Investigating Best Practice: Doctoral Fieldwork Experiences With and Without Indigenous Communities in Settler-colonial Societies

Jessica K Weir

Western Sydney University
j.weir@westernsydney.edu.au

Cleo Woelfle-Erskine

University of Washington
cleowe@uw.edu

Sharon Fuller

Sonoma State
fullersh@sonoma.edu

Sibyl Diver

Stanford University
sdiver@stanford.edu

Margot Higgins

University of Wisconsin La Crosse
mhiggins@uwlax.edu

Abstract

Through the sharing of personal commentaries about our doctoral fieldwork experiences, this paper contributes to decolonial literatures about academic knowledge generation in settler-colonial societies.

The commentaries each illustrate shifting understandings of our roles in perpetuating the colonial knowledge-violence and material power of the academy, and our personal ethics to do something useful in response. Such experiences are often unreported or under reported for diverse reasons. Seeking to address injustice, and to move away from extractive research relationships, we highlight four matters: consent and risk; the resource gap in research collaborations; the consequences of not collaborating with Indigenous people; and, the importance of examining knowledge frames. As constrained and compromised as it is, we argue the doctoral experience is an important opportunity for decolonising the academy. Whilst we appreciate that this paper does not address the material circumstances that perpetuate colonial privilege, we go beyond descriptive reflection to offer prescriptions for change.

Keywords

First peoples; decolonizing research; natural resources; environmental governance; more-than-human

Introduction

There is no doubt that the academic research work of scholars and universities in settler-colonial societies is implicated in the injustices of the imperial age, including the dispossession of Indigenous peoples' territories and the dismissal of their knowledge practices. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith has written, "Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized." (2001, 7). This includes naming the terms on which knowledge is judged authoritative, and securing funding streams for its perpetuation through knowledge generation and transmission. Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars working to address these historic and contemporary injustices have developed a body of scholarship augmenting, amending, re-thinking, challenging, and overturning academic norms about research methods, research questions, teaching, and the very terms on which knowledge is legitimated (Nakata et al. 2012; Louis 2007; Smith 2001; Coombes et al. 2014; McLean et al. 2019; Kerr 2014; Rigney et al. 2015; Tuck and Yang 2014; de Leeuw and Hunt 2018). Much of this scholarship argues that academics and their universities need to do more than identify injustice in their research – they need to materially address it, both in the academy and society more broadly (e.g. Tuck and Yang 2012; McLean et al. 2019). This includes the return of land.

Significantly, and in contrast to the substantial literature about decolonisation in the Global South, this literature is grappling with the co-location of Indigenous peoples' homelands and settler-colonial societies. It is not an external imperial/colonial power that Indigenous people are contending with, but its successor, the nation state, whose authority and governance is domestic (Simpson 2014). In these contexts, there is no possibility of a receding colonial authority, nor a presumption that colonialism ends with the establishment of a democratic nation state. Instead, this scholarship re-thinks and challenges the structures and processes of settler-colonialism, to show that the colonial project is not, and never will be, complete; and, find ways to make these structures and processes more porous, so as to better respect the expression of Indigenous peoples' sovereignties and authorities (e.g. Simpson 2014; Pasternak 2017; Coulthard 2014; Nadasdy 2003; Hemming et al. 2010, TallBear 2014; Moreton-Robinson 2015). This is inherently constrained and contingent work. There will always be unsettled, irreconcilable issues (Tuck and Yang 2012, 3).

This paper contributes to literatures about contemporary colonialism. Specifically, the paper considers academic research collaborations with, or in regard to, Indigenous people and natural resource and environmental governance issues. In the discipline of Geography, the pursuit of decolonial research by "often non-Indigenous often White" scholars has been identified as falling within three agendas: to interrogate and call for the decolonization of systems that reinforce settler colonial power; to decolonise

themselves as academics as well as their disciplines; and, to decolonize research methods and develop anticolonial behaviours and techniques (paraphrased and adapted, de Leeuw and Hunt 2018, 5). This paper seeks to contribute across all three. Whilst much of the decolonial literature is engaged with pedagogy (McClean et al. 2019; Kerr 2014; Nakata et al. 2012), research methods (Coombes et al. 2014; Nicholls 2009), Indigenous peoples' protocols (Arsenault et al. 2018), and conceptual/material knowledge practices (Bawaka Country et al. 2015; TallBear 2014; Smith 2001; Rigney et al. 2015), our specific contribution is with the situated experiences of non-Indigenous doctoral students (see also Cerwonka and Malkki 2007). We do so by interrogating our own experiences.

Writing as scholars from Australia and the United States, with different racial backgrounds but not identifying as Indigenous, we present five commentaries about our doctoral fieldwork experiences. Each commentary illustrates a challenging moment that was a catalyst for deeper reflexivity about colonial privilege, leading to a change in our research approach. Our intention is to get closer to the difficult questions we should be asking of ourselves and our institutions. We align with McLean and co-authors who understand this as a process of 'always-learning within the decolonising imperative' (2019, 123). We highlight four matters for consideration: consent and risk; the resource gap in research collaborations; the consequences of not collaborating with Indigenous people; and, the importance of examining knowledge frames. By showing how issues of knowledge, power, identity and rights threaded through our fieldwork, and thus our academic research, the commentaries highlight some of the justice work demanded of researchers, universities, and governments in settler-colonial societies. Further, as constrained and compromised as it is, we argue that the doctoral experience is an important opportunity for decolonising the academy.

Clearly there are risks that decolonial scholarship, such as this paper, is ineffective, and/or a re/iteration of colonial privilege (Tuck and Yang 2012; Nicholls 2009; Coombes et al. 2014). As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang critique, decolonial research can be employed to ease 'settler anxiety' and generate 'settler futures', without materially addressing the core issues of Indigenous peoples' territorial and governance rights (2012). This is a significant risk given that much of the literature is written by non-Indigenous people who form the majority of academic staff and doctoral students (de Leeuw and Hunt 2018; McLean et al. 2019). When non-Indigenous scholars present their own representations of Indigenous peoples, they continue the tradition of 'playing Indian' by white settlers who alternately vilified and idealized Indigenous peoples (Deloria 1999). We understand that such issues of representation and engagement are blurred, but not undone, by shared identities that resist clear demarcation, whether Indigenous/settler, settler/native/slave, refugee/immigrant/migrant, and so on (borrowing from Tuck and Yang 2012). We write from the conviction that non-engagement by non-Indigenous scholars is the greater harm (Neale and Vincent 2017, 418). To not engage with Indigenous peoples' scholarship and epistemologies when researching land, water, and resource governance in settler societies is to re-inscribe violent erasures of conquest, as Jodi Byrd (2011) has written in a different context. To not directly learn from Indigenous people about their matters of importance, is to forgo the act of witnessing and the responsibilities that come with that ethical position (Rose 2004). Engagement with Indigenous peoples' viewpoints is also required of non-Indigenous people if they are to 'think for themselves' as part of addressing their own responsibilities (Land and Vincent 2005). Thus, we offer this paper as a partial and contingent way to foreground the consequences of the current academic context for decolonial doctoral research, and what might be done, and is being done, in response. By foregrounding this context, we are being responsive to the different Indigenous communities that we have worked with, who see decolonising the academy as part of their self-determination agendas, as well as our Indigenous academic mentors. At the same time, this peer review journal article serves our interests in meeting the academy's priority to publish.

