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Canadian and Australian First Nations: Decolonising knowledge

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About the author

Dr. Josie Arnold, inaugural Professor of Writing Swinburne University of Technology, is an active supporter of Indigenous scholars and scholarship. She has published a book and several articles on Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing as a friend of Indigenous scholars and scholarship. In 2016 and 2017, at their request, she made biofilms of two Warundjeri women Elders that have been shown on Indigenous television and that contribute to Swinburne's Reconciliation Action Plan. She established the Swinburne online journal *Bukker Tillibul* (a Warundjeri Name permitted by Warundjeri Elders); the online Master of Arts (Writing); and the PhD by artefact and exegesis for which she has won national and university teaching awards. She has also published over 45 books, including poetry, drama, novels, textbooks and memoirs. Josie has supervised 20 PhD students to a successful conclusion, including an Indigenous colleague. She currently supervises another ten students, including a female Indigenous scholar. She publishes refereed journal articles on research in the areas of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, creativity, and electronic curriculum; writing and reading; and teaching and learning. She writes and publishes in a number of creative fiction and non-fiction genres, most recently in poetry and film.

Abstract

This article explores Indigenous standpoint theory in Australia in the context of postcolonialism and some of its aspects influencing Canadian First Nations scholarship. I look at how cultural metanarratives are ideologically informed and act to lock out of scholarship other ways of knowing, being and doing. I argue that they influence knowledge and education so as to ratify Eurowestern dominant knowledge constructs. I develop insights into redressing this imbalance through advocating two-way learning processes for border crossing between Indigenous axiologies, ontologies and epistemologies, and dominant Western ones. In doing so, I note that decolonisation of knowledge sits alongside decolonisation itself but has been a very slow process in the academy. I also note that this does not mean that decolonisation of knowledge is always necessarily an oppositional process in scholarship, proposing that practice-led research (PLR) provides one model for credentialling Indigenous practitioner-knowledge within scholarship. The article reiterates the position of alienation in their own lands that such colonisation implements again and in an influential and ongoing way. The article further proposes that a PhD by artefact and exegesis based on PLR is potentially an

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inclusive model for First Nations People to enter into non-traditional research within the academy.

Keywords

decolonisation, Indigenous knowledge, practice-led research

We acknowledge the traditional Wurundjeri custodians of the land on which our Australian University stands, and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We also acknowledge all the Wurundjeri people and their Elders. We will strive to respect their culture and through our work recognise all Indigenous people, their stories and traditions.

Introduction

Decolonisation of knowledge is a central objective if First Nations' people are to bring their knowledge with them to schools and universities for credentialled learning. As I explore in this article, such decolonisation of Indigenous knowledge will enrich traditional curricula, providing a two-way bridge for scholarship (Foley 2003; Rigney 2001). A recognition of Indigenous knowledge as and in scholarship and education is an immediate need for all Indigenous peoples throughout the world. This is clearly articulated in Lester Irabinna Rigney's Indigenous standpoint theory and supported by many Indigenous Australian scholars such as Karen Martin (2008).

Canadian First Nation people represent a similar percentage (2–3%) of the total population as Australian Indigenous peoples (Ball 2004, 455). They have other commonalities that this article proposes. Both peoples live in wealthy societies where they are largely fringe dwellers and where their own traditional knowledge is largely disregarded. Stephen Cornell (2006) states of Canada's First nation peoples that they live 'among the world's wealthiest nations. It is an often noted irony—and an occasional source of embarrassment to the governments of these two countries—that the Indigenous peoples within their borders are in each case among their poorest citizens' (1). He goes on to note that the British settlement of nations such as Australia and Canada "has entailed enormous Indigenous resource losses, the eventual destruction of Indigenous economies and a good deal of social organization, precipitous population declines, and subjection to tutelary and assimilationist policies antagonistic to Indigenous cultures" (2006, 5). Poor health, less wellbeing, early death, suicide, high infant mortality rates, less certified education and over-representation in jail follow this.

