



**MACQUARIE**  
University

## Macquarie University PURE Research Management System

---

**This is the author version of an article published as:**

Bishop, M. (2021). 'Don't tell me what to do' encountering colonialism in the academy and pushing back with Indigenous autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 34(5), 367-378.

© 2020. This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* on 23/05/2020, available online <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2020.1761475>

It is deposited under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

**“Don’t tell me what to do” Encountering colonialism in the academy  
and pushing back with Indigenous autoethnography**

Michelle Bishop

*Macquarie School of Education, Macquarie University, Australia*

Balaclava Road, Macquarie Park, NSW, 2109, Australia

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3292-2355

Twitter: @MichelleABishop

Email: michelle.bishop@mq.edu.au

Michelle Bishop is a Gamilaroi woman from Western NSW who was grown up on on Dharawal Country, south-west of Sydney, Australia. Currently, she is an Associate Lecturer in the Macquarie School of Education at Macquarie University. From a critical Indigenous perspective, Michelle ’s research critiques dominant practices in education and research, offering counter-narratives to advocate for emancipatory change for Indigenous Peoples. Her PhD research focuses on Indigenous education sovereignty.

# **“Don’t tell me what to do” Encountering colonialism in the academy and pushing back with Indigenous autoethnography**

As an Aboriginal woman critiquing Australia’s education system as a site of ongoing colonialism, I aim to actively resist the temptation to perform research within Western hegemonic research paradigms, and instead seek ways to disrupt normative research practices with the *what*, *how*, and *why* of research. In this paper, I utilise Indigenous autoethnography as a cultural imperative to ‘walk my talk’, embedding an autoethnographic dataset of reflection, poetry, emotion, and subjective blurting in response to my experiences of colonialism in the academy. Indigenous autoethnography allows a space from which I can expose (and resist) the abnormality of the ‘normal’; fulfil cultural, ethical and relational obligations; and recentre axiology and ontology as a starting place for research. This paper seeks to contribute to the small but growing literature on Indigenous autoethnography, to offer another pathway for Indigenous scholars to follow, as well as illuminate normative research practices for non-Indigenous researchers.

Keywords: Indigenous autoethnography; decolonising methodologies; Indigenous Knowledges; colonialism; education

## **Introduction**

I am a Gamilaroi woman belonging to the country now known as Australia. I am a daughter, granddaughter, niece, mother, aunty, sister, cousin, partner and have occupied the position of teacher, coordinator, facilitator, student, academic and researcher. Most recently, in coming to reconcile my understandings of what it means for me to be a ‘researcher’, it was important to understand not only the ‘how’ of research, but the ‘why’; where ‘research’ comes from, whose interests did/does it serve, and what/where is my place in research?

It is imperative for me to state upfront who I am and where I come from, not only as an important cultural protocol, but also as a way of acknowledging the way I see the world. My axiology, ontology and epistemology as a Gamilaroi woman comes from

a strong line of Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> women, the matriarchs of my family, who have guided me in spirit, knowledge and life. I hold stories and knowledge that have been passed to me from Elders and Knowledge Holders across Australia and it is with this understanding of the world that I speak from: a sovereign woman of ancient land that has never been ceded. Our culture has not been ‘lost’, as is often claimed; however, the dispossession of our land continues, providing great profit and benefit for those who are now in possession. It is through this lens that I interrogate Western systems, and the world looks very different from the news headlines and polished magazine covers. *Deceitful knowledge hierarchies. Arbitrary binaries. False classifications of racial superiority. Commodification of peoples and places.* The world appears much more sinister and scheming, with those in positions of privilege and power seeking to protect themselves. Looking through the eyes of the colonised, you can *see*.

In researching ‘research’, I became enthralled by autoethnography, a research method that has gained popularity in recent years (Lapadat, 2017). I admired the courageous subjectivity and reflexivity from scholars wanting to rectify the damage caused by research through a methodology which, “at its core, is inquiry that is ethically motivated and grounded. It aims to make a difference” (Lapadat, 2017, p. 592). Then I ‘discovered’ Indigenous autoethnography (Bainbridge, 2007; Francis IV & Munson, 2017; Houston, 2007; Iosefo, 2018; McIvor, 2010; RedCorn, 2017; Whitinui, 2014). A distinct, and decolonising, approach to research/researching, Indigenous autoethnography differs from autoethnography by centring Indigenous axiologies, ontologies and epistemologies. It is into this ‘space’ that I seek to enter, to offer another example of Indigenous autoethnography and contribute to ensuring this methodology is

<sup>1</sup> I use the terms ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Indigenous’ interchangeably throughout this paper, acknowledging that these are colonial constructs.

recognised for its rigour, which other Indigenous scholars can utilise without having to first justify and defend.