The paper begins with two short sections on our conceptual/methodological approach. We then introduce the commentaries. They are followed by two discussion sections, the first on synthesising our learnings, and the second on the socio-political context and avenues for change. For the purposes of this paper, we use the term 'academic research' to mean the knowledge generated, transmitted and legitimised by the academy, and its pre-dominantly, but not exclusively, settler-colonial processes and structures. This includes universities, research institutions, disciplines, professional societies, academic pathways, journals, peer review, educational norms, teaching programs and so on. We are well aware that the academy might also be described as the academic industrial complex, given that it is embedded in the imperatives of nation-states and others (e.g. Hemming et al. 2010).

On methods: situating ourselves collectively

The conversation that led to this co-authored paper began in a workshop convened for doctoral students undertaking socio-ecological justice research topics with Indigenous communities in the United States (U.S.), Canada, and Australia.[1] We found that intersecting issues of knowledge, power, identity, and rights uniquely influenced our personal academic research practice. We shared priorities, vulnerabilities, and risks in our research practice which were rarely raised in the literature or documented in our PhDs, and yet fundamentally informed what we wrote and how we wrote it. We decided to work on a collective piece about this, with five of us being in a position logistically and ethically to commit to do so. We write now as graduates, keen to provide better support for current and future doctoral students, the Indigenous communities they collaborate with, and for social and ecological justice more generally.

Our method has proceeded through preparing individual commentaries that track our differentiated and changing motivations and understandings, then exploring how our situated positions inflected research questions and, eventually, conclusions. In other words, the commentaries illustrate what we thought was going to unfold during fieldwork, what actually happened, and what we did in response. During workshopping and revision, we pushed one another to reveal intimate specifics of particular moments of connection, misrecognition, and epistemic violence. Whilst critical to producing a doctoral thesis, these experiences are often unreported or under reported, in part because of the political context within which the thesis is undertaken, but also because of the intimacy, fragility, and/or specific expectations of the research relationships built with the community, as well as academic norms. The topics discussed span the negotiation of formal academic research agreements, transitory shifts in identity, the participation of more-than-human life worlds, and the consequences of un/intentionally not collaborating with Indigenous people.

There are several elements that we share as co-authors, and form the background for this paper. As doctoral students, we each undertook qualitative fieldwork research to investigate environmental and natural resource conflicts, generally around the field of human geography. This fieldwork was in the settler-colonial societies of Australia and the United States, and was significantly differentiated by whether the fieldwork was with or without Indigenous communities. Our qualitative methods ranged from anthropological ethnography to human geography's use of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Those of us who prioritised research partnerships with Indigenous communities from the outset – Diver, Fuller, Weir and Woelfle-Erskine – prepared by learning about research ethics from the literature, mentors within the academy, and the specific protocols that Indigenous people have

---

[1] Cleo Woelfle-Erskine and Jessica K Weir, 'Resources and the more-than-human: Researching Indigenous and post-colonial environmental governance', interdisciplinary workshop for doctoral students, co-sponsored by the Joseph A. Myers Center for Research on Native American Issues and the Berkeley Watershed Governance Group, University of California, Berkeley, 5 May 2014.

developed. Diver, Fuller, Weir and Higgins went on to establish research collaborations. In terms of the ethics of writing this paper, we have our individual relationships with the communities that we work with and continue to engage based on our mutual commitments to one another. These ethical arrangements centre on trust and responsibility, especially in relation to knowledge and information which is not appropriate to share.

We see the doctoral experience as an important time for the transformation of academy norms, and the regenerative capacity of research for good rather than bad. As academics in training, doctoral students usually bring very little research expertise to their research program and are learning through doing. Doctoral students are also largely on the receiving end of university norms and processes that preceded their enrolment – whether helpful or not for them, their research collaborators, or the university itself. Nevertheless, many students do the most innovative work of their careers during this intensive research period. They have the unique privilege of undertaking a mentored research program, often pursuing a thesis of their own choosing, and being able to plan out their priorities and agenda.[2]

On concepts: power and knowledge

Whilst this paper raises many methodological issues arising out of our empirical fieldwork, we do not separate these from the geo-politics of knowledge that entrenches injustice and discrimination for Indigenous peoples' in settler-colonial societies. This includes epistemological violence, disputed histories and geographies, inequitable funding, and the denial of territorial and self-determination rights. Fundamentally, we understand that knowledge structures and processes are powerful, and that the academy is an influential actor.

From their experiences, Tuck and Yang bluntly observe that the academy:

- Stockpiles examples of injustice, yet will not make explicit a commitment to social justice;
- Produces knowledge shaped by the imperatives of the nation-state, while claiming neutrality and universality in knowledge production;
- Accumulates intellectual and financial capital, while informants give a part of themselves away; and,
- Absorbs or repudiates competing knowledge systems, while claiming limitless Horizons (original capitalization, 2014, 233).

Tuck and Yang highlight how the very idea of what knowledge is, and how it is generated, is used to undermine Indigenous peoples' knowledge. The academy is able to replicate these ideas through their institutions of power. For example, the challenges raised during the general / qualifying exam process within universities, which are based on cultural and epistemological norms that brutalize Indigenous and other marginalized students.

The extent to which colonial privilege is accepted as normal is evident when such challenges are received as unreasonable and/or unrealistic, jarring to the status-quo, and thus posing risks for those that speak out (McLean et al. 2019). At the heart of these tensions is how the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples unsettles the sovereign authority of societies as based on the exclusion of the first peoples, including the colonial narratives of 'Manifest Destiny' and *terra nullius*. These narratives provided settler-colonial societies the ideological foundations for the marginalisation, oppression and

---

[2] A doctoral program typically involves a partially funded 4-6 year commitment in Australia, and 6-8 years at the University of California, Berkeley.

dispossession of Indigenous peoples and their territories. In North America, the Manifest Destiny narrative is generally identified with westward and outward movement, divine favour, white supremacy, resource exploitation, and insistently policed boundaries, and depends on the idea of the 'vanishing Indian' (Simpson 2014; Pasternak 2017; Coulthard 2014; Nadasdy 2003). English and then U.S. and Canadian government policy was to make treaties with some tribes, though many treaties were never ratified, and, in the U.S., twentieth century policies of allotment and termination further eroded Indigenous land bases of recognized tribes. In Australia, notions of European superiority supported the patronising and violent legal fiction of *terra nullius* – a land belonging to no one; and, thus, no treaties were made with the First Nations (Moreton-Robinson 2015).[3] Indigenous people were not seen as civilized enough to understand land ownership and thus hold property rights, an assumption partially overturned after the historic *Mabo* legal case was successfully argued by the Meriam people from the Murray Islands in the Torres Strait.

The imperial and colonial expectation that Indigenous peoples' ways of knowing and governing necessarily give way to superior European forms is bound up in representations of world history into narratives of progress – from traditional to modern, uncivilized to civilized, and from undeveloped, to developing, and then developed (Mitchell 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Rowse 2008). With respect to environmental issues, these linear trajectories include the notion of humanity becoming increasingly separated and freed from the constraints of nature, either through technology, science or both (Mitchell 2000). Within these worldviews, science is often interpreted in reductionist terms as a universal method that produces a universal understanding of the world – otherwise known as the view from nowhere (Haraway 1998). This involves the hyper-separation of subject and object as discontinuous and oppositional to each other – what is one, cannot be the other (Plumwood 1993 & 2002; Latour 1993). This hyper-separation is applied to other binary pairs, for example Indigenous/non-Indigenous, traditional/modern, science/religion, nature/culture, human/non-human, emotion/reason, male/female, and so on. Collectively called modernism, these now globally pre-dominant knowledge practices determine whose knowledge is authoritative and whose is not, and what is normal and what is deviant. For example, Indigenous people's knowledge is cast as 'traditional' and 'cultural', but not also 'modern' and 'scientific' (TallBear 2014; Weir 2009). There is a diverse literature that does not try to maintain the 'either/or' of hyper-separation, and instead investigates the 'both/and' of these paired categories in a double-movement to affirm both similarity and difference (Plumwood 1993). This literature includes how different knowledges are privileged and situated (Rigney et al. 2015; Haraway 1998), reflexivity (Nicholls 2009), and more-than-human knowledge creation (Bawaka Country et al. 2015; Rigney et al. 2015).