These are massive problems, and decolonisation of academic knowledge structures and curriculum can be seen as a small but important part of redressing this. Glen Aikenhead proposes cross-cultural education as being what he describes as a movement that is a "cultural border-crossing for students" in this journey, and that teachers "facilitate those border crossings by playing the role of tour guide, travel agent, or culture broker, while sustaining the validity of students' own culturally constructed ways of knowing" (1997, 217). This calls for subtle and focused Indigenous inclusion in the curricula that brings Indigenous epistemology (ways of knowing), axiology (ways of doing) and ontology (ways of being) to scholarship, not as a subject of research but as a true contributor.

Indigenous standpoint: Theory and practice

In Australia there has been a growing emphasis on Indigenous knowledge as scholarship. For example, Indigenous scholar Lester Irabinny Rigney sees Indigenist research methodology as offering "three core, inter-related principles: resistance (as the emancipatory imperative); political integrity; and privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices" (2001, 8). Indigenous scholar Denis Foley states that the dominant Western science model as applied since the colonisation of Australia has "resulted in the elimination and extermination of Indigenous social systems, knowledge, traditions and

cultural sciences" (Foley 2003, 44). Today, however, such Eurowestern traditional models are becoming challenged by multiple alternatives:

> the rise of Indigenism in Australia is another successive wave of epistemological theorising in social science, like feminism, post-modernism and postcolonialism. Such approaches to knowledge have brought about "undisciplining" … traditional disciplines are now being de-stabilised to allow space for emerging theories of social discourse. (Rigney 2001, 7)

For Dennis Foley (2003), indigenous standpoint theory (IST) establishes relevant epistemology. IST means that "the practitioner must be Indigenous" and "well-versed in social theory". The research itself should act to benefit the Indigenous community, and, more contentiously given their loss, "wherever possible the traditional language should be the first form of recording" (50). This, too, is a challenging proposition, given that many Indigenous languages are now lost or spoken by very few (McConvell & Thieberger 2001).

Such propositions as in IST have come about through on-the-ground negotiations with Australian Indigenous Elders as well as Australian Indigenous scholars from the Eurowestern tradition. Above all, decolonising knowledge from IST perspectives should mean interactions with "… Grandfathers and Grandmothers who have lived colonial subjugation and who have a desire to teach the young of their culture" (Foley 2003, 50). Such recognition is not readily available within the academy and especially within Enlightenment modalities.

Interactions with traditional Indigenous Elders and peoples in Australia is made further difficult as traditional or bilingual data are not readily accessible in studying with Indigenous Australians. Most of the more than 250 languages have been repressed by force, there has been constant stealing away of children, and dominant cultures have repressed Indigenous ones. Much has been lost since British colonisation/invasion (Nettle 2000).

As with an Anglicanisation of language, the Eurowesternisation of education has inevitably led to culturally and socially inbuilt inequality for Indigenous Australians. Social justice demands that academe address this inequality, and this "is not possible without cognitive justice, without recognizing the presence of different forms of knowing and explaining the world" (Chan-Tiberghien 2004, 191). When the dominant way of knowing, being and doing in the academy is still premised on the Enlightenment model, then such decolonisation or even change of knowledge structures is a difficult and challenging notion.

Martin (2008) describes the world's oldest continuous culture of Australian Indigenous peoples as being over-researched by non-Indigenous scholars and asks us "to please knock before you enter". She suggests we can be a friend or "jarwon", but should never speak for Indigenous peoples.

The Indigenous Australian aims to decolonise knowledge are underpinned by postcolonial theory that emphasises many of the points made by Rigney, Foley and Martin and other Indigenous scholars in Australia who are attempting to decolonise knowledge.

As IST emphasises, for the Australian First Nation position, postcolonial theory emphasises the shared experiences of Canadian and Australian First Nations peoples vis-a-vis colonisation.

