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Roxana Aguilar Alonso  
*Independent researcher*

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## **Responding to Policies that Involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students and Content: An International Pre-Service Teacher's Experience**

Roxana Aguilar Alonso  
The University of Queensland

*Abstract: Using auto-ethnography, I write my story as Mexican international student in the role of pre-service teacher in Australia. I focus on exploring my socio-political status and its relationship to assuming a position to respond to education policies about working with students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, and teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content. I argue that assuming a position to respond to these policies as international pre-service teacher is overlapped with a multi-layered process in which epistemological deliberation occur as a consequence of being in a state of constant position shifting. Anzaldúa's Coyolxauqui imperative and Martin's Relatedness theory are used to analyse the structural conditions that framed the epistemological challenges that I encountered. I suggest a process to support international pre-service teachers who are ethnic minorities to assume a position in relation to these policies. Recommendations for potential further research are outlined.*

### **Introduction**

International students in Australia are temporary residents who are not expected to take an active political role during their stay. However, pathways for international students to perform professionally in Australia exist (Grimm, 2019). Jobs in which international students become accountable to a broader range of Australia's public policies necessitate a more active political role. This is the case of the teaching profession, in which developing a position on how to carry out certain policies is a requirement. Sometimes developing a position entails exploring one's self in the socio-political context. In this text, I recount and analyse my story as international student and International Pre-Service Teacher (IPST) in Australia. I focus on exploring my socio-political status and its relationship to assuming a position to respond to education policies, specifically the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) 1.4 and 2.4 (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011)

The APST 1.4 and 2.4 establish that it is a requirement for Graduate teachers to understand the impact of culture on the learning of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) backgrounds, and to be able to teach content related to ATSI cultures, histories and languages (AITSL, 2011). In my case, the process of developing a position towards these policies overlapped with a multi-layered process in which epistemological deliberation occurred as a consequence of being in a constant state of position shifting. In this process, I started to develop awareness of and to question many of the referents with which I understood the world.

Elements in this epistemological deliberation had a paradoxical nature for they had the potential to hinder or to promote the development of an informed professional position. Sometimes the understandings with which I came to Australia as international student were an obstacle for the development of contextual knowledge. I argue that taking this multi-layered process into account was necessary for examining the process that led me to develop a professional position as IPST in relation to APST 1.4 and 2.4.

I also argue that when I identified that my understandings were mediating my experiences and engagements with ATSI affairs and research, another dimension of the process of developing a position in relation to APST 1.4 and 2.4 was unlocked. My story gives an account of these experiences and engagements and how they interacted with my prior understandings. One characteristic of my story is that my first approaches to ATSI affairs occurred in informal settings rather than in formal education, which entailed that I was responsible for framing and regulating my learning. This self-regulation was affected by conditions associated with my international student status. As a result, the development of contextual understandings to have an informed professional position was delayed. My academic interests led me to further engage with ATSI research, which was fundamental for the development of contextualised understandings.

In this paper, the term ATSI affairs refers to aspects of the cultures, histories, languages, knowledges and the issues that impact the lives of ATSI people. The term ATSI research refers to “research that impacts or is of particular significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples” (Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [AIATSIS], 2020, p. 6). I wrote this text as an immigrant who was born in Mexico City and lived there for many years. I spent my childhood in a suburban municipality called *Cuautitlán Izcalli*, which is located within the metropolitan area of Mexico City. I have practised as a teacher and educator in formal and non-formal education in Mexico and Australia. When this text was written, I had been in Brisbane for four years as a temporary resident. I expect this text to contribute to the scarce academic literature about the experiences and engagements of international students and IPSTs with ATSI affairs. I am currently a PhD candidate investigating a topic that is not related to ATSI research.

This text is mostly written in first person in line with principles of auto-ethnography. Anzaldúa’s (2015) *Coyolxauqui imperative* (pron. Koy-ol-shauw-kee) (Cartwright, 2016), and Relatedness theory within Martin’s (2008) Indigenist research paradigm are the theoretical and methodological frameworks through which I analyse my story. I include two specific sections to explain the elements within these theories that resonated with my story. I consider that the way I made sense of these theories in relation to my international student experience is also part of my story. Both theories allowed me to identify structural conditions and personal experiences that framed my knowledge in relation to my professional role. The process I present in this text may be relevant for further investigation of similar cases.

In this text, the reader will first find the background of my story. Next, theoretical and methodological approaches are explained. Following this, elements of the *Coyolxauqui imperative* that resonated with my story are introduced. Then, my story is presented with a preface that describes its literary structure. After this, the reader will find the re-reading of my story in which academic literature is used to further enhance its relevance. Next, elements of Relatedness theory and how they resonated with my story are explained. This is followed by a discussion that outlines considerations for further research. Conclusions are presented in a final section.