Thus, this article aims to speak back (and up) – “*don't tell me what to do*” – as I analyse and reflect upon my experiences as a postgraduate student: encountering Whiteness<sup>2</sup> and navigating the academy; feeling strengthened by the work of Indigenous ‘warrior scholars’; and finding *or being found* by Indigenous autoethnography. Throughout, I embrace deviations from the ‘concrete footpath’ to instead follow the multiplicity of winding tracks left by our Ancestors; demonstrating what an Indigenous ethical and relational approach to ‘doing’ research may look like. These winding tracks are not linear, and, at times, may appear ‘messy’<sup>3</sup> (Martin, 2008), yet they follow a sequence of logic and purposefully spiral around a core message. *Indigenous Knowledges, Indigenous methodologies, Indigenous Peoples are legitimate*. Marked in italics and inserted throughout the paper as an act of defiance you will find poetry, reflections, emotions, and subjective blurts – my autoethnographic dataset.

### **“That’s not the only way” Pushing back with Indigenous autoethnography**

Many Indigenous Peoples will no longer passively and politely comply with existing research methodology. Too much of ourselves has already been erased (Blair, 2015, p. 23)

In coming to terms with my role as ‘researcher’, I started to wonder if I would, in effect, be endorsing colonial practices by using Western qualitative methodologies instead of

<sup>2</sup> I refer to the “invisible omnipresent norm” of ‘Whiteness’ as a social construction, encompassing knowledge systems, privilege, race and institutional hegemony (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. xix).

<sup>3</sup> Martin (2008, p. 21) argues the use of ‘messy’ text is not ‘bad’ English, but a reflection of how to mediate “cultural conventions and expectations and those conventions and expectations of the academy.”

Indigenous methodologies. Textbook after textbook of postgraduate required readings inducted me into quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the 'right' way to do research. The 'right' way to get top marks. Yet, I heed caution from Indigenous scholars, including Kovach (2009, P. 31) who states "those who attempt to fit tribal epistemology into Western cultural conceptual rubrics are destined to feel the squirm." *I don't want to let my family, my communities, down.* Too often there is an expectation for Indigenous scholars to work within Western frameworks *and* use the tools of our oppressors (Martin, 2008; Smith, 2012). Consequently, I feel a profound sense of obligation to 'walk my talk' and using Indigenous autoethnography provides a way to centralise the "core structures of (my) Aboriginal ontology as a framework for research" (Martin, 2003, p. 206), rather than relying on Western Knowledges and paradigms. *That's not the only way.*

My dissent with imperialistic, Eurocentric, patriarchal knowledge paradigms is shown through what may be interpreted as non-conventional research and writing practices (Houston, 2007). Indigenous autoethnographies can not and will not be defined or reduced to a checklist. They operate from a different axiology and ontology that does not seek to categorise, classify, or simplify; instead, Indigenous autoethnographies strive to increase complexity. In this way, cultural agency is asserted; bound by obligations to family, communities, Country, Knowledges - "*where storytelling can spiral into a bigger pattern, an interconnectedness that recognises and links together infinite experiences across time and space*" (Bishop, 2020, p. 23).

However, I'm mindful that in reaching beyond established methodologies I may be perceived as troublesome. Non-compliant. Negative. It certainly felt this way as a postgraduate student. *It takes energy to carefully explain that there are multiple knowledge systems. That Western knowledge doesn't have veto rights on everything*

*'Other'. Indigenous methodologies are just as rigorous, just as 'advanced'. I know I'll need to 'prove' it though; and try to find a way that this can be done without slipping back into Western logic. I'm learning how to navigate conversations that are deeply imbued with notions of Indigenous primitivism. I'm careful not to go too far, trying not to upset or offend. Is this self-protection or 'double consciousness'?*

*Ah, angry blackfulla,  
so negative  
Think the world out to get you.  
Think conspiracy, aye?  
so negative*

*Getoverit.*

It is a lived reality for many Indigenous Peoples that we are encouraged, and sometimes expected, to *walk in two worlds* (Brown, 2010): that of the invisible, 'normal' Western/White culture and our own (often) invisible, or misrepresented culture. We are consistently reminded of ourselves as 'Other', and yet, the forceful and destructive expectations of assimilation are rarely acknowledged. Similar to Du Bois' (1994, p. 2) concept of *double consciousness* as "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others", I exist in a state of critical awareness and therefore continually occupy the role of 'researcher'. In this way, I *embody* Indigenous autoethnography. However, the use of Indigenous autoethnography for publication demands personal exposure in a system which privileges 'objectivity'; a vulnerable and risky position to place yourself in (cf. Bishop & Smith, 2020). As Smith (2012, p. 37) notes "writing can be dangerous because sometimes we reveal ourselves in ways which get misappropriated and used against us". *This terrifies me. And sometimes...it feels as though you're stepping too far outside the boundaries. Which makes it...hard, but also brings about intense fulfilment. Following your gut.*

Indigenous autoethnography demands disciplined patience against the tide of ‘busy-ness’ to allow adequate time for critical self-reflexivity. As Martin (2003, p. 212) states:

Reflexivity in research design affords the ‘space’ to decolonise western research methodologies, then harmonise and articulate Indigenist research. Reflexivity is a process that allows us to work from Aboriginal centres and ensure we work with relatedness of self and Entities.