We seek here, and in publications stemming directly from our research collaborations, to overturn and undermine the knowledge hierarchies that discriminate against Indigenous peoples' knowledge practices. We affirm that all societies have always undertaken systematic investigations – research – to understand their worlds, generating knowledge processes and structures (James 2015; Rigney et al. 2015). We do not ascribe to an either/or binary relationship of Western/Indigenous knowledge, but take more open and intricate approaches to 'thinking about thinking' (Nakata et al. 2012). As Martin Nakata and co-authors write, Indigenous peoples' concerns about the prejudicial treatment of their knowledge and authority are "arguably heightened rather than overcome when Indigenous epistemologies are re-presented as the antithesis of Western epistemology" (2012, 128; see also Coombes et al. 2014). Instead

---

[3] There is one long-disregarded exception, in 1835 a treaty was made between a farmer and the Indigenous people of the land that is now known as Melbourne.

of seeking to secure a hyper-separated Indigenous/non-Indigenous binary, we align with those scholars tracking how important matters of similarity and difference play out with respect to power and culture.

Commentaries

Absence and Re-inscription – Cleo Woelfle-Erskine

During the second week of my PhD program, in 2010, I was invited to co-facilitate a graywater installation workshop on Winnemem Wintu ancestral land, near Shasta Dam in North California. I spoke with elders about their water concerns: their wells and springs had dried up for the first time, increased settler residential development around their land threatened the aquifers even further. At a much larger scale, US Bureau of Reclamation plans to expand Shasta Dam threatened ceremonial sites with inundation; the tribe's reservation and many other important cites flooded when the dam was built in 1936. Back at University, my advisors strongly discouraged me from pursuing collaborative research with the Winnemem, arguing that addressing such problems required more time than the 6-year PhD timeframe. Lacking my own funding and mentors in Indigenous Studies, I decided to focus my research in a non-native community facing similar water scarcity issues, and then later try to bring what I learned about decentralized water systems to a project with the Winnemem. However, by the time I had finished my doctorate, the tribe's priorities had shifted to legal and policy work to re-introduce genetically pure strains of McCloud river salmon.

As happens often in academic research conducted by non-Indigenous researchers, I found my doctoral research site through colleagues who worked nearby, with agencies, consultants, and the local watershed council, but not with the local Indigenous communities. In this area, the Confederated Indians of Graton Rancheria had only recently had federal recognition restored. When I contacted their environmental office, a year into my research, I received no response; other attempts to contact the tribe also went unanswered. A university colleague—a Graton member conducting collaborative archaeological research with the tribe—suggested that the tribe was focused on economic development cultural restoration activities at other locations. My previous work with tribal communities in Navajo, Tzeltal, and Winnemem territory made me sensitive to how leaving out Indigenous peoples' perspectives limits research power and management conclusions from academic research. Had my dissertation fieldwork included collaborative research with Graton Rancheria, my dissertation would have more power to analyse crucial questions of sovereignty and how to deal with social and ecological legacies of Manifest Destiny. In terms of the salmon recovery process itself, field work without Graton collaborators foreclosed several opportunities, among them:

1. To strengthen of Pomo and Miwok sovereignty as co-managers.
2. To interrogate western scientific analyses with Indigenous science epistemologies.
3. To further develop, document, and disseminate Indigenous peoples' knowledge and practices and financially support tribal scientific and environmental programs.
4. To challenge the perspective widespread amongst white residents—that Pomo and Miwok members of Graton Rancheria either no longer live in the area or "aren't real Indians" (in the words of several of my respondents).

The inclusion of local knowledge perspectives in agency science that I document on Salmon Creek may be strengthening scientific and collaborative methods. But without formal participation by local Indigenous people, this research is not breaking down—and indeed may be reinscribing—aspects of Manifest Destiny in research practice. In the absence of a formal mandate from national, state, or local governments to consult with and meaningfully involve Indigenous communities in natural resource governance, there's often a tokenizing aspect to reports that begin with a short account of Indigenous occupancy (often with no attribution to source), followed by white settler narratives. These reports and

research practices perpetuate the exclusion of Indigenous people and the myth that they are not still there and still governing resources. As evidence of this perspective, one resident explained at a watershed council meeting, "[Graton members] don't even know their own traditions anymore—they have to relearn them from a white ethnobotanist". I'd thought to challenge such everyday instances of Manifest Destiny thinking by including the Graton Rancheria Environmental Protection Agency director on an expert panel at a forum on watershed knowledge. But when I reached out to him and other members of tribal government, I received no response. Later, reading Tuck and Yang's "R-words: Refusing Research", I recognized this lack of response as refusal, possibly along both dimensions they sketch:

> One way to think about refusal is how desire can be a framework, mode, and space for refusal. As a framework, desire is a counter logic to the logics of settler colonialism. Rooted in possibilities gone but not foreclosed, "the *not yet*, and at times, the *not anymore*" (Tuck, 2010, p. 417), desire refuses the master narrative that colonization was inevitable and has a monopoly on the future. By refusing the teleos of colonial future, desire expands possible futures. As a mode of refusal, desire is a "no" and a "yes."

> Another way to think about refusal is to consider using strategies of social science research to further expose the complicity of social science disciplines and research in the project of settler colonialism. There is much need to employ social science to turn back upon itself as settler colonial knowledge, as opposed to universal, liberal, or neutral knowledge without horizon. (Tuck and Yang, 2014, 243).

Whilst acknowledging the many extenuating circumstances at play for the Indigenous community, whether known or unknown to me, experiencing this refusal reinforced my conviction that collaborative research must begin from the Indigenous community's priorities. Simultaneously, institutions must support graduate students to engage in participatory research with Indigenous and other marginalized communities, providing connections, an extended timeframe, and material support that this research requires.

Becoming Native – Sharon Fuller

Over the course of three years, primarily during the summer, I conducted fieldwork in South Carolina's Sea Islands, on the U.S. south east coast. The Sea Islands served as an ideal site for investigating the emergence of a distinct Indigenous identity due to its remarkable retention of traditional fishing practices—practices that I argue evidence distinct Gullah Geechee linkages to place. The Gullah Geechee are the descendants of enslaved West African who have preserved imported land-based cultural practices. However, in attempting to continue these traditional practices in a different landscape but that featured ecological similarities to their historic homelands, the Gullah Geechee encountered the Cusabo and their practices. It was through this encounter between Africans of the diaspora and Native Americans, and the other-than-human inhabitants of this particular landscape, that traditional fishing practices co-mingled to articulate new cultural practices that can be defined in an unexpected way as Indigenous. My initial visit to St. Helena Island was to locate a place to stay. While visiting the Penn Historical Cultural Center, University of South Carolina Beaufort, and local businesses I presented a brief description of my project. As a University of California Berkeley researcher, without community ties, I aroused suspicion about my intent. In spite of valid scepticism however, I was able to pique the interest of a local business owner—my host. My host, an insider, meaning a life-long resident and highly respected community member, expected my full participation in cultural practices. In other words, I was to become a "witness", rather than a miner of local knowledge (Hurston 2008, Scholte 1972). With my host's assistance I received invitations to events important to the community and introductions to numerous community members. As a form of reciprocity, the community expected me to assist them in telling their story.