## Background of My Story

In this section, I examine academic literature and statistics about the Australian Higher Education system to examine the relevance and scope of my story. The possibility that the number of international students enrolling in Indigenous Studies courses at Australian Higher Education institutions may be growing has been acknowledged (Nakata et al., 2012). Attention to the attitudes and reactions of international students when presented with aspects of ATSI affairs has been given attention (Hassam, 2007; Rolls, 2014). In this literature, the juxtaposition between international students and learning about ATSI affairs is another component of the whole Australian experience. After reviewing these sources, I infer that the experiences of international students in relation to ATSI affairs are varied. Here I am focusing on the international learners rather than on the diversity within ATSI cultures.

Being aware that there is a range of experiences is relevant to the extent that there are also multiple ways of seeking and engaging with research to be informed. Anzaldúa (2015, p. 71) suggested that “one ends up living in a different physical and symbolic environment while retaining the former ‘home’ culture and position”. The work of Radermacher (2006) is valuable in this regard because she acknowledged her position as white international student from the United Kingdom studying in an Australian university. She explored her assumptions in a self-reflective way in relation to her host country to discuss matters of whiteness, racism, and the inclusion of Indigenous issues in the Psychology curriculum. Additionally, she highlighted the uniqueness of the international student perspective. Although I share this unique perspective, my account is different because I did not go through a formal process of examining my assumptions and questioning them in my position as ethnic minority in Australia.

The multiplicity of experiences and engagements with ATSI affairs is characteristic of the current Australian context. At the same time, the complexities that it involves remain overlooked. The temporary status of international students may be the main reason for the scarce attention given to this aspect of contemporary Australia. Additionally, my case is not necessarily representative of the experience of international students in Australia more broadly. By the end of 2019, international students represented a 32.4% of the total of students in Australian Higher Education institutions (Department of Education, Skills and Employment [DESE], 2020). Although this number is large in terms of studying the Higher Education system in Australia, its importance in relation to the lives of ATSI peoples is less evident. Given that the majority of international students in 2019 included students from China, India and Nepal (DESE, 2019), cases like mine are not informing common descriptions of international student in Australia (Luke, 2010; Neri & Ville, 2006).

A similar situation was found regarding the teaching workforce in Australia, where only 18% had been born overseas (Willet et al., 2014). The majority of these teachers were born in a Commonwealth country (e.g., United Kingdom, New Zealand, South Africa and India). Latin American countries did not feature in the Top 20 of overseas born teachers (Willet et al., 2014). Even though these numbers demonstrate that the extent of my story is small, they do not eliminate the existence of analogous cases. Examining stories like mine can be valuable as a way of exploring another position and analysing pathways towards professional engagement with education policies like APST 1.4 and 2.4. Telling and analysing my story through theories that emphasise knowledge construction in position shifting processes makes it more relevant.

## Theoretical and Methodological Approach

Anzaldúa's Coyolxauqui imperative and Martin's Relatedness theory were used as the theoretical approach and methodology in this text because through these theories I interpreted my story to myself in real life. These theories helped me to examine the epistemological challenges related to developing a professional position pertinent to the Australian context. The Coyolxauqui imperative provided me the hermeneutical resources to explore my self-knowledge and self-ignorance as an ethnic minority and in relation to the multiple positions that I occupied as international student in Australia (Pitts, 2016). I found the Coyolxauqui imperative useful for the purpose of illustrating the process of epistemological deliberation I went through. Anzaldúa stated that the starting point of this process is a moment or period of crisis that breaks the self into many parts. In my story, each of the positions I occupied as international student represented the parts that I needed to make sense of. Through the cracks of the broken self, understandings could be seen when the crisis began to heal. With the Coyolxauqui imperative, I was able to name and to interpret the process that led me to realise that developing contextual understandings was necessary. I used some of elements in the Coyolxauqui imperative as resources to analyse the interplay between my prior understandings, my experiences and engagement with ATSI affairs, and my socio-political status.

Relatedness theory consists of three research projects that "are the intellectual, cultural, spiritual and social tasks that Indigenist researchers undertake to ensure Aboriginal ontology and epistemology remain joined" (Martin, 2008, p.83). The three research projects in Relatedness theory are called: Project of Critique, Project of Re-framing, and Project of Harmonization. Projects should not be understood as sequential stages as critiquing will not occur only at the beginning of research. I learned about Relatedness theory as a professional interested in undertaking a scholarly role. This theory became relevant to my story and sequentially connected with the Coyolxauqui imperative because it provided me with a framework to navigate my position in context. In acknowledging the limits of the Coyolxauqui imperative in my story, Relatedness theory became necessary. This theory re-centres Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives, which is crucial for developing a position in relation to APST 1.4 and 2.4.