Postcolonialism

It is reassuring to see that a postcolonial theoretical prism exists for looking at the Eurowestern (Spivak 1988, 2004) methods and knowledge structures that dominate schools and universities. Of course, it is a theoretical tool that enables critical analysis of cultural givens, but it importantly assumes that colonial imperatives continue to exist today. Postcolonialism implies that there is a strong resistance to the historical disenfranchisement of colonialism in many aspects of being, but this is not generally seen in curricula and research. Usually it is isolated in Indigenous Studies. Yet, a central part of postcolonialism is the reclaiming of the past in the present for the future, and this involves recognition of Indigenous knowledge methods, structures, histories and so on across the curricula. For example, Jessica Ball (2004) states that:

> many First Nations in Canada are … engaged in multifaceted efforts to revitalize their cultures, assert the legitimacy of their culturally-based values and practices as integral to the fabric of Canadian society as a whole, and foster among First Nations children positive identities with their Indigenous cultures of origin. Indeed, throughout the world Indigenous groups are seeking ways to use education, training, and other capacity-building tools in order to maintain, revitalize, and re-envision cultural knowledge and ways of life. (456)

Addressing questions arising from utilising theoretical prisms such as postcolonialism and IST to enact the decolonisation of knowledge is not a simple matter. For example, even in writing local histories, a very popular Australian pastime, Indigenous people are too often ignored or sidelined, or shown as part of a colourful past. They are not present. They are the “other” of Europe (Spivak 1988, 2004). Local history, for example, is usually a Eurocentred point-of-view in itself, as the establishment of place is part of the Western view of knowledge. People write the history of their locality because they want to keep a record of a geographical area that means a lot to them, because it includes their cultural and social past, and because they think it deserves to be formally recorded. Like all other writing, local history is subject to the cultural construction of the reader and/as the writer. The writer selects the area under surveillance and the periods, places and people that need to be researched. Many First Nation peoples—for example, Australian Indigenous peoples—have a very different view of place. For them, a local history is themselves and their people—past, present and future. A rock may be a grandfather, a tree a great-grandmother at the same time as both are themselves (Pascoe 2014).

Indigenous Australians assert that they have knowledge methodologies that contrast with Western ways of knowing (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Hutchinson et al. 2014). Their cultural transmissions, like those of Canadian Indigenous peoples, have been replaced and diminished by cultural as well as geographic colonisation. Nevertheless, until very recently if at all, recognising Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing within the academy has been given little more than passing lip-service (Moreton-Robinson & Walter 2008). In discussing the depressingly familiar colonisation of Indigenous First Nations, Aikenhead (1997) states that:

> In the 19th and 20th centuries, attempts (such as residential schools) at assimilating First Nation students into North American culture only succeeded in extinguishing the students’ own culture and failed to provide an alternative cultural support system … consequently, First Nations peoples are the most disadvantaged minority in North American education … apart from abject poverty, the main issue is *control* over education. (218)

Education is a form of control as it prepares students through cultural metanarratives to enter the workforce and the space of the dominant Westernised culture as I discuss later with reference to Louis Althusser (2006). This becomes particularly poignant when we see the history of residential schools in Canada as a form of oppression and control through the pretence of education, and of the Stolen Generations of Australian Aboriginal children.

Decolonising knowledge

In the face of such anti-Indigene historical foundations, the academy struggles to provide a two-way bridge over educational "border crossing". Aikenhead (1997) describes this as "autonomous acculturation", which he defines as: "a process of intercultural borrowing or adaptation in which one borrows or adapts attractive content or aspects of another culture and incorporates (assimilates) it into one's indigenous culture" (230). That is, Indigenous culture has many aspects that enrich traditional, usually Enlightenment-influenced ways of knowing, being and doing (Midgely 2011), just as these traditionally accepted materials and attitudes can be adapted into Indigenous knowledge structures (Nakata et al. 2004).

This is a sensitive and difficult task that has confounded many academic institutions and that remains still to be accomplished, although Aikenhead (2001) in his discussions of Indigenous science curricula for First Nations people, describes "an emerging paradigm of research and practice" (183) that draws together the students' life world cultures and worldview with the knowledge content.