Ironically, tourists of European descent similarly expected my full immersion in the spatial realities of the South's plantation culture.

Each morning I began with exercise, coffee and a generous spraying of insect repellent, in spite of its potentially cancerous effects, in my site's tropical setting. Eager to remain in sync with the tide's rhythm, I'd rush to the field with just coffee in hand. My host however believed that everyone should start the day with a hearty breakfast. She often waited patiently with meal in hand, poised to intercept. "I'm headed to the lagoon", I'd protest. "This is hot 'yo pot" she responded, "a meal on the go". Resolutely silenced, I set off with coffee and meal in hand. At the site while settling into my beach chair, adjusting my hat and securing the vital water nearby, I noted patterns emerging. One phenomenon I found particularly interesting. Every time I appeared on the beach, people would quickly snap my photo. While enjoying a scrumptious "hot 'yo pot" meal of shrimp and grits, this particular day was no exception. The beachgoers never acknowledged nor requested permission, but rather pretended to snap scenic shots in my general direction. The incognito photography occurred several times before I noticed the lens' inevitable aim directly at me. "Why are people taking my picture", I wondered? Musing from the photographer's angle, however, I constructed an imaginary of difference. My shoulder length dreadlocks, adorned with cowrie shells and a straw hat transformed me, the only person of African descent on the beach, into "native". Mute, I became Gullah.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon (2008) notes the contradictions of who one is and who one thinks she or he may be. The Gullah Geechee are constituted as black within the dominant discourse on race in the United States. However, they cannot be adequately understood as simply black. Yes, they are racially black, but the Gullah Geechee are also culturally Indigenous. De jure sovereignty, based on biological inheritance, is not the reality, but rather de facto assertions of belonging to the land. TallBear (2013) argues that genetic ancestry is not the only factor that constitutes Indigenous identity, but biological, cultural, and political groupings are also integral. Constituted as such this recognizes the transitory nature of identity. Circe Sturm (2011) in *Becoming Indian* challenges a twenty-first century phenomenon of individuals who previously self-identified as white adopting an Indian identity in adulthood. My intent in using a similar title is to emphasize the adoption, or in my case imposition, of identities constituted through imaginaries and ideologies of nativeness or difference. Thus, a colonial imaginary and privileging of exoticism, as Gullah, was critical to that particular space. Trained in conventional ethnography methods, initially I attempted to assume the voyeuristic position of outsider that Philip Deloria (1998) criticizes. My objective was to be the consummate objective observer, ensuring an appropriate distance or disconnect was attained between my "subjects" and me as researcher. Yet, my host embraced me as a southern child returning home, while tourists imposed an exotic identity. Following Zora Neal Hurston, who self-identified as a storyteller first, and an anthropologist second, I discovered that I had to immerse myself to the fullest extent possible into the daily lives of St. Helena Island community members (which also met the expectations of my host). I thus adopted Hurston's (2008) ethnographic approach of witnessing in which she elects to reveal "a sense of black people as complete, complex, and undiminished human beings". Witnessing enabled me to dispense with rigid adherence to academic norms and expectations. The focus of my analysis thus evolved to confounding constructs of knowledge production that legitimize colonial privilege.

Regardless of who I am or think I may be, my identity produced spatially by historical social formations provided access to geographies and social networks critical to my research. Disguised in silence, business continued as usual, as I fished and crabbed unencumbered alongside the Gullah Geechee within the Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto basin, an intercostal waterway named after the tribes that occupied the land as early as 900 AD (SCDAH 1974). Silence also enabled me to experience exoticism and recognize Indigeneity's exponential value to South Carolina's tourist industry. Unmuted, I had no illusions about my limitations as a non-Indigenous scholar to fully reveal the Gullah Geechee's narrative

of the construction of self as Indigenous in the Americas. For any substantive engagement on my part would always be contingent upon their ongoing consent.

Underlying currents and intellectual property – Sibyl Diver

Pursuing respectful research partnerships with Indigenous communities requires a personal commitment. As an invited guest on Indigenous territory, I wish to step lightly. I strive to follow participatory, feminist, and Indigenous research methods that emphasize power sharing and community protocols. At the same time, I am tethered to academic standards. Learning how to negotiate a path that transcends academic norms is an ongoing challenge.

One of my recent learning experiences with Indigenous research comes from my collaboration with the Xáxli'p community in British Columbia, Canada. In response to community concerns, I worked with Xáxli'p to co-create the *Xáxli'p Community Forest Research Information Sharing Agreement*. This formal research agreement provided an essential space for facilitating dialogue, understanding community needs, and beginning to address sensitive intellectual property issues.

The impetus for this agreement came at an inopportune time—at the end of my dissertation writing. I had just returned home from presenting research results to the community. Opening my email, I was struck by a community member's request, could I send a copy of community approvals for my research? I felt a dark curtain of worry descend over me. Despite my best efforts to be a reliable partner, I did not have this written documentation. There was a good reason for this. Three years ago, when I first spoke with community mentors about my research, they instructed me to request permission from Chief and Council at a council meeting. If Chief and Council agreed, no written approval was necessary. This was the culturally appropriate way of doing things at Xáxli'p.

I trusted that my community partners would help me find a solution. At this same time, I felt ashamed at my lack of foresight, and was highly aware of my own interests as a researcher. I hoped to complete my dissertation before my funding ran out. I also knew that, given my own ethical standards, I would not move forward without addressing community concerns.

My community collaborators informed me that oral approval was consistent with Xáxli'p tradition. Yet we also decided that we needed a formal agreement. The agreement would follow the Indigenous research methodologies that community members were learning in their college classrooms. The solution was not about choosing the old way or the new way. It was about accommodating a diversity of community experiences.

Community discussions around the agreement brought me an additional surprise. I had assumed that the biggest issue was protecting cultural information. Although my study did not include sensitive information, my academic training had emphasized maintaining confidentiality. For example, my Institutional Review Board approval prevented me from sharing interview transcripts. However, it turned out that my community partners were most interested in ensuring community access to data and protecting intellectual property. Would I have copyright over the work, and could they use the data and research outputs? After some research, I learned that copyright originates with the individual creator of the work. Whether or not I registered a copyright, I still had one. The conventional system gave me all the power.

I began to see how Indigenous communities working with academics take on real risks of potentially losing access or control over their knowledge. Research partnerships are often built on personal trust. While most researchers are well meaning, communities have little recourse if something goes wrong. And when I submit my writing to journals, the work is subjected to the rules of these institutions—regardless of the Xáxli'p community's needs and interests. To ensure community access to my research materials, I needed to assign joint copyright ownership. I wrote an extensive community

report, entitled *Community Voices: The Making and Meaning of the Xáxli'p Community Forest* (2016). This report was not limited by existing institutional standards, and provided a venue for establishing joint copyright under conditions established in our information sharing agreement.

Reflecting back on this process, providing Xáxli'p with joint copyright over at least some of my research outputs was an important gesture, but it was still a partial intervention. I did not know how to pursue joint copyright under my university's dissertation writing policies, nor with a potential publisher. I have since learned that selected publishers are beginning to name Indigenous communities as the copyright holder for published works based on community knowledges and experiences.

Individual publishers are taking this important step because Indigenous communities and community-engaged researchers are asking for this as a condition in their contract. I view this as a small part of the institution-building to support respective research with Indigenous peoples that is yet to be done, that all of us in this paper are striving to contribute to.