Auto-ethnography was used as research method because of its consistency with the theories described above. Exploring the "relationships between the personal and the wider social and cultural world" was possible through auto-ethnography (Denshire, 2014, p. 4). In alignment with this method, I first wrote my story and then used academic literature to further enhance its relevance (Ellis et al., 2011). This enhancement involved a cyclical process to which I referred as the re-reading of my story. I was guided by the conviction that in-depth understanding can be attained with every reading that we make of a story ("*EDUC2090 model*", 2018). I accepted the premise that auto-ethnography has a therapeutic dimension and that this method can be process and product (Ellis et al., 2011; Denshire, 2014). Exploring the process of being an IPST was a therapeutic stage that opened space to examine how a professional position in relation to APST 1.4 and 2.4 was assumed. I expected this process to result in a product to investigate similar stories.

To write my story some of the patterns described by Anzaldúa were followed. First, I committed to a free writing process in which I annotated all the memories featuring any link with ATSI affairs that I could recall. The writing was retrospective and no official record or diary was kept throughout the years covered. Caution is important when reading my story because memory

recalling had some implications. For example, the experiences were not that clear to me as I was living them and perhaps, I would not have described them with the same language. Some experiences may have remained forgotten or the perception of them altered. After this first approach, three processes of editing were undertaken. The first process involved the revision of language conventions and paragraphs to create a literary experience. The second process took place after spending two weeks apart from the initial text. In this second process, some words were changed to provide a more accurate meaning. Further revisions were minimal to correct grammatical mistakes or due to privacy protection. The third process occurred after submission and review of the manuscript. I decided to eliminate two sentences about memories from when I was in Mexico because they were very distant and blurry. Only one memory from that time remained in the text because I still own an object that gives me certainty of the memory. No other experiences were added or deleted to the recount. Although my story was not written within an academic institution, ethical considerations were taken following the example of Wood (2017). Consent to be mentioned was sought and provided in written form (e.g., email) from characters to whom I refer in singular. Characters to whom I refer in plural are deidentified. I worked in more than three hospitality venues. In addition, the identity of many of the characters to whom I refer in plural (e.g., clients) is unknown to me.

### **Alluding to the Coyolxauqui Imperative**

The elements within the Coyolxauqui imperative that resonated the most with my story were: the Coyolxauqui process, (*des*)*conocimientos* and the *nepantlas*. Central to the Coyolxauqui process are the images of opening cracks and dismemberment, as well as processes of reconstruction and reframing. Anzaldúa used the metaphor of cracks or dismemberment to discuss issues related to identity. She used a variety of images and metaphors to allude to a process of disintegration, which occurs when a person shifts from one position to another. At disintegration, deep-rooted referents through which the world was understood are no longer valid to know the world. “This change triggers an identity crisis, cracking us open to other ways of identification” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 86). In my role as international student, this process occurred in many ways and involve multiple layers. Change of geographical location, language, nationality and residence status, professional and work status, and social networks were some of the layers overlapping in my process.

The notions of [*des*]conocimientos and nepantlas play an important role in the Coyolxauqui process. The term [*des*]conocimientos is comprised by two notions in Spanish: “conocimientos” in English means “knowledge”; and the prefix “des” that turns the noun into its opposite, similar to “un” in English. Anzaldúa (2015, p. 2) translated [*des*]conocimientos to English as “ignorance” but also describes it as knowledge that we prefer to remain unconscious and assumptions that we use to continue living without being accountable. When life is overwhelming, the cracks can be filled with (*des*)conocimientos to be able to go on. However, living such a life is not sustainable and cracks need to be navigated. Anzaldúa (2015, p. 56) also referred to the cracks as nepantlas, which means “in-between space” and is characterized by liminality and transformation. The navigation of nepantlas involves calling into question taken-for-granted and common assumptions and beliefs in an effort to reconstruct identity. In this sense, the Coyolxauqui imperative was useful to analyse my story, in which old epistemological frameworks experienced dislocations and new frameworks became necessary. In my story,

[des]conocimientos include understandings of many aspects of the world that I had when I came to Australia.