Thus, in comprising of both process *and* product (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011), Indigenous autoethnography encourages (and expects) critical reflection on and analysis of experiences during both the research and writing phases. It promotes ‘spiralling up’ to the literature, to situate personal experiences within a broader framework. For me, as an Aboriginal woman operating in an institution that is governed by Western, patriarchal epistemologies, I was able to utilise Indigenous autoethnography to “map personalized issues into the larger discourse of the cultural and political contexts” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 13). Such an approach to research values the Indigenous researcher as someone who can speak about the “cultural underlays/overlays associated with time, space, place and identity. Autoethnography, as the dominant discourse, has become a widely accepted method of inquiry...but at times lack a certain esoterically, metaphysical, and w(holistic) edge specific to an indigenous reality” (Whitinui, 2014, p. 461). The quote above points to very serious ethical considerations for Indigenous researchers; we are responsible and accountable first and foremost to our families, community members, Elders, Ancestors, and Country. Hence, Indigenous autoethnography provides a way to ensure these obligations are respected and fulfilled, and that the research is “culturally safe and culturally respectful through recognition of Indigenous worldviews, respect, and accountability” (Singh & Major, 2017, p. 5).



For me, using Indigenous autoethnography fulfils the ethical and relational responsibility I feel to make my work accessible and relatable. The criteria and standards set by academic writing conventions have created a barricade which denies access to many people (Bochner, 2000). Included in the ‘many’ are most of my family, incredibly knowledgeable and insightful people, but who resisted, or were not permitted, access to Australia’s education system. This unnecessary barrier has been purposively erected, put in place to serve a “conservative and destructive function”, whereby most academic work remains in the possession of the ‘ivory towers’, further inscribing knowledge hierarchies and systems of power (Bochner, 2000, p. 269). This deliberate exclusion of non-academes is unnecessary. *Who/What are we really doing research for? Our writing should belong to everyone, the observers and the observed, the researchers and the researched.*

My intention to contribute to the small but growing scholarship on/using Indigenous autoethnography (Bainbridge, 2007; Houston, 2007; Iosefo, 2018; McIvor, 2010; RedCorn, 2017; Whitinui, 2014) is a deliberate effort to further encourage future Indigenous scholars to trust their own standpoint as “culturally liberating human-beings” (Whitinui, 2014, p. 456). *We hold ancient knowledge.* I take comfort in knowing that every time my heart begins to pound and my cheeks start to prickle, every time my palms reach in on themselves and I feel the urge to flee, every time these bodily reactions occur in a White space, I remember this is the gift of my Ancestors, my Old People. These bodily reactions come from ancient knowledge that the Law/Lore of this land is being abused. *It lives in me, this knowledge, deep in my cellular memory. But now I’ve captured this arsenal of English language. And people are listening. I feel the urge more than ever to stay grounded, feet on Country, keep listening and learning, carrying those ancient messages. Communicating these in different ways. My*

*community have assigned this role to me; the translator, mediator, confronter? My obligation to them reminds me to keep my ego in check. I'm just 'playing' this other game. Making sure it doesn't become my game.*

### **“Who are you, where you (coming) from?” An ethics of relationality**

The insistence in using western science knowledge frameworks to construct Aboriginal knowledges and apply this in Aboriginal knowledge research is inherently impaired, because it is inherently colonial (Martin, 2008, p. 56).

My early encounters with decolonising practices were neither theoretical nor conceptual; I didn't even know the term 'decolonisation' existed. However, my delight in challenging people who abused their positional authority (most often teachers and managers) started from a young age and I relished in each small 'win'. *Always trying to restore a power imbalance.* Throughout my career in education, I found the wins were harder to gain. In one instance, when voicing concerns over (what I perceived to be) the mismanagement of an Aboriginal program, I was accused of being 'non-compliant' and 'emphatic'. *Tensions arise when working for/with your mob<sup>4</sup>, yet under whiteness* (cf. Tynan & Bishop, 2019). Inevitably, as is commonplace when Aboriginal Peoples speak back to Whiteness, my voice was expurgated (Moreton-Robinson, 2003) and I was faced with a decision: comply or leave.

<sup>4</sup> 'Mob' is a term used by many Indigenous Peoples in Australia to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

*Under the White*  
*A Z*  
*G E*  
*Surveilled, castigated, dominated.*  
*Start to do it yourself,*  
*to yourself,*  
*to others.*  
*Thinking that's the way.*  
*Police, dictate, demand.*  
*I feel shame I went their way,*  
*briefly*  
*caught in the toxicity,*  
*coerced by fear.*  
*Infused with*  
*Infected with*  
*POWER.*  
*Thinking that's the way.*  
*That's not the way.*

I left. *Wilful subjugation was not an option.* I returned to university with rage and passion to increase my capacity to have my voice heard. *Playing their game.* Knowing the high value placed on that 'piece of paper'. It was throughout my Master's Degree that I realised my actions and reactions to structures of power and hierarchies of knowledge have always been situated within a theoretical framework of decolonisation. Yet, decolonisation is not just a theoretical framework. It is a way of being; lived and enacted every day by Indigenous Peoples all over the world. Tuck and Yang (2012, p.