The Grey Zone – Margot Higgins

Unlike the other co-authors in this article, I was not initially focused on the Alaska Native communities living within my doctoral study site. My interest was the consequences of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, a federal law passed in 1980 which set out explicitly to preserve not only the ecological integrity of the land, but also the lives of the rural non-native people living off-grid on that land. While I had some baseline knowledge of colonial settlement in Alaska, like so many other Alaska visitors, I took at face value stories of Alaska Native "disappearance."

While scoping out my research, I attended a public meeting during the winter season, when most of the attendees were non-native year-round Alaskans that have private property and subsistence rights in the park. These include hunting, fishing, logging, and small-scale mining operations. When I first asked these residents how my research might assist them, they told me that they wanted to elevate their particular experience of living off the grid in rural isolated Alaskan communities for distant government policy makers in Washington, DC. Most distrusted the federal government and felt that their off-grid rights were being slowly eroded over time by the National Park Service (NPS). Others criticized the NPS focus on the Kennicott mining era (1900-1938) as leaving out the living history they experienced on a day to day basis. In other words, many people felt that the NPS was deliberately leaving their stories out as part of a subversive effort to eventually remove their in-holder rights. I initiated my fieldwork by gathering those stories and perspectives that seemed to be missing from the central NPS narrative on Kennicott.

There are four distinct Alaska Native groups with ties to the lands in Wrangell-St. Elias, including the Ahtna people who resided in the interior of the park. At first, I did not extend my fieldwork inquiry to the Ahtna people. I had been told by many of the non-native residents, in addition to staff from the NPS, that Alaska Native people did not have much of a year round presence in Kennicott due to a perceived lack of fishing and hunting opportunities, and the claim that the area was surrounded by too much ice to support their livelihoods. However, in the lead up to a weekend-long celebration about the mining and railroad history, I observed that an Ahtna dance performance had been tacked on by the NPS at the last minute.

At the celebration, the Ahtna youth performed traditional dance, prayer, and music in the Kennicott Recreation Hall – built by the same company that had stolen copper from their tribal leader in the name of industrial development. To conclude the occasion, the Park Interpretive Supervisor handed the Ahtna dance leader a copper spike as a thank you for their participation. There was a slight smirk on her face when she took it. Without discussing the topic, it was as if she had whispered, "please write about that." I realised that this was a gesture towards the pattern of the erasure of Native people from our

national parks that I had also assumed. The method of erasure I was starting to recognize here was a narrow definition of where Alaska Native peoples lived. Absent from the settler narrative is a recognition of how traditional dance, prayer, and music indicates and maintains a deep spiritual relationship to place.

The following year I received funding from a non-profit foundation focused on national park science, which extended my research into other areas of the Park, but, again, I found myself involved in acts of erasure. This new funding expanded my inquiry into piecing together the observations that Alaska Native and Non-Native park residents had made with regard to changes in the land, as recorded on calendars, in journals, hunting and gardening logs, and so on. My NPS mentors encouraged me to focus on phonological observations, or biological indicators of seasonal change such as vegetation bloom or the return of migratory birds, to see if they were happening earlier in the context of climate change. While presented as citizen science, the format for recording these observations very much fit with western scientific practice, and did not fit with the observations that I started to gather from Alaska Native people.

Wilson Justin, an Ahtna man demanded that I consider more relational and holistic knowledge: Did I understand why there are no more beetles around? Did I know about the health implications of increasing amounts of glacier dust due to increased melt? Would that have a similar human health impact as coal dust? Did I understand why Park residents suddenly have winds coming in from the west? In Ahtna language there is no word for west wind. "The scientific approach is to first analyse in order to determine the boundaries of the quadrant," he explained. "This presents a one dimensional snap shot of a four-dimensional reality. A one dimensional snap shot only justifies the stance of those in power." With his help, this was the place from which I would start to tell the story of changes in the land and connect those changes to indigenous cultural knowledge.

Interestingly, one long-time national park resource manager stated, "we have limited ability to operate within the grey zone" – or that relational, spiritual, fourth dimension. This is the space that lies outside of the nationalist management agendas. It is the space that contains the critical knowledge that western science alone cannot encapsulate.

Five years later my writing is taking on some new directions, about the potential for better integration of scientific and traditional knowledge at Bear's Ears National Monument (Higgins 2018). I hope my writing can help illuminate the grey area.

Knowledge for Life – Jessica Weir

I embarked on a doctoral thesis because of the fraught conversations I kept having with friends about my social justice concerns, whilst they were alarmed by issues of ecological justice. In the 1980s school yard, the time of LIVE AID and Greenpeace's Save the Whale, we were unable to discuss social and ecological justice together. Later I became aware that many Indigenous people in Australia brought these justice issues together, in both conversation and intent, although I could not understand how they did so.

I started my doctoral program without a 'case-study', but was keen to work close to home where I had knowledge, responsibilities and was accountable, and where both environmental and Indigenous peoples' issues did not fit within idealized categories of 'intact' and 'remote'. Fortunately, early on I was invited to co-write an Indigenous water rights paper with the Murray Lower-Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN), a confederation of first nation groups established along the rivers of Australia's 'agricultural heartland' (Morgan et al. 2004). The invitation came via one of my non-Indigenous PhD supervisors, with whom I also used to work with at an Indigenous research organisation. After this paper was completed, I felt I was known enough by MLDRIN to ask if I could address one of their meetings and see if they would support my doctoral program.

The meeting I attended to pitch this proposal was in a small riverine town, plagued by midges rising out of the nearby drought exposed lake bed. Right at the point of asking for permission I felt an acute flush, perceiving how I embodied the colonial project's brutality as a researcher of Scottish and English descent. To my immense relief, the people around the table were supportive. As a novice researcher, this was my best practice research ethics: consent had been given, and now I had to be respectful, quiet and useful. This was a process that I hoped would build relationships of trust and ongoing learning. As an outsider and knowledge beneficiary, I was also keenly aware I was there by invitation and that this could be withdrawn. That MLDRIN took this engagement seriously was evident in the protocols they began drawing up for this their first academic research collaboration. These included the principle that they meet their responsibilities towards the researcher.

My fieldwork involved long drives to meetings, and visiting people in their homes and their homelands, or 'Country' as known in Australia. This is a vast area, extending from snowy mountain catchments through to semi-arid and arid lands. Over time, we became closer as we joked and commiserated our way through the horrors of river diminishment and the peculiarities of labyrinthine water bureaucracies. Throughout, the drought persisted and deepened. Towns ran out of domestic water, orchards and vineyards were cut down, and river ecologies were at the brink of ecosystem collapse.

With my social justice motivations, I thought that my interviews with the MLDRIN delegates would centre on their difficulties with arguing for Indigenous water rights in an agricultural landscape, in which drought had highlighted the twin problems of water scarcity and water pollution. National water reforms and societal pressure to reduce existing water-allocations were pitting upstream and downstream entitlement holders and government authorities against each other. This was a tough context to influence. Indigenous peoples were often cast as newcomers to these debates, or sometimes dismissed for not being 'Indigenous' according to authenticity formulas that required them to be remote in time and space to contemporary Australia. Whilst I did hear about issues of rights, identity and dispossession, my open questions – 'What has happened here?' and 'What would you like to see happen here?' – produced responses that by far highlighted another oppressive colonial formula: the abuse of intimate relationships held between people, rivers and more.