Another element in the Coyolxauqui imperative that felt familiar to me was the place that Anzaldúa placed the body as a material presence in the writing process. She stated: “My feminism is grounded not on incorporeal abstraction but on corporeal realities” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 5). I associated this statement directly with my own experience because I physically felt some of the implications of my decision to study abroad. My body was performing on multiple settings and I was learning my new status through the different interactions in those settings. My body was also organically providing evidence of the positions that I was occupying. This element of corporeity has been accurately described for the Australian context by Lobo (2019), when physical reactions like raising heart rates appeared as a result of receiving overtly racialised comments. In my case, corporeity also worked as a filter to regulate my understandings about the new context in which I was. My attention focused more on experiences that were closely related to my temporary residence status in Australia. Consequently, my experiences in relation to ATSI affairs were pushed to the cracks.

## My Story

This section presents my story as international student highlighting experiences and engagements with ATSI affairs that I could recall. The story is presented in italics to set its place within the whole paper. My story focuses on three periods of time and five different settings. The three periods involve my life before coming to Australia, the time during the Master’s Degree, and the time as pre-service teacher. The five settings include my preconceptions developed in Mexico, my life as a part-time worker while studying in Australia, my academic life, my personal life, and my professional placement as pre-service teacher. Metaphorically, the cracks of my Coyolxauqui process opened as a result of occupying this multiplicity of positions as international student.

*It was 2014 and I decided to apply to an Australian university to continue my professional development. I had other options in mind but Australia still presented itself as the most attractive place. If I went there, I was going to be able to spend time with my family living there too. I was also going to be able to apply for a student loan to fund my overseas degree. Other places were just too expensive or not one of the hundred best universities in the world, which was one of the requirements to apply for the loan.*

*At that time, I did not know much about the country. I did not even know the name of its capital city. Surprisingly, I had some images of Aboriginal (not Torres Strait Islander) people. The clearest image was stamped on a T-shirt that one of my aunts gave me after a trip to Australia around 2012. The caption on it said “Aboriginal Australia”. I still keep the T-shirt. I did not connect with these images or make sense of them. They were as distant as the geographical space between Mexico and Australia.*

*Once in Australia, I felt as if I was in a US teen television show. Most of the characters were white people who spoke English with confidence. There were so many phenotypes in this new place. I started developing a tactic to determine who I thought was Australian. I focused on the accent. I soon discovered that my*

*strategy was flawed. I could not really make assumptions based on colour or on the accent. I was also just learning that my skin was darker than I thought. So, the TV show reference in my mind slowly faded away with the passing of time and the accumulated experiences in this country.*

*The first semester of my academic life passed while I was adapting to the language, the workload, the buildings, the academic staff and my colleagues. I was constantly concerned about finding the job that was going to help me paying for my second and third semester. My loan was insufficient and I committed to cover the fees using independent funding. I finally found a job. Working in hospitality, I met more people in a non-academic environment. Sometimes, I met people from Aboriginal background. I only got to know about their background because of a small remark that was told at some point in time. Usually, I got to hear those comments around the 26<sup>th</sup> of January. The comments were not clear to me. I lacked the historical knowledge to determine whether they were positive or negative. I usually did not pay attention and kept doing my job.*

*My thoughts were focused on my own issues. I was coping with having to deal with complete strangers who, after finding out about my nationality, casually asked if I came to the country in the search of a husband. These were customers who did not hesitate in telling me things like “in this country we are used to saying please”. Some other customers were just friendly chatters and I liked to share with them that I was doing my Master’s degree and working to support my studies. And again, I just kept doing my job. My mind was too busy understanding my new status and how I ended up writing academic arguments with a sore body after an evening of picking up and washing glasses. I paid no attention to other matters.*

*Sometimes Aboriginal words and references were presented to me more explicitly. I found them at train stations and in the names of some of the places I went. It took me a little while to know how to pronounce the words. It took me a little bit longer to realise that the words are Aboriginal place-names pronounced in English. I thought that maybe Toowong was like Copilco, one of the local metro stations nearby the Mexican university I studied at. During the Master’s Degree, I also learnt three very direct references. One lecturer introduced us to the concept of Dadirri (Ungumerr, 1988) and another lecturer introduced us to the history of Boundary Street in West End, Brisbane to talk about Place-based pedagogy (Emily, 2013). These words and references disrupted me in a comfortable way. I saw a familiar context in them and at the same time, they did not pull me enough to commit. The third reference, though, told me that the sense of familiarity was deceptive. In academic spaces, I witnessed Acknowledgements to Country when I attended seminars or conferences. I had no prior referent in my mind to which I could compare this. I felt that I needed someone to explain me what was happening, but activities just went on. Knowing more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures attracted me but my attention kept focusing on other aspects. Nevertheless, I kept following the clues that other people left. I met a group of international students completing their PhDs. I saw Horton’s (1996) Map of Indigenous Australia in the house of one of them. This friend was very concerned about the disadvantage*



