researchers' names appear and will forever be associated with that work, and while contemporary practice suggests that source name should be cited, it is still possible for their ideas and thoughts to become lost in the citation and forever associated with the author. This is reinforced through an academic system that acknowledges communities of practice, networks, research teams and support systems in principle, but continues to assess and promote academics on individual academic merit.

In 2014, I was asked to contribute to a journal through conversation with a non-Indigenous academic. A series of emails between us would form the conversation, to be written and published in a special issue that promoted the Australian Indigenous Studies Learning and Teaching Network to which we both belonged (2013). In the end, it seemed a little more like an interview with me and I encouraged my co-writer to publish more of her own ideas, as she had been a leading figure in the development of the Network. Still lopsided in authority, she argued that we should be positing an Indigenous perspective and that I was a leader across the broader space in which we were working. We were both very pleased with the resulting text that was submitted to the journal and accepted for publication. I wrongly assumed that I would be listed as one of the two authors.

In the same publication and with the same author there appeared another article: 'Four scholars speak to navigating the complexities of naming in Indigenous Studies', with all four scholars, along with others, named as authors of the article (Carlson et al., 2014). I have

mused for some time on how this could possibly have occurred and was informed that my author-exclusion was standard practice for an interview. Far from an interview, the text entitled, 'A discussion with Sandy O'Sullivan about key issues for the Australian Indigenous Studies Learning and Teaching Network', I argued, was a scholarly and cultural contribution to which I was clearly connected. But this argument came far after publication and, while not consistent with the nominations in the other article, it served as a reminder that negotiation of our cultural and insider knowledge is not privileged in the academy. This discussion is not a challenge to the publication or even the author, for whom I hold a great deal of respect. I was, without question, deeply complicit in the actions that led to a failure to enact a citation in line with author-ownership by forgetting the central tenet of academic work, that it will always be publish or perish (Laurence et al., 2013) and that sharing a citation diminishes the power of the single-author work.

Within this cautionary tale is a reminder that even in Indigenous contexts nothing else is valued as highly as citation in academic research, and that it has moved from a prize to a requirement (Laurence et al., 2013), and that we must countenance caution against engaging without clear guidelines. The underlying concern is that if this could happen to me – a senior researcher with decades of experience within the academy – what hope was there for a community or community of practice outside of this environment?

## Knowledge transfer, ownership and the academy: managing beyond inclusion

There have been notable exceptions to this practice that should be lauded as inclusive and accurate in citation. Non-Indigenous researchers Lyn Fasoli and Rebekah Farmer engaged in research to explore strategies for Early Childhood workers in working within Aboriginal communities. This work resulted in a 2011 report called

*You're in New Country* (Fasoli & Farmer [Compilers], 2011). Fasoli and Farmer do not author the text; rather they frame themselves as 'compilers'. Their contributors were mostly Aboriginal Early Childhood workers from across the Northern Territory, who had a range of material that they needed to disseminate as researchers across the field; Fasoli and Farmer privileged the information by clearly nominating the contributors and their knowledge set. In the imperfect world of academic citation, you will still find the names of the contributors largely excluded from a list (see this reference set), because of the volume of names involved, but their contribution is acknowledged beyond 'informant'.

Language researcher Maree Klesch of Batchelor Press rarely assumes a name assignment on the publication of collaborative research, instead assigning it to a community or researcher from the community.<sup>3</sup> Problematically this work – often significant community stories and Knowledges – becomes catalogued as children's books or uncitable research data. Other authors within the press will note their role as 'compiler' (Batchelor Press, 2015). Similarly the citation for *The people of Budj Bim: engineers of aquaculture, builders of stone house settlements and warriors defending country* can be seen in full in the reference section of this chapter, and clearly states authorship by Gunditjmarra People & Wettenhall, G. (2010). Commissioned by a government department, the authorship is shared and this arrangement is discussed within the book with a clear indication that the text only exists because of this co-authorship (p. 4).

Most of these texts straddle the academic, publishing and community engagement worlds, and are not centrally placed in academic contexts. This may be the key to academic imperatives failing to drive the ownership, however each of the participants loses academic

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3 For example, see citation: Marri Amu Rak Tjindi Malimanhdhi people. (2003). *Mi-tjiwilirr i wulumen tulh*. Batchelor: Batchelor Press. Please note that Maree Klesch's name does not appear as an author.

credibility through each shared or community citation. I am proud to say that the first two publications arise from work we have undertaken at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education to recognise the value of a shared citation, and to encourage it, where appropriate. It is worth noting that if an institution is able to assert this as individual intellectual achievement, there is a beginning argument for its value in changing practices. The examples given here intentionally include non-Indigenous participants. Again, reinforcing those systems that reward and integrate alternative measures, incentivise Indigenous voices in the process of dissemination. The communities involved in each of these texts would not permit an engagement that failed to recognize their contribution. It also, at least at some level, provides a space to the compilers to 'opt out' of the process of the academy, by ensuring that the value of the material is primarily to the community (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2012), rather than an iterative, ongoing journey of citation, further academic writing and the intended audience of academics.