When I turned towards this information, and actively listened within an 'open dialogue' (Rose 2004), I heard not animism's fetishist charm, nor an ineffective environmental sentimentalism, but a serious agenda to influence societal debates away from the management of a water resource for human consumption. The MLDRIN delegates emphatically and sensibly argued that there are no water rights – consumptive, environmental nor Indigenous – from a dead river. Relational ethics of respect and reciprocity were emphasised as the way forward for water reform, reconnecting ecologies with their cultures and histories, as well as upstream and downstream communities. I was told about how all lives are connected, that wetland bodies are also human bodies, and that the powerful rivers demand respect for their capacity to nurture all lives, including our own. Country was meant to be alive with communicative sentient beings – crickets, frogs, mythical creatures, and more – but this Country was dying. The delegates kept pointing to river health as the preeminent issue, with all else depending on this priority being accepted and responded to with real action for change.

Significantly, their interview responses repeatedly contested the idea that humans and nature are distinctly discontinuous and hyper-different, instead identifying that nature also has 'human' attributes to act, feel and communicate (Plumwood 2002, 11). In order to hear all this, I had to take my own knowledge practices apart concept-by-concept. I had to understand how the idea of human exceptionalism to nature had become so normalised as to become an unexamined truth. Whilst similar but different, humans are still a part of nature, our futures are co-dependent, and these are not just instrumental but also cultural and ethical bonds (Rose 2004; Plumwood 2002). It was this shift in focus that became my thesis.

Human exceptionalism remains more familiar territory in my thinking. Yet the importance of listening to Country is threaded through my thesis. It has become a discipline I must practice – to keep examining where I place myself and whose company I keep. It is work that requires the constant release of what was my normal, what I thought was possible, and to embrace the so much more that lively Country offers.

Our learnings synthesised

These diverse commentaries illustrate our shifting understandings of our roles in perpetuating the colonial knowledge violence and material power of the academy, and our personal ethics to do something useful in response. We have synthesised these learnings under four headings: consent and risk; the terms of exchange; on not collaborating; and, framing knowledge.

Consent and risk

Our commentaries reveal the importance of consent in negotiations of power and authority between the academy and the research community. The academy's ethical and practical imperative for securing consent, as now administered through university ethics committees, provides Indigenous people, doctoral students and others with strategic avenues for influencing academic norms. The refusal of consent by Indigenous people is also an opportunity for the academy to learn about colonial privilege, whether that refusal is 'not yet' or 'not anymore' (Tuck and Yang 2014).

Consent is always re-negotiated as the collaboration evolves; however, we found that the terms of the research partnership itself were understood *through* the research partnership, by both ourselves and the research communities. That is, the research partnership is something that emerges, rather than is agreed upon in advance, and thus its value only becomes known when both parties are already invested. This is a risky process. Whilst all parties have something at stake in these collaborations, Indigenous people are risking how they and their issues are represented in forums where their expertise is not respected as having the same authority as our academic research expertise.

Fuller's commentary on 'becoming native' provides insight into the negotiation of consent and risk when identity becomes blurred with fieldwork partners. This generated certain expectations around her participation and contribution within the community, useful access to geographies and social networks, as well as personal experiences in 'becoming Gullah' when mute. All the while Fuller's difference was clear to her – her substantive engagement was contingent on having ongoing consent. Identity was a complex part of her main agenda which was to produce a PhD.

Protocols for engagement assist in navigating matters of consent and risk. For the kinds of collaborations entered into by Diver, Fuller and Weir, Karletta Chief and co-authors have summarized Lomawaima (2000) to identify four "simple rules" to consider about the legal and political standards of research, as well as the cultural and ethical requirements when working with tribes:

1. ask about the ethics of conducting research in each particular community;
2. do more listening than talking;
3. find and follow any and all tribal research rules or protocols; and,
4. give something back to the community in exchange for their cooperation with your research (2016, 9).

Within this we identify some specific priorities:

- the project has meaningful benefits for the Indigenous community;
- the methodologies and methods are negotiated;
- there are opportunities for reciprocal learning; and,

- the Indigenous community's intellectual property rights are protected (Arsenault et al. 2018; FNIGC 2014).

Principles and rules sketch out the grounds for best case scenarios, but reality is messier, which is why sharing personal experiences is important. More fundamentally, we found that the potential of the protocols was challenged by power asymmetries that favoured the academy.

The terms of exchange

Our fieldwork experiences repeatedly demonstrated how ideals of 'best practice research ethics' were constrained by inequitable terms of exchange – the epistemological and institutional imbalances.

Reciprocity is an important part of research collaborations, and scholars have discussed many pathways to giving back to communities through reciprocal relations (e.g., Gupta and Kelly 2014). Diver, Fuller, and Weir had planned for this from the start of their doctoral programs, and helped out with tasks and advice as the collaborations developed. A few frameworks were established to provide institutional support to our Indigenous research collaborators, including a student led initiative at Berkeley that has provided legal research support. Students effectively institutionalized the community-academic relationship through existing law school programs, a framework that has enabled multiple cohorts of students to continue supporting Indigenous partners.[4] Fundamentally, however, our attention and energies were with contributing through our manuscripts: to provide an ethical account of what had been entrusted with us, whilst at the same time delivering the research product required by academic norms. The manuscripts are valuable documents for the communities, and appreciated and celebrated by our research partners. However, together all these contributions are not substantive enough to respectfully reciprocate the personal and professional investments that our Indigenous community collaborators made in our doctoral studies.

As community-engaged scholars we are particularly concerned about the resources gap that deepens the uneven power relations between academic and Indigenous community researchers, and the academy and Indigenous communities more broadly. In our doctoral experience, our universities have been deficient in providing little or no additional funding or in-kind support to:

- enable these collaborations to follow the research protocols of their partner Indigenous communities, not just the university;
- support the doctoral student to stay on with the community after the PhD is submitted and produce additional benefits, such as community reports, data archives, policy advice, etc;
- amplify research and research leadership capacity in the community, for example through new training and employment opportunities;
- support Indigenous students from research partner communities to access higher education;
- involve community members in the presentation of research results, such as through attending and/or co-presenting at conferences and departmental seminars; nor,
- support Indigenous experts and governance institutions more broadly.

Through adhering to academic norms, we have created expertise that privileges us as knowledge holders, conducting research in contexts where Indigenous people have experienced centuries of

---

[4] Student-Initiated Legal Services Projects (SLPS) at Berkeley Law, the University of California Berkeley https://www.law.berkeley.edu/experiential/pro-bono-program/slps/ accessed 24 July 2019.

marginalisation and oppression, including epistemological violence by expert researchers. All of us have benefited from our investment in pursuing a doctorate, and now hold status in society as knowledge generators, which we do so through publishing papers and books, and securing academic employment.

Importantly, universities and the academy more broadly are also beneficiaries of these collaborations. Doctoral students are an important component of university funding models. They provide income in relation to tuition and fees, and in Australia the completion of doctorates determines the allocation of government block grants for research. Doctoral scholars also comprise an important part of the academic workforce, assisting in faculty research projects and publications, and taking on roles as tutors and lecturers whether paid or unpaid (as is usually the case in Australia and the U.S respectively).

Unfortunately, the epistemological and institutional power imbalances of our research collaborations are masked in the consent negotiations, whereby the individual doctoral student meets with the research community, whilst the academic institution is largely absent. This arrangement is not necessarily a malicious power move by the academy, but demonstrates how power asymmetries are perpetuated through business as usual. It is not appropriate that such negotiations sit with graduate students who have limited financial and other resources. Instead, supervisors, departments, and the university must take responsibility for the benefits that flow to them out of these research partnerships, as well as seeing these negotiations as important opportunities to partially address their colonial privilege.

On not collaborating

Much of the literature about research collaborations is responsive to the kinds of research partnerships that Diver, Fuller and Weir were involved in; but, doctoral studies that do not collaborate also need serious consideration, which is why the inclusion of Woelfle-Erskine and Higgins' commentaries is so important.