*of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australian public health policy. Once we went together to an Indigenous short-film festival. Another friend in this group was always in the search of an authentic and beautiful piece of Aboriginal artwork. Many of the clues came from the stories of an Australian man with whom I started a love relationship. His stories were about Native title law. I visited Kakadu with him and I kept following the clues that I could see. Now I was less indifferent. When I went to the State Library of Queensland to write my assignments, I started noticing the exhibitions and events that promoted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.*

*Sooner rather than later, my reason for being in Australia was about to come to an end. It was the last semester of the Master's Degree. I only managed to grasp a bit of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories or knowledges. I participated in some conversations with my Latin American friends but never with complete awareness of the implications of what I said. Some lecturers pointed me to decolonisation studies because of the topic that I chose to research. I tried to join a decolonisation studies group at the university but I always had to leave early to go to work. The clues were presenting themselves more clearly and in a more academic fashion. When the time to go back home came, I decided to become a pre-service teacher and so I changed positions again. I became a temporary resident participating in a public position in Australia.*

*I was one of the few international students in a large cohort of a one-year Graduate Diploma of Education. My life was similar in terms of having to work while studying to pay for my loan and the new degree. I was told that the year was probably going to be very tough. I started sharing more spaces with local Australian people in my professional field. I tried to keep up with the pace and the academic demands. Ironically, I achieved the necessary score for my literacy and numeracy test; while I was still not able to fulfil the language requirements for pre-service teachers with English as second language.*

*I went to my teaching practicum, where I realised that language was not the only problem. I did not know what it was like to go to High School in Australia. The diversity among students struck me as much as the uniforms. So, I started paying more attention to the responsibilities of being a teacher in this country. I tried to complete my evidence portfolio to demonstrate that I had all that it takes to be a Graduate teacher. There were two requirements that stood out. I had no evidence that proved that I could teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content or that I could teach students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. I did not cover it in my degree or I must have missed the workshops about it.*

*This thought kept revolving around my head until one day one of my PhD friends took me to an event organised by a collective. The event was a public yarn between academics. There I realised that it was not just me who did not have evidence to demonstrate that I could work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and content. It had also been the case of the Australian Education System for many years. A few days later, I asked my partner how was he taught about Aboriginal cultures at school. He was not. I felt very*

*nationalistic and proud that at least I was taught about Indigenous cultures in Mexico throughout my schooling. I had to double-check the origin of my pride and started reflecting on it. So, I became engaged with ATSI research.*

### **Re-reading My Story**

To elaborate on the arguments of this paper, I use the language of the Coyolxauqui imperative in this section. I analyse my Coyolxauqui process as international student to then examine its connection with my professional performance in the status of IPST. I highlight the paradoxical nature of some elements embedded in the process of epistemological deliberation I experienced. I also evaluate the way in which I used [des]conocimientos in relation to my experiences with ATSI affairs.

As international student, I found a context highly determined by having a political condition as unfree migrant. An international student is considered unfree because the choices to participate in the labour market are constrained. The temporary status granted in the visa is what defines the category of migrant (Walsh, 2014). I use the notion of unfree to emphasise that my work choices were limited by the academic and financial requirements needed to complete my postgraduate studies. This status represented the initial crack of my Coyolxauqui process. It worked as a reminder that my actions were only to have individual consequences and not social or political.

While I was holding this status, I experienced situations that confronted my referents to understand the world and monopolised my attention. Beyond the most evident concerns arising from the adaptation to a different academic environment in a second language, other situations challenged my assumptions. For instance, I performed in sectors that student-workers often find contradictory (Nyland et al., 2009). I also had to learn job-seeking mechanisms in parallel to learning the academic environment. Understanding the patterns of social inclusion and exclusion was a challenge for me, as it has been suggested to be for international students (Zhao, 2016). I tried to understand why most of my lasting relationships were with people in temporary status or other international students (Zhao, 2016; Cotterall, 2011). I embodied stereotypes and I learnt my own position through other people's prejudices. Other issues that I did not have to make sense of but other international students do are worth mentioning. For instance, I felt that my family in Australia was supportive and prevented me from social and cultural loneliness (Sawir et al., 2008). These situations represented cracks in my Coyolxauqui process and added layers to my personal analysis.

In this context, my deep-rooted referents of the world were disrupted. Many of these referents unveiled my own ignorance and racialised versions of the world. For instance, when I referred to the multi-cultural character of Australia and the white pre-conception I had of the country, and when I learned that the colour of my skin was darker than I thought. Some referents related to my ethnicity and nationality were materialised in comments made by strangers that exposed the assumptions some people made about me based on my nationality. As a member of an ethnic minority in Australia, I learned how my own and other people's racialised referents of the world filtered our relationships.