It appears that this problem of relevant First Nations educational objectives, curricula material and dialogic narratives in educational practices is difficult to reconcile with reality. For example, Jessica Ball describes how:

> many First Nations in Canada … have made repeated attempts to strengthen community capacity through education and training. However, they most often have found neither cultural relevance in training curricula nor cultural safety on "mainstream" campuses with one-size-fits-all curricula or with European-heritage instructors. (2004, 457)

This article adds to the scholarly conversation about how we might as academics bring together cultural practices with research so as to increase the knowledge of the academy. Ball suggest strongly that:

> Researchers and practitioners need to become aware and appreciative of the many effective or promising practices in human services and education that reflect the diversity of human experience, individual and collective goals, and social ecologies rather than searching for "best practices" with universal applicability. (2004, 459)

It is difficult to credential Indigenous knowledge, even when the Elders hold it and are accorded respect for this by their peoples. Today, most Australian universities have a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), regulations that include the aim to accept Indigenous students' non-traditional knowledge in "Current Competencies" as proven ways of knowing that are not credentialed; see, for example, http://www.swinburne.edu.au/about/our-university/indigenous-matters/reconciliation-action-plan/

With regard to both undergraduate and postgraduate studies, but particularly the latter, I argue that some methodologies such as practice-led research (PLR) could facilitate this and lead from Indigenous practices to scholarly enframing. This acceptance of non-traditional learning and research outcomes is valuable for the university, of course, as well

as for the Indigenous practitioner, as two-way knowing or walking in both worlds is not confined to Indigenous peoples crossing into Eurowestern scholarship.

Ball (2004) describes a project undertaken to provide educational resources based upon culture but also giving Eurowestern qualifications; that is, one that would enable First Nations people to "walk in both worlds" (459). She describes this as a "biculturally respectful stance (that) has created a safe and supportive context for communities of learners to become engaged in co-constructing culturally grounded training curricula that combines two knowledge 'traditions'" (460). But how bicultural is this stance? Does it mean that non-Indigenous people walk in an Indigenous world or is the crossing one-way? Is it yet another form of assimilation?

Ball's pedagogical model combines reflection and dialogue with traditional academic knowledge. She describes how:

> The First Nations Programs embody a postmodernist valuing of multiple voices and insistence upon situating alternative constructions of experiences with reference to the historical, cultural, political and personal contexts in which these constructions have been generated … This approach illustrates how Eurowestern self-assertive thinking and values can exist in creative dialogue with the more integrative thinking and values that are characteristic of many Indigenous cultures, resulting in positive transformations for all individuals, institutions, and communities involved. (2004, 461)

It is clear that integration is another aspect of assimilation and hence involves a loss to Indigenous knowledge rather than a gain. Today, with more Indigenous scholars publishing research, Karen Martin states that Indigenous people are reclaiming their stories (2008, 148). For Martin, all researchers, particularly non-Indigenous "outsiders", should respect "Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being, and Ways of Doing" (9). For her: "the implications and challenges for western research and researchers is to engage research as an interface where conceptual, cultural and historical spaces interface or come alongside each other based on new relationships to knowledge, to research and to self" (10). In this way, Indigenous people's stories are represented in scholarship, and this is "transformative and works towards achieving Aboriginal sovereignty in research" (10). When we understand and respect a two-way border crossing, then decolonisation occurs as both Eurocentred ways of knowing and Indigenous ways of knowing are acknowledged and respected within scholarship. Her award-winning thesis and subsequent book summarises this in the title: *Please knock before you enter. Aboriginal regulation of outsiders and the implications for researchers.*

Known as an activist intellectual pursuing the rights of indigenous peoples, particularly those in Canada, Dr Gerald Taiaiake Alfred is an internationally recognised academic, a Kanien'kehaka, and a political advisor who is currently a professor at the University of Victoria. His work evokes awareness of the continuing encroachment of the dominant settler/invader societies of contemporary colonialism upon Indigenous peoples and nations. This is no small struggle, as he identifies "approximately 350 million Indigenous peoples situated in some 70 countries around the world" (Taiaiake & Corntassel 2005, 599). The need to decolonise Indigenous knowledge is no small matter: it is supported by many scholars who are either Indigenous or highly empathic.

Gerald Alfred and Jeff Corntassel (2005) define this struggle as one of peoples who are "Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies and states that have spread out from Europe and other