The mid-fieldwork transition that Higgins describes in her commentary, becoming simultaneously aware of Indigenous presence and her contribution to narratives of erasure, is rarely presented for analysis and learning. This experience can attract criticism for its previously held assumptions, yet this is the fundamental pathway of personal realisation and reflection that is critical for transformative change in settler-colonial societies, with the proviso that this learning is followed up with meaningful material action (Tuck and Yang 2012). Doctoral students who are open to learning about colonial privilege, and adjusting their research approach in response, can also be a conduit for change in conservative academic contexts. Their pathway is a tangible example for both supervisors and fellow graduate students. Significantly, in our interdisciplinary environmental research departments it seemed that the majority of doctoral students and academics did not consider colonial privilege as an influence on their research that needed interrogation, or only gestured towards Indigenous peoples' issues in the spirit of multicultural inclusion. Further, some of our faculty mentors actively discouraged us from pursuing research with Indigenous communities. This is despite environmental issues being an important decolonial research agenda given that many Indigenous people express their being, identity, rights, and laws as arising out of their places, territories and natures (Tallbear 2013, 510, 514).

Least documented of our experiences is Woelfle-Erskine's resignation to having no collaboration with Indigenous people in his fieldwork area, despite a personal commitment to do so, and several attempts to make community connections. Consequentially, he did not analyse and address crucial questions of power and management in relation to Manifest Destiny; indeed, he may be re-inscribing aspects of it in his research practice. This highlights the importance of collaborative research arising out of the Indigenous community's own priorities, so that the doctoral student aligns with existing energies, and collaborations have a better chance of forming. Woelfle-Erskine also identified that doctoral students need to be supported by their institutions with the connections, time and material resources to undertake such collaborative work. Overall, however, is the critical self-determination matter of materially

supporting Indigenous communities to further set and undertake their own research agendas, and to be in a position to engage with the research approaches of others if they so choose (Hemming et al. 2010).

Framing Knowledge

Our commentaries demonstrate how epistemological violence is embedded in the power asymmetries generated and maintained by the academy. Higgins and Weir highlighted this in relation to narrow framings about the 'environment', human exceptionalism, and the forms in which knowledge is made, shared and judged authoritative. Fuller found the 'objectivity' of her fieldwork methods to be a construct of knowledge production that legitimizes the colonial privileges of the academy.

We found that the epistemological/institutional matter of 'control the frame, control the game' needs to be addressed through an examination of the subjective positions of different knowledge holders and their knowledge practices in the creation and use of academic research (Nakata et al. 2012; Haraway 1998; Diver 2017; Rigney et al. 2015). As Hemming and co-authors have argued, far from being a neutral position, the academy's perpetuation of modernist notions of an objectivity hyper-separated from subjectivity, can be used to undermine other knowledge practices and knowledge holders (2010). This critique does not reject the achievements of modernism, but rejects its singular claim to an objective neutral authority. Instead, an and/both approach to the subjective/objective binary means that the categories remain meaningful but their differences and similarities are able to be examined. This enables more appropriate grounds for acknowledging and addressing the silencing, erasure and marginalisation that Indigenous peoples have experienced through being understood and governed as other than modern.

It is noted that such critiques of modernism do not simply criticize that which is western and affirm that which is Indigenous, but pursue a deeper reflexivity about knowledge practices. Coombes, Johnson and Howitt write how this reflexivity can embrace:

> a new relational ethics which unsettles any remaining binaries that survived the qualitative revolution in human geography: ethics becomes method; data become life; landscape becomes author; participants become family. (Coombes et al. 2014, 849).

In this, the subjectivities of method are made explicit, our 'objects' of study are alive, the world we live in is recognised for holding and communicating knowledge, and we can be explicit about the bonds generated as part of the research collaboration.

The involvement of the more-than-human as knowledge co-creators is a critical part of Indigenous research methodologies and decolonizing research (Bawaka Country et al. 2015); but, the pre-dominance of viewpoints that hyper-separate humans from nature means that suggesting nature has attributes seen as exclusively human – such as the capacity to communicate, feel, and act – is to invite ridicule. This includes responses by academics who misinterpret the linking of Indigenous and environmental agendas as naive and essentialist expressions of the 'noble savage' (Rose 2014). Environmental crises demand that the academy be explicit about the multinatures of expertise. This includes detailing how the colonial ideologues of Manifest Destiny and *terra nullius* were a deliberate denial of not just *bodies* but *peoples* and, we add, *natures* (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 598, original emphasis). This is not just a geopolitics of knowledge, but a biopolitics (Tuck and Yang 2010, 4).

Material change

Through this paper we have shown how academic institutional and epistemological norms continue to inscribe and re-inscribe injustices, and the broader agenda that is required. More than participatory approaches, and more than building rapport, relationality and trust with Indigenous communities, scholars and their institutions need to engage with ideas of critical responsibility (Nicholls 2009, 121). As part of this, there needs to be a questioning of the very purpose of research (Coombes et

al. 2014, 848). With respect to taking specific material action to support better research collaborations with doctoral students, we refer back to the six dot points listed earlier under the *terms of exchange* sub-heading. More generally, from our experiences we highlight two agendas for the academy, the importance of:

- supporting Indigenous peoples to further build their governance and research capacity. As Coombes and co-authors identify, there needs to be a transfer of research capacity to Indigenous communities; and, a rethink of research away from partnership or collaborative arrangements, to embed Indigenous leadership of research teams (2014, 847-8). This requires a more equitable sharing of governance and research funds that are monopolised by settler-colonial nation-states.
- systematically embedding an accountable reflexivity into academic approaches that are not reflexive about their knowledge norms, by teaching these skills across campus, in order to rework problematic narratives and material practises that entrench knowledge hierarchies. As Jeanne Kerr argues, the acceptance of secular cosmology and a neutral positioning of Western scientific materialism, dismisses Indigenous peoples' viewpoints as marginal, disruptive and not objective (2014).

Our departments and universities can help facilitate such change through asking the following questions:

- What kinds of research are privileged and why?
- Where do Indigenous people's interests sit in these spaces?
- How can Indigenous people develop the capacity to equitably engage in these spaces?
- What changes should universities make to their research practices and their partnership building with governments and business that would assist Indigenous people operating in these contexts? (as adapted from Hemming et al. 2010, 96).

Indigenous people need to be resourced to lead these discussions, and, when appropriate, to bring into this dialogue the many other people who are invested or should be.

The Australian phrase *unfinished business* keeps attention focused on the outstanding work needed to prepare better terms for good relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This will be unsettling for people living within settler-colonial societies who would prefer, or have assumed, that such issues of Indigenous governance and authority have been settled (Simpson 2016, 11-12). Critically, unfinished business is not just about redistributing power and being more reflexive, it also requires returning land (Tuck and Yang 2012).

Conclusion

Through our doctorates we had the unique opportunity to learn from a diversity of Indigenous peoples and their extraordinary homelands – temperate coastal California, the tropical Sea Islands of South Carolina, mountainous British Columbia, subarctic Alaska and an inland river basin in Australia. We brought with us diverse motivations, understandings and expertise. We all sought to address injustice and move away from extractive research relationships. We all found ourselves complicit in the perpetuation of colonial privilege, and often in unexpected forms. The steps we took to address colonial privilege were very different, and occurred in different stages of our doctorates. The commentaries reveal some of the vulnerabilities and limitations of our experiences – blind spots, weaknesses, and false moves made within very intimate and political contexts. With distance and some job security we have investigated these experiences more deeply. At a minimum, we hope this paper provides insights for doctoral students about the decolonial compromises and possibilities that may occur when collaborating with Indigenous people. Fundamentally, though, the problematics documented here have to be addressed through systemic change.