These aspects were part of the process of constant position shifting in which I was living. Many times, I allowed my [des]conocimientos to take over because disentangling the meaning of these new experiences was not a condition to fulfil the purpose established in my visa. In the

case of my experiences and engagements with ATSI affairs using [des]conocimientos was the rule. My [des]conocimientos were characterised by the notions of colonialism and indigeneity in Mexico with which I came to Australia. It is worth going through some examples to show how I operated through [des]conocimientos in relation to ATSI affairs.

For many aspects, I would find an equivalent that would not let me question beyond my assumptions. For instance, when encountering Aboriginal place-names I felt at home because I grew up accustomed to having words with *Náhuatl* roots together with Spanish in my vocabulary. Likewise, I would evoke the 12<sup>th</sup> of October when hearing conversations about the 26<sup>th</sup> of January. In Mexico, 12<sup>th</sup> of October is commonly known as *Día de la Raza* (Race day), and it is associated with the arrival of Christopher Columbus to what today is called America. This date was officially declared as a public holiday in 1929 (Rodríguez, 2004). In Australia, 26<sup>th</sup> of January is a National Public Holiday known as Australia day. According to the Kwan (n.d.), celebrating this holiday on that specific date was officially established in 1994 after a long history of debating about its significance. Ardill (2013, p. 319) explained that for "many First Peoples of Australia, 26 January represents the beginning of their dispossession, murder and colonisation from 1788 through until the present day". When I learned that Australia Day is not equivalent to Independence Day, I would comment that in Mexico the 12<sup>th</sup> of October stopped being a public holiday when I was in Primary School.

Similarly, when having conversations about Australian Native Title Law I would use my basic knowledge of Constitutional law to refer to the Article 2 in the Mexican Constitution, which establishes the rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination (National Autonomous University of Mexico, 2015). Looking at Horton's Map of Indigenous Australia reminded me of the sixty-eight officially recognised Indigenous languages in Mexico (Catalogue of national Indigenous languages, 2008). Operating in this way resulted in the replacement of an accurate understanding of ATSI affairs in the Australian context. It also hindered the possibility of changing or enhancing the initial images that I brought with me to Australia.

Determining how operating through [des]conocimientos as an international student could impact or affect the lives of ATSI people might be irrelevant. However, this way of operating continued when I started my role of pre-service teacher with an international student status. Making sense of my responsibilities as a pre-service teacher juxtaposed with the international student conditions. During the Graduate Diploma, the paradoxical attribute of my [des]conocimientos manifested. They predisposed me to recognise the importance of APST 1.4 and 2.4 but also were an obstacle for me to develop contextual understandings for an informed professional position. An important aspect to highlight is that the cohort in which I was enrolled was the last to undertake the one-year degree in Queensland universities. This degree did not include a specific Indigenous Studies course, a fact that changed when the degree was extended to Master's level. Not having undertaken a specific Indigenous Studies course meant that I needed to informally self-regulate my knowledge construction in relation to ATSI affairs.

At the end of my story, the paradoxical nature of my [des]conocimientos operated again. Through my [des]conocimientos, formed in my schooling years and my teaching practice in Mexico, I could see that the incorporation of Indigenous content into curriculum can be characterised by the perpetuation of colonial control over Indigenous people. However, my [des]conocimientos did not tell me how to perform in such a way that I did not perpetuate colonialist practices in Australia. I concur with Moodie and Patrick (2017, p. 440) that a "sociologically grounded approach that recognises the ongoing impact of colonialism [in settler societies]" should underpin the practice of teachers in relation to APST 1.4 and 2.4. In my case,

it was probable that my interests in decolonisation and feminist studies urged me to seek a more informed understanding for this context. In this process, I found necessary not only to learn facts to expand my knowledge but also to explore my position in the socio-political context.

A *nepantla* was opened for me when I recognised that using my [des]conocimientos to respond to APST 1.4 and 2.4 could have damaging consequences. I am still in the process of putting myself together as Anzaldúa's Coyolxauqui imperative commands, which implies navigating my position. Perhaps I would not have engaged in understanding my position or become interested in ATSI research had I gone down this path fifteen years ago. The APST, that have been key in this engagement, were only published in 2011. Furthermore, the ATSI research with which I have mostly engaged has been published in the last twelve years. By engaging with this research, I became acquainted with Martin's Relatedness theory.