21) assert “decolonization specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life”, an action which presents challenges in Australia as “our colonisers have never gone home” (Bond, 2015, n.p.).

In research, decolonisation is often used as a metaphor (Tuck & Yang, 2012) which seeks to overturn the positioning of Indigenous epistemologies as invisible and inconsequential, and destabilise Western knowledge hierarchies that have been built upon our discursive oppression. Smith (2012, p. 21) maintains “decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values which inform research practices.” *As I delved more and more into literature written by Indigenous thinkers, it was affirming to read echoes of my lived experiences. My experiences in education and the academy are not isolated, they are part of something much greater; patterns of colonialism that are being tracked and exposed by Indigenous scholars all over the world.* It was exciting to see the ways decolonising methodologies could encompass and engulf dominant frameworks by reclaiming and foregrounding Indigenous epistemologies (Foley, 2003; Martin, 2008; Smith, 2012). In other words, decolonising methodologies simultaneously strips the colonial power from limiting and dismissing Indigenous agency, whilst enhancing critical analysis and propensity for complexity (Bunda, Zipin, & Brennan, 2012). *Culture of genius.* For me, a decolonising framework is central to my research as it informs my purpose *and* process to expose and challenge Western hegemonic knowledge production, albeit in a culturally appropriate and respectful manner.

To remain culturally respectful, I have thought deeply about my ‘Relationally Responsive Standpoint’ as a process of decolonisation which privileges axiology

*valuing* and ontology *being* as the starting point (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). This framework, passed to me through my relationships with Aunty Doris Shillingsworth, a Murrawarri woman, and Tyson Yunkaporta, a Bama fulla, maintain that ways of ‘valuing’ and ‘being’ are often assumed to be universal, or ‘natural’, which inevitably normalises and reproduces Western hegemonic knowledge systems. Instead, operating from a Relationally Responsive Standpoint involves firstly *Respecting*, then *Connecting*, *Reflecting*, and *Directing* – in that order (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). It is imperative that axiology and ontology is acknowledged to inform epistemology and methodology when conducting research. This approach, arguably, should be instructive for all researchers; who we are inevitably informs and influences the way we ‘do’ research.

In coming to a Relationally Responsive Standpoint, I reject the paradigm of positivism, whilst remaining sceptical that ontologically, qualitative research methodologies can sit completely outside of positivist epistemologies. *It’s still research. Re-search.* Even autoethnography, a methodology I admire, which emerged from postmodernism as a method of inquiry aiming to resist and critique hierarchical systems and structures (Wall, 2006), didn’t quite fit. *Postmodernism... Landless? Lawless?* The ‘auto’ in autoethnography typically represents ‘self’ (Wall, 2006), a concept which feels restrictive. As previously identified by Indigenous scholars (Bishop, 2020; Iosefo, 2018; Whitinui, 2014), the concept of ‘self’ needs broadening to recognise that this is a bigger entity than an individual. Despite contrary assumptions by the academy (and Western society), I am *not* an individual. It is therefore imperative that I remember – even as I tell ‘my’ story of ‘my’ experiences using Indigenous autoethnography – my knowledge is not just coming from me, or from books and articles accessed because of my exclusive university library membership. My knowledge primarily comes from my

family, my communities, my connections. My 'self' belongs to them. Therefore, I must constantly be reflecting on 'Who do I speak for?', 'Whose stories and knowledges am I able to share?' alongside, 'What am I speaking for?' and 'Who am I speaking to?'

These ethical considerations reach beyond ticking a box on an ethics application form and align with my positionality as an Aboriginal woman; centring my obligations first and foremost to family, communities, Country, Ancestors. Tuck and Yang (2014) argue that current ethical guidelines are a recent phenomenon and are not able to adequately ensure research is ethical or useful to those being researched. Therefore, it is essential to consider the knowledges that will be 'acquired' by the academy: "the university is not universal...it is a colonial collector of knowledge as another form of territory. There are stories and experiences that already have their own place, and placing them in the academy is removal, not respect" (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 813). Bringing Indigenous Knowledges into the academy has very real, ethical ramifications.