## **The underlying question across this chapter is in what context this shared authorship would not be appropriate?**

An aspect of the extra-curricular and off-track undertakings that many Indigenous academics undertake is often not understood by the academy, but can lead to transformative practice (Behrendt et al. 2012). While this may lead to education and research reform for Indigenous Peoples, the overwhelming approach recognizes the importance of social action, a central tenet of Rigney's Indigenist philosophy and practice (1999). The *Idle No More* project that academic Alex Wilson of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation has actively organized across her community may prove to be one of the more significant historical moments in First Nations challenges across Canada. The ongoing project has focused on stimulating action within communities

against racist and oppressive government practices and to ensure treaty plans are carried out (Febna 2013). Wilson's role as educator and intellectual within the mainstream academy is often lost in the public descriptors of her actions (Johnson & Ward, 2014), her movement from writer to news item transforms her voice and the relationship is, at times, separated. In other contexts she is described as both an instigator of the action and an employee of the university, with the connection between the two not always apparent, except in media where it is Indigenous-controlled. It is evidenced in her teaching practice that Wilson's movement oscillates between the action of the social movement, a transformation of understanding for her students, and the community-driven motivations (Johnson & Ward/Wilson, 2014). In 2014 she incorporated *Idle No More* into a contemporary understanding of First Nations agency in Canada in her curriculum. In her institutional blog, Wilson takes control of her diverse identity markers, and creates a space in which her voice and the voices of her community are privileged, but where she operates applying an equally legitimate and rigorous reporting (Wilson, 2015).

Aboriginal education leader, Victor Hart in *Teaching black, teaching back*, frames the untenable base-line relationship that Aboriginal teachers have to the academy, and suggests strategies to disrupt, if not dismantle, the colonial project through applying our own complex positionalities (Hart, 2003, pp. 12-13). To do so he enlists critical race theory as a strategy to dismantle the idea that the post-colonial exists. He explores our role as Aboriginal educators teaching both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and as inhabiting a space that is more accustomed to describing the actions and reactions of others, as distanced and historical overview (Hart, 2003, p. 5). Fast forward eleven years and Aboriginal/South Sea Islander academic, Chelsea Bond, who works across identity and representation in higher education teaching practice, writes of teaching *herself* as an object (Bond, 2014). While she worries about the value of an essentialising view and the problems it presents,

she reflects an awareness that presenting first-hand Indigenous perspectives in a mainstream university process can operate as “...disruptive, confrontational, and confusing, but... a necessary part of transformative *warrior scholarship*”. Her concept of warrior draws on the importance of challenging her audience – her students – and transforming their perspectives. She encourages them to confront their feelings of guilt and discomfort, through her engagement as both teacher, and the othered object (Bond, 2014).

In 2014 I participated in a workshop with Indigenous academics Yvonne Cadet-James, Felecia Watkin-Lui and Valda Wallace at their home institution of James Cook University. Each of these researchers are proponents of centering knowledge-transfer as the base motivation for undertaking research with Indigenous communities (2014). This process moves beyond the idea that standard academic dissemination is the end-goal and positions community-led processes and useful end products delivered back for the benefit of the community as the primary objective. Using this model, an academically formatted research output is seen as a necessary, but secondary requirement. I participated as an ‘academic in residence’ and was able to observe in this workshop – comprised of mostly PhD and Masters candidates – a clear sense of their direction, value of their research and a positivity that I have rarely encountered. Their work was rigorous, and their accountabilities were clear to both the community and the academy; it was edifying.

## Including the academy

In the criticism of an Indigenous-focused text that failed to have Indigenous contributors, except for the designer of the cover, Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson, refers to the “...writer-knower as subject [being] racially invisible, while the Aboriginal as object is visible” (2004, p. 80). This analysis by a leading Aboriginal academic is a reminder that the gaze now comes from First Nations’

Peoples and that we are now participating in the academy, and are invested in interrogating an underlying insular research approach.

In a text that focuses on common ground, we must contemplate the contribution of our non-Indigenous allies and collaborators who remain present in the process of undertaking research across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts. Central to this is the importance of researcher positionality and a recalibration from an imperative of building a publication track record to undertaking research that has, as its primacy, the value to our communities. Many of us work across communities that are not our own, and carefully reject a pan-Indigenising lens, yet we remain Indigenous participants engaging with other Indigenous Peoples and our responsibilities are frequently explicit and complex (Smith, 2002). We should encourage our non-Indigenous colleagues to manage their own relationships in ways that acknowledge the contribution of communities to the research, and that ensure that their positions and engagements are clear.

## Conclusion

In this chapter it has been argued that in order to challenge the colonial gaze within the academy, we must engage not only the representation of the Indigenous voice across both researcher and researched, but ensure that our contributions are relevant, adequately acknowledged, and that we encourage our communities to have a greater agency over research processes within the academy as they relate to the dissemination of our knowledges and ideas. The academy must learn from community processes of reciprocation and desire for agency, and in doing so realise that our insistence on inclusion does not reflect an aspiration to belong to the academic ‘club’, but rather a desire to revolutionise it.

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