### **Alluding to Martin's Relatedness Theory**

As in the case of the Coyolxauqui imperative, the scope of this section is limited to explaining my understanding of the theoretical elements that were relevant to the interpretation I made of my story. Therefore, the reader will not find a thorough description of Relatedness theory in this section. Relatedness theory was proposed by Martin as a theoretical framework to support and guide researchers who become engaged in ATSI research. The ontological and epistemological premises of Martin's Indigenist research paradigm, as well as the research context where it was developed are central to understanding this theory. Reading them directly from the source will be necessary for those interested.

Of the three projects comprising Relatedness theory, the Project of Critique and the Project of Re-framing are the focus of this section. In the Project of Critique, relatedness involves engaging in self-dialogue and self-reflection to answer the questions of "who you are, where are you from and how you are related" (Martin, 2008, p. 83). These questions should be responded in a two-fold manner. First, the person answering needs to focus not only on the relation to "*People*" but also on the relation to "*Waterways, Climate, Plants, Animals, Skies and Land*" (Martin, 2008, p. 83). Second, the person answering needs to reply in terms of their "historical, political, societal, gender, professional, cultural, social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual" position (Martin, 2008, p. 83). This project involves a decolonisation and deconstructive endeavour that allows people to know their terms of reference.

The Project of Re-framing is a continuation of the Project of Critique. Respect, responsibility and accountability are established as the three conditions for relatedness. Martin (2008, p. 85) explained that respect is demonstrated when "Aboriginal terms of reference" are used to understand Aboriginal contexts and understandings developed through the Project of Critique. A core aspect of this project is the reconstruction after the critique where knowledge is expanded in line with Aboriginal terms of reference instead of being replaced. Responsibility and accountability are demonstrated through "thoughts, values and actions" (Martin, 2008, p. 85). Of great importance for being responsible and accountable is not to stay remote from research participants or to stay in a permanent state of critiquing, as this can result in the replacement of knowledge and negatively affect respect.

My story ends before the Project of Critique and the Project of Re-framing can be explicitly told. In my story, these projects pertain to the time when a *nepantla* was opened. Initially, the APST triggered the search for parameters or understanding to fulfil an unknown

role. Martin's work guided the navigation of such nepantla. Relatedness theory was the basis to develop relevant referents to the Australian context and to develop a professional position. This theory made clear the importance of building upon my existing frameworks rather than trying to disengage from them completely. In this sense, the Project of Critique and Project of Re-framing enhanced the understandings that became evident in the Coyolxauqui imperative.

I consider the Project of Critique valuable in my story for two reasons. The first reason is that it made me realise that I was using my understanding of indigeneity and colonisation in the Mexican context to look at ATSI affairs in Australia. The Project of Critique brought forward Aboriginal terms of reference and provided a clear set of expectations that allowed me exploring how to position myself in the Australian socio-political context. Although I am yet to respond to the questions of who my people are, where I am from and how I am related, the Project of Critique helped me to examine my [des]conocimientos, distinguish their origin and the ways in which they operate. The second reason is that this project let me respond and participate as an ethnic minority in Australia and in my professional field, reinstating my political capacity and agency in my position of temporary resident.

The Project of Re-framing was relevant to my story because it set the conditions for a reconstruction process to perform and attend to Aboriginal terms of reference, enhancing accountability and responsibility beyond the APST and my personal assumptions. As my story suggests, being in a constant state of position shifting and having to regulate my own understandings impacted the development of contextual and conscious referents. However, the Project of Re-framing was useful for me to contest this situation in my personal experience and to develop awareness of how I was replacing Aboriginal terms of reference by using deep-rooted referents to understand the world. These reflections are not evident in my story. I arrived to them through reading about Relatedness theory.

## Discussion

My story and the re-reading of it contain experiences and understandings of a single individual. Telling the story is a proposal for taking into account the multi-layered contextualisation process in which many IPSTs might be and allowing members of ethnic minorities to explore their self-knowledge. This text differs from previous research on multiculturalism and ATSI affairs in Australia, which argued that ethnic minorities have been excluded from debates about ATSI affairs (Cohen, 2003; Rolls, 2014). Moreton-Robinson (2003) discussed in relation to the notion of belonging in Australia that "the dominant institutions such as law and governments, and their epistemologies, remain anglicised" (Moreton-Robinson, 2003, p. 27). She added that the "right to be here and the sense of belonging it creates are reinforced institutionally and socially; personal profound sentiment is enabled by structural conditions" (Moreton-Robinson, 2003, p. 37). The place of international students in the "colonial-post-colonial spectrum" (Curthoys, 2000, p. 33) of Australian society is strongly tied to the structural conditions that control the entry-door. Temporary residents of Australia are highly accountable to these conditions and it is within these conditions that we can be included in debates about ATSI affairs. Given that these structures have been historically created in emulation of British colonial power structures, they are central to examine the position of IPSTs in relation to ATSI affairs.