*The urge to educate classmates (and educators) on Indigenous matters creates an unnecessary danger. That I might inadvertently exploit (my/our) Indigenous Knowledges in an attempt to overturn preconceived misconceptions or offer an alternative viewpoint. And then, once I've 'disclosed' my Aboriginality, I become the 'expert'. Actually, it's not so simple. As the only Aboriginal student in the classroom, and as a fair-skinned Aboriginal woman, my disclosure would almost always be followed by curious questions or alarming accusations that essentially ask me to 'prove it'. From then on, as an act of benevolence (or fear), whenever anything was mentioned that involved Indigenous 'issues', it became my responsibility. Heads would turn and bodies swivelled. I felt obliged to nod encouragingly and commend 'trying' as an Acknowledgment of Country is read from a scrap of paper, often after the housekeeping, after the introductions, but "Before we begin...". If it's done at all.*

*Challenging the centuries-long campaign of degradation is never easy, and most people can't see beyond 'disadvantage' or 'helping'. It wears me out. Do all Indigenous students feel this? Like a free dose of adrenaline as you exist in a state of permanent hyperarousal, awaiting the moment to decide: fight or flight? Is it ever 'easier' to keep silent? Because the 'fight' or 'flight' decision isn't a real one. Instead, I walk the tightrope of reassurance (they are trying, after all) and (re)education; always careful not to show any animosity (it's not 'their' fault) or evoke any guilt (because really, who would actually want to think about how their own possession has been built on Indigenous Peoples' dispossession). It wears me out. It hurts... It makes me angry.*

**“Please choose from the following...” Coming to know the expectations of the academy**

Indigenous postgraduate students can become frustrated by being forced to accept western, ethnocentric research methodology that is culturally remote and often unacceptable to the Indigenous epistemological approach to knowledge (Foley, 2003, p. 44).

As with other Indigenous postgraduate students, I quickly became disturbed by the ways in which Western values and philosophies were privileged, and expected (Francis IV & Munson, 2017). Bunda and colleagues (2012, p. 946) pinpoint the dangers involved when there is an absence of Indigenous standpoints in universities, stating “without recognition and inclusion of Indigenous standpoints, the institution can be a dangerous and frightening place, inimical to the interests, safety and health of Indigenous people.” As an Aboriginal woman, I can attest that being in ‘White’, patriarchal spaces can be quite unnerving.

*The first class of a new course. Time for introductions: what's your name, why are you here/what are you studying, tell us a fun fact about yourself. Even introductions*

*have to have parameters. It seems so innocent, so common, so 'normal'. But, for me, my palms perspire and the blood hurries to fill my cheeks. Ah, I've done this so many times, why do I still have to rehearse it in my head? I know the reason. This is the moment when I decide whether to disclose my Aboriginality to a roomful of strangers who may harass me to 'prove' it. This is the moment when I question whether to break the 'rules' in order to follow my own cultural protocols. This moment defines how I participate in class for the rest of the semester. It's about cultural safety, and some classes aren't safe, right from the beginning.*

I had known this would happen. I had carefully considered the risks before enrolling. Many Indigenous students are acutely aware that “Australian policies and educational institutions have been marinated in cultural and racial social engineering theories” (Rigney, 1999, p. 111). With this in mind, interrogating the familiar practice of an introduction activity reveals the way it implicitly operates as an “apparatus of power” (Bhabha, 1996, p. 92). Whilst this may seem like a superfluous example, the introduction activity described in the vignette above encourages a cultural exchange that favours Western parameters; privilege is awarded to the concept of the individual and emphasis is placed on qualifications and achievements. On the other hand, when introducing yourself in many Aboriginal contexts across Australia, you would not be expected to talk about yourself or your career/university qualifications upfront. Instead, you would state who you are and where you're from (who's your mob?). This positions you *within* your family (“ah, you're Alison's niece”), and shows your ancestral connections to Country. It centres relationality and allows other people to connect to you via Family, Country, Kinship, and Law/Lore. Following this, you may be invited to share your intentions and qualifications. It can be seen that Aboriginal protocols of



introduction differ significantly, which further highlights the assumed universality of ‘normal’ (Western) practices.

Nevertheless, I felt the risks of returning to university were worth it. Potential damage to myself in exchange for ‘credibility’ to advocate for change in the education system. *After 10 years as an educator, in primary, secondary and tertiary education, I had witnessed the destruction and harm schools were inflicting on many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and knew something needed to change. Urgently. If schooling was designed to uphold an imperial agenda, are Indigenous students still subjects to civilise, acculturate, indoctrinate, assimilate?* Aboriginal students in Australia are made relentlessly aware that they have the “worst educational outcomes of any comparable Western settler society” (Gray & Beresford, 2008, p. 204), however, at the level of policy, little acknowledgement is made of the historical and structural mechanisms that continue to oppress and discriminate Aboriginal Peoples. Unfortunately, pervasive assumptions (and expectations) of assimilation continue at all levels of the education system (Vass, 2013). This is what motivated me to return to university.

*It was hard for me to believe. But they were very adamant, insisting the education system in Australia might need a few tweaks, but any talk of an education revolution, that was unnecessary. Not idealistic, not impossible, but unnecessary. In my head, I disagreed. I couldn’t say it aloud, but it certainly shaped my involvement in class discussions from then on. It caused me to reflect on another education system I know about. An education system that has been in place for tens of thousands of years. An education system that has sustained thousands of generations of people and ensured the harmonious existence between peoples and places, living and non-living entities. This education system recognises the role of different knowledge systems in supporting*

*relationships and increasing complexity. It is an education system from and of this ancient land. And yet it goes unrecognised; deemed invalid, inferior.*

During my Master of Education, it was not uncommon in class discussions to witness educators and peers make inferences (and sometimes outright assertions) of the superiority of Western knowledge systems. Repeatedly, Indigenous knowledge systems were treated as “quaint folk theory held by members of a primitive culture” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 6). *My cheeks boom as my eyes flit around the room. Is there anyone else who can see what’s going on? Who will back me up if I contest these assertions?* Most often, though, it was the failure to identify knowledge as Western which led to unspoken and unquestionable presumptions that Western knowledges are superior, ‘normal’ and universal. *Incessantly assumed neutrality.* It is through such omissions that colonial discourses continue to be entrenched; ensuring racial hierarchies become ‘just the way things are’ (cf. Bishop, 2020).