Acknowledgements

References

Alfred, Taiaiake and Jeff Corntassel. 2005. Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism. *Government and Opposition* 40, 597–614.

Arsenault, Rachel, Sibyl Diver, Deborah McGregor, Aaron Witham and Carrie Bourassa. 2018. Shifting the Framework of Canadian Water Governance through Indigenous Research Methods: Acknowledging the Past with an Eye on the Future. *Water* 10, 49.

Bawaka Country, Sarah Wright, Sandie Suchet-Pearson, Kate Lloyd, Laklak Burarrwanga, Ritjilili Ganambarr, Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs, Banbapuy Ganambarr, Djawundil Maymuru and Jill Sweeney. 2015. Co-becoming Bawaka. *Progress in Human Geography* 40, 455-475.

Byrd, Jodi. 2011. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Cerwonka, Allaine and Liisa Malkki. 2007. *Improvising Theory: process and temporality in ethnographic fieldwork*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Chief, Karletta, Alison Meadow and Kyle Whyte. 2016. Engaging southwestern tribes in sustainable water resources topics and management. *Water* 8, 350.

Coombes, Brad, Jay T Johnson and Richard Howitt. 2014. Indigenous Geographies III: Methodological Innovation and the Unsettling of Participatory Research. *Progress in Human Geography* 38, 845–854.

Corntassel, Jeff. 2003. An Activist Posing as an Academic, *Project MUSE* 27, 160-171.

Coulthard, Glen. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Deloria, Philip. 1998. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

de Leeuw and Hunt. 2018. Unsettling decolonizing geographies. *Geography Compass* 12, 1-14, e12376.

Diver, Sibyl. 2016. *Community Voices: The Making and Meaning of the Xaxli'p Community Forest*. A Report to the Xaxli'p Community Forest.

Diver, Sibyl. 2017. Negotiating Indigenous knowledge at the science-policy interface: Insights from the Xáxli'p Community Forest. *Environmental Science & Policy* 73, 1-11.

Fanon, Frantz. 2008. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.

FNIGC (First Nations Indigenous Governance Centre). 2014. 'Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP): The Path to First Nations Information Governance', FNIGC.

Gupta, Claire and Alice Bridget Kelly. 2014. The social relations of fieldwork: Giving back in a research setting. *Journal of Research Practice*, 10, Article E2.

Hemming, Steve, Daryl Rigney and Shaun Berg. 2010. Researching on Ngarrindjeri *Ruwe/Ruwar*: Methodologies for positive transformation. *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2, 92-106.

Higgins, Margot. 2018. From a National Monument to a National Disgrace. *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 21, 9-12.

Hurston, Zora Neale. 2008. *The Complete Stories*. New York: Harper Perennial.

James, Paul. 2015. They have never been modern? Then What is the Problem with those Persians? *Arena Journal* 43/44, 31-54.

Kerr, Jeanne. 2014. Western epistemic dominance and colonial structures: Considerations for thought and practice in programs of teacher education. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 32, 83-104.

Land, Clare and Eve Vincent. 2005. Thinking for Ourselves. *New Matilda* 29 June 2005.

Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Lomawaima, K Tsianina. 2000. Tribal sovereigns: Reframing research in American Indian education. *Harvard Educational Review* 70, 1–23.

Louis, Renee Paulani. 2007. Can You Hear Us Now? Voices from the Margin: Using Indigenous Methodologies in Geographic Research. *Geographical Research* 452, 130-139.

Mitchell, Timothy. 2000. The stage of modernity. In, Timothy Mitchell (ed.), *Questions of modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 1–34.

Mitchell, Timothy. 2000. Introduction. In, Timothy Mitchell (ed), *Questions of Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. xi-xxvii.

Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. 2015. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Morgan Monica, Strelein Lisa and Jessica K Weir. 2004. *Indigenous Rights to Water in the Murray Darling Basin: In support of the Indigenous final report to the Living Murray Initiative*. Research Discussion Paper 14, Native Title Research Unit, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, 1-63.

Nadasdy, Paul. 2003. *Hunters and Bureaucrats: Power, Knowledge and Aboriginal-State Relations in the Southwest Yukon*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Nakata, Martin N, Victoria Nakata, Sarah Keech and Reuben Bolt. 2012. Decolonial goals and pedagogies for Indigenous Studies. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, 120-140.

Nicholls, Ruth M. 2009. Research and indigenous participation: critical reflexive methods. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 122, 117-126.

Pasternak, Shiri. 2017. *Grounded Authority: the Algonquins of Barriere Lake Against the State*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Plumwood, Val. 1993. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

Plumwood, Val. 2002. Decolonising relationships with nature. *PAN: Philosophy Activism Nature* 2, 7-30.

Rigney, Daryle, Simone Bignall and Stephen Hemming. 2015. Negotiating Indigenous Modernity: Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan - Listen to Ngarrindjeri speak. *AlterNATIVE* 11, 334-349.

Rose, Deborah Bird. 2004. *Reports from a Wild Country: ethics for decolonisation*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.

Rose, Deborah Bird. 2014. Decolonising the Discourse of Environmental Knowledge in Settler Societies. In Timothy Neale, Catherine McKinnon and Eve Vincent (eds), *History, Power, Text: Cultural Studies and Indigenous Studies*. Sydney: UTS ePress, pp. 206-228.

Rose, Denis, Damein Bell and David A Crook. 2016. Restoring habitat and cultural practice in Australia's oldest and largest traditional aquaculture system. *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries* 263, 589-600.

Rowse, Tim. 2008, Indigenous Culture: The Politics of Vulnerability and Survival. In Bennett Tony and John Frow (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 406-426.

SCDAH (South Carolina Dept. of Archives and History). 1974. *Indian Hill Site*. March 22. Accessed November 12, 2017. www.nationalregister.sc.gov/beaufort/nrbeaufort.htm.

Scholte, Bob. 1972. Toward a reflexive and critical anthropology. In *Reinventing Anthropology*. Dell Hymes (eds), New York: Pantheon Books, pp. 430-457.

Simpson, Audra. 2014. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Duke University Press.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 2001. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London & New York: Zed Books.

Sturm, Circe. 2011. *Becoming Indian: The struggle over Cherokee identity in the twenty-first century*. Sante Fe: School for Advanced Research Press.

Swanton, John R. 1984. *The Indian tribes of North America*. Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press.

TallBear, Kim. 2013, 'Genomic articulations of indigeneity', *Social Studies of Science* 43, 509-33.

TallBear, Kim. 2014. Indigenous Scientists Constitute Knowledge across Cultures of Expertise and Tradition: An Indigenous Standpoint Research Project. In J. Gärdebo, M.-B. Öhman, & H. Maryuama (eds), *RE: MINDINGS: Co-Constituting Indigenous/Academic/Artistic Knowledges*. Uppsala: Uppsala University, pp. 173-191.

TallBear, Kim. 2015, Dossier: Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms: An Indigenous Reflection on Working Beyond the Human/Not Human. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 21, 230-235.

Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. 2014. R-Words: Refusing Research. In D. Paris and M. T. Winn (Eds.) *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with youth and Communities*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, 1-40.

Vincent, Eve and Timothy Neale. 2017. Mining, Indigenous, Alterity: or Mining Indigenous Alterity. *Cultural Studies* 31, 417-439.

Weir, Jessica K. 2009. *Murray River Country: An Ecological Dialogue with Traditional Owners*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.