In the field of Education, the influence that structural conditions exert on IPSTs cannot be ignored in analysing the engagements of IPSTs with APST 1.4 and 2.4. Scholarly literature about transnational pre-service teachers (Spathis, 2014), immigrant teachers (Bense, 2016) and overseas trained teachers in Australia (Collins & Reid, 2012; Datta & Lavery, 2017) stressed the role of structural conditions in teachers' contextualisation processes. This literature could be useful for examining experiences and engagements with ATSI students and content as it has already been reported in the case of non-Indigenous Australian pre-service teachers (Thorpe, 2017), teacher educators (Kelly, 2013; Moodie & Patrick, 2017) and in-service teachers (Booth, 2014; Buxton, 2015; Wood, 2017). The impact of exploring the position of international students as pre-service teachers in relation to ATSI affairs may be small in numbers. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that stories like mine may be repeated with their own nuances, complexities and variability impacting on the professional performance of IPSTs.

Words should be added to discuss the extent to which such examination may or may not benefit ATSI peoples' sovereignties. This is a critical question for any research that involves ATSI contexts (AIATSIS, 2020). I acknowledge that this text was written for my own scholarly agenda and that I can only provide a perspective as a non-ATSI non-Australian person. Nevertheless, I expect that the information in this text can be useful for ATSI scholars and educators to pursue their interests. I propose that operating through [des]conocimientos may lead to uninformed teaching performance, which may be damaging for certain causes and ATSI affairs. [Des]conocimientos feature a similar role to what Rose (2012) called practitioner's blind spots. This notion refers to the distorted views and assumptions in the practice of non-Indigenous educators that are the result of the systematic silencing of ATSI knowledge and perspectives in Australia. Auld et al. (2016) have further referred to the notion of practitioner's blind spots in relation to non-Indigenous pre-service teachers completing professional experience in remote communities in the Northern Territory. They found evidence of practices that can be detrimental to ATSI education if appropriate professional support is not in place for pre-service teachers. For example, the practice of pre-service teachers can reproduce stereotypes, perpetuate colonising practices, hinder the decolonisation agenda and limit the right of ATSI children to communicate in their language. Evidence also suggested that the personal lives of pre-service teachers can be affected when re-adjusting in their return to their place of origin. Both [des]conocimientos and practitioner's blind spots may contribute to the dissemination of misinformation and the perpetuation of stereotypes. Operating through [des]conocimientos in relation to ATSI affairs can be damaging because it is a way of behaving, thinking and relating that enforces decontextualised understandings by drawing parallel comparisons with minimal consideration of ATSI terms of reference. This way of operating can result in omitting the historical and current struggle of ATSI people for geographical, cultural, political, societal, intellectual, epistemological and ontological self-determination.

## **Conclusion**

Although the scope of my story is narrow, it is important to consider that international students who have decided to participate professionally in Australia have a story to tell. In the case of IPSTs who are ethnic minorities, the telling of the story and the re-reading of it may be part of the process of assuming an informed professional position. Elements within the Coyolxauqui imperative and Relatedness theory proved useful in my individual case, and may be

useful for other IPSTs. These theories enabled me to become aware of the conditions associated with my socio-political status and my self-knowledge, to evaluate my knowledge in context, and to seek research to develop contextual understandings.

The Coyolxauqui imperative facilitated the examination of structural conditions that impacted the development of an informed professional position. In light of the Coyolxauqui process, I evaluated how the multiple positions that I occupied as international student were relevant in the exploration of my self-knowledge and the knowledge needed to perform professionally. Using [des]conocimientos as a category, I was able to determine how lived experiences were being filtered through uninformed understandings. Examining how the paradoxical properties of some of these understandings could affect professional performance was also possible.

The use of the Coyolxauqui imperative can be considered an obstacle for centring ATSI terms of reference in this text. However, some of the elements within Anzaldúa's theory are consistent with Martin's Relatedness theory. Both stress the need for examining deep-rooted referents through which the world can be understood and the subsequent re-construction that this examination entails at personal level. Both highlight the importance of being accountable and responsible. Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives are only brought to the fore with Relatedness theory, providing clarity about the necessary elements for assuming a political role in relation to ATSI affairs. Arriving at the point at which a story is analysed through ATSI terms of reference is crucial in this context because it enhances the terms of accountability and responsibility.

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