*Racism, oppression, dispossession, discrimination, power ^OVER^ Surviving.*

*seeping and sneaking  
through discourse.*

*The shifts in language - are just that...*

*s h i t y  
f*

*It wears me out.*

*It hurts.*

*It makes me angry.*

<sup>5</sup> See Homi Bhabha’s (1996, p. 92) assertion that colonial discourses seek to “construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.”

Like many Indigenous students, I read extensively beyond course requirements; devouring literature by Indigenous academics to help make sense of the academy (cf. Blair, 2015; Kovach, 2009; Lowe, Backhaus, Yunkaporta, Brown, & Loynes, 2014; Martin, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2011; Nakata, 2007; Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2014; Wilson, 2008). For decades, Indigenous scholars – ‘warrior scholars’ – have been mounting resistance attacks against disembodied, disconnected and statist authority (Alfred, 2004). These warrior scholars have been especially active in pinpointing universities’ role in old and new forms of imperialism (Alfred, 2004; Bunda et al., 2012; Justice, 2004; Smith, 2012). Smith (2012, p. 68) insists that the establishment of universities fulfilled a colonising role as part of the imperial project – an “essential part of the colonizing process, a bastion of civilization”, whereby western science is (re)inscribed as the “all-embracing method for gaining understanding of the world.” *Not the only way though*. Alfred (2004, p. 93) provides a scathing critique of how imperial objectives continue, served by universities through the “production of imperial values and ethics.”

Thus, universities represent an “organized form of imperialism that allowed colonization to continue by indoctrinating new subjects” (Wane, 2008, p. 185). *Masking indoctrination as ‘good education’*. Bunda and colleagues (2012, pp. 949-950) acknowledge the role of universities in perpetuating “colonising logics” by participating in “neo-colonial knowledge transfers that cannibalise ‘the Indigenous Other’.” In other words, universities are treacherous grounds for Indigenous Peoples (Alfred, 2004; Bunda, 2018).

## **Colonial trappings in the academy**

We recognise that refusal is complex and requires us to be strong and clear in our community and cultural obligations. However, we also acknowledge that there are dangers posed by not refusing...stories and patterns from our Old People can guide us in this (Co-author & author, 2019, p. 220).

There is a catch. One we must be careful of when ‘playing their game’. It is an alluring conundrum as we fight to be considered equal/human/not inferior/not primitive. The ongoing assumption of assimilation persists, albeit in a sneaky fashion. I liken the current vigorous campaigns to ‘educate us up’ with the past explicit policies to ‘breed us out’. In trying to prove ourselves equal/human/not inferior/not primitive by getting accepted into private schools/elite universities; earning good grades at school/university; winning awards or prestigious scholarships, we enter knowingly into systems that may expect our assimilation in return. This expectation may not seem obvious and may be disguised by good intentions, or masquerading as ‘opportunities’ (Co-author & author, 2019). Yet, imperialism endures in the academy, with Smith (2012, p. 20) proclaiming “imperialism still hurts, still destroys and is reforming itself constantly.” We must not forget this. *We must not forget to listen to the old ways*. It is important to be aware of colonial traps, in particular, the academy contains temptations and “seductions of colonialism” which could lead Indigenous scholars into becoming “agents of colonialism”, “enmeshed in the privileges and powers” of the university (Justice, 2004, p. 112).

Thus, as Indigenous scholars, we have been forewarned, and should remain acutely aware of the enticements of the academy, and the inherent dangers if we forget who we are and where we are from. In the United States, these concerns are felt by well-respected scholar Vine Deloria Jr. who worries that emerging Indigenous scholars are not holding true to cultural values:

I fear we have raised a generation of sell-outs who have no commitment to the Indian Community...this generation is doing nothing for the people that come. They keep themselves in a little intellectual ghetto and throw around big words like 'sovereignty' and think they are doing something. Not likely (as cited in Justice, 2004, p. 114).

*We must not succumb to the cunningness of colonial metamorphosis.*

## **Conclusion**

All Indigenous peoples continue to strive for a decolonized context in an hysterically antagonistic Eurocentric canon, a context in which our Indigenous cultures, languages and knowledge can exist legitimately and safely (Battiste, 1996, as cited in Blair, 2016, p. 474).

The quote above from Battiste demonstrates the desire felt by many Indigenous Peoples across the world to exist safely, where our Knowledges are not ridiculed and delegitimised, but also where our lands are not being stolen and abused. This could be called self-determination or decolonisation (*or freedom? autonomy?*), however, these terms are often co-opted for other agendas. To demonstrate my own exertion of self-determination with/in the academy, I have presented, throughout this paper, 'another way'. A defiant stance to push back against dominant research methodologies and push forward with Indigenous autoethnography, insisting "don't tell me what to do".

Using Indigenous autoethnography encourages a shift in the research gaze, from studying Indigenous Peoples, communities, cultures, to look instead at institutions and structures of power. Tuck and Yang (2014) argue that this is a prominent form of 'refusal' as an analytic practice, and will serve Indigenous scholars well in avoiding colonial traps. *Looking critically at systems of power should be the work of all people living in Australia, who call this ancient land 'home', who seek to 'belong' in/to this*

*Country. However, this may involve relinquishing a 'possessive investment in ignorance' and instead locating a Relationally Responsive Standpoint (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020).*

Whilst the body of literature on Indigenous methodologies grows and becomes more established through the work of warrior scholars, unfortunately, Indigenous Peoples remain in a “constant battle to authorise Indigenous knowledges and methodologies as legitimate and valued components of research” (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Indigenous students, then, are often faced with explaining, justifying or defending their use of Indigenous methodologies. Thus, there is much work to be done by non-Indigenous scholars, particularly those teaching and supervising Indigenous students. This involves becoming more informed, aware and respectful towards methodologies outside of Western research paradigms.

In this paper I demonstrate how my approach to research is deeply influenced by my positionality as a Gamilaroi woman. *Unapologetically critical. Fuelled by love and respect of the genius of Indigenous Knowledges. Aware of my relational responsibilities and ethical obligations to make my work accessible. Attentive the importance of storytelling, reflection and narrative. Always looking to the Old People, who show how to connect the patterns of the past to determine the intergenerational consequences if systems and structures of power remain the same. And enraged/inspired to do something about it. Our Ancestors left us the greatest challenge.*

## References

<sup>6</sup> Gilbey and McCormack (2018, p. 140) describe ‘possessive investment in ignorance’ as “day-to-day behaviours and attitudes that actively promote a deliberate not seeing, or seeing through another lens.”

- Alfred, T. (2004). Warrior scholarship. In D. A. Mihesuah & A. C. Wilson (Eds.), *Indigenizing the academy: Transforming scholarship and empowering communities* (pp. 88-99). London, UK: University of Nebraska Press.
- Bainbridge, R. (2007). Autoethnography in Indigenous research contexts: The value of inner knowing. *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, 10(2), 54-64.
- Bhabha, H. (1996). The other question: Difference, discrimination, and the discourse of colonialism. In H. Baker Jr., M. Diawara, & R. Lindeborg (Eds.), *Black British cultural studies: A reader* (pp. 87-106). Chicago, USA: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bishop, M. (2020). Epistemological violence and Indigenous autoethnographies. In P. Stanley (Ed.), *Critical Autoethnography and Intercultural Education: Emerging Voices* (pp. 19-32). London, UK: Routledge.
- Bishop, M., & Smith, D. J. (2020). Yarning through the Intricacies, Tensions, and Potentialities of (Indigenous) Autoethnography. In P. Stanley (Ed.), *Critical Autoethnography and Intercultural Education: Emerging Voices* (pp. 33-41). London, UK: Routledge.
- Blair, N. (2015). *Privileging Australian Indigenous knowledge: Sweet potatoes, spiders, waterlilys and brick walls*. Illinois, USA: Common Ground Publishing.
- Blair, N. (2016). Researched to Death. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 8(4), 463-478. doi:10.1525/irqr.2015.8.4.463
- Bochner, A. P. (2000). Criteria against ourselves. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(2), 266-272. doi:10.1177/107780040000600209
- Bond, C. (2015). Conversation Three: Singin' Up Sovereignty: #SovereigntyX. *Clancestry: A Celebration of Country*. Queensland Performing Arts Centre.
- Brown, L. (2010). Nurturing relationships within a space created by "Indigenous Ways of Knowing": A case study. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 39(S1), 15-22. doi:10.1375/S1326011100001095
- Bunda, T. (2018). The raced space of learning and teaching: Aboriginal voices speak back to the university. In G. Vass, J. Maxwell, S. Rudolph, & K. Gulson (Eds.), *The relationality of race in education research* (pp. 85-96). Abingdon, Ox: Routledge.

- Bunda, T., Zipin, L., & Brennan, M. (2012). Negotiating university 'equity' from Indigenous standpoints: a shaky bridge. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(9), 941-957. doi:10.1080/13603116.2010.523907
- Denzin, N. K., Lincoln, Y. S., & Smith, L. T. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies*. London, UK: Sage.
- Du Bois, W. E. (1994). *The souls of black folk*. New York, USA: Dover Publications.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: an overview. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 36(4), 273-290.
- Foley, D. (2003). Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous standpoint theory. *Social Alternatives*, 22(1), 44-52.
- Francis IV, L., & Munson, M. M. (2017). We help each other up: Indigenous scholarship, survivance, tribalogy, and sovereign activism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(1), 48-57. doi:10.1080/09518398.2016.1242807
- Gilbey, K., & McCormack, R. (2018). The two years that killed a First Nations university. In G. Vass, J. Maxwell, S. Rudolph, & K. Gulson (Eds.), *The relationality of race in education research* (pp. 132-144). Abingdon, Ox: Routledge.
- Gray, J., & Beresford, Q. (2008). A 'formidable challenge': Australia's quest for equity in Indigenous education. *Australian Journal of Education*, 52(2), 197-223. doi:10.1177/000494410805200207
- Houston, J. (2007). Indigenous autoethnography: Formulating our knowledge, our way. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 36(S1), 45-50. doi:10.1017/S1326011100004695
- Iosefo, F. (2018). Scene, seen, unseen. In P. Stanley & G. Vass (Eds.), *Questions of culture in autoethnography* (pp. 56-64). Abingdon & New York: Routledge.
- Justice, D. H. (2004). Seeing (and reading) red: Indian outlaws in the ivory tower. In D. A. Mihesuah & A. C. Wilson (Eds.), *Indigenizing the academy: Transforming scholarship and empowering communities* (pp. 100-123). London, UK: University of Nebraska Press.
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.



- Lapadat, J. C. (2017). Ethics in autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(8), 589-603. doi:10.1177/1077800417704462
- Lowe, K., Backhaus, V., Yunkaporta, T., Brown, L., & Loynes, S. (2014). Winanga-y Bagay Gay: Know the river's story. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 34(3), 59-91.
- Marcus, G. E. (1998). *Ethnography through thick and thin*. New Jersey, USA: Princeton University Press.
- Martin, K. (2003). Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for Indigenous and Indigenist re-search. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 27(76), 203-214. doi:10.1080/14443050309387838
- Martin, K. (2008). *Please knock before you enter: Aboriginal regulation of outsiders and the implications for researchers*. Brisbane, Australia: Post Pressed.
- McIvor, O. (2010). I am my subject: Blending Indigenous research methodology and autoethnography through integrity-based, spirit-based research. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 33(1), 137.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2000). *Talkin' up to the white woman: Aboriginal women and feminism*. St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. M. (2003). Tiddas talkin' up to the white woman: when Huggins et al took on Bell. In M. Grossman (Ed.), *Blacklines: Contemporary critical writing by Indigenous Australians* (pp. 66-77). Carlton, Australia: Melbourne University Publishing.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2011). The white man's burden: patriarchal white epistemic violence and Aboriginal women's knowledges within the academy. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 26(70), 413-431. doi:10.1080/08164649.2011.621175
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2013). Towards an Australian Indigenous women's standpoint theory: A methodological tool. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 28(78), 331-347.
- Morgensen, S. L. (2012). Destabilizing the settler academy: The decolonial effects of Indigenous methodologies. *American Quarterly*, 64(4), 805-808. doi:10.1353/aq.2012.0050
- Nakata, M. (2007). *Disciplining the savages, savaging the disciplines*. Canberra, Australia: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- RedCorn, S. (2017). *Set the prairie on fire: An autoethnographic confrontation of colonial entanglements*. (Doctor of Education), Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, USA.

- Rigney, L.-I. (1999). Internationalization of an Indigenous anticolonial cultural critique of research methodologies: A guide to Indigenist research methodology and its principles. *Wicazo sa review*, 14(2), 109-121.
- Singh, M., & Major, J. (2017). Conducting Indigenous research in Western knowledge spaces: aligning theory and methodology. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 44(1), 5-19. doi:10.1007/s13384-017-0233-z
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Zed books.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1-40.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2014). Unbecoming claims: Pedagogies of refusal in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(6), 811-818. doi:10.1177/1077800414530265
- Tynan, L., & Bishop, M. (2019). Disembodied experts, accountability and refusal: an autoethnography of two (ab)Original women. *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 25(2), 1-15. doi:10.1080/1323238X.2019.1574202
- Vass, G. (2013). 'So, what is wrong with Indigenous education?' Perspective, position and power beyond a deficit discourse. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 41(2), 85-96.
- Wall, S. (2006). An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(2), 146-160. doi:10.1177/160940690600500205
- Wane, N. N. (2008). Mapping the field of Indigenous knowledges in anti-colonial discourse: A transformative journey in education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 11(2), 183-197. doi:10.1080/13613320600807667
- Whitinui, P. (2014). Indigenous autoethnography: Exploring, engaging, and experiencing "self" as a Native method of inquiry. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 43(4), 456-487. doi:10.1177/0891241613508148
- Wilson, S. (2001). What is an Indigenous research methodology? *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2), 175-179.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Winnipeg, Canada: Fernwood Publishing.

Yunkaporta, T., & Shillingsworth, D. (2020). Relationally Responsive Standpoint.  
*Journal of Indigenous Research*, 8(4), 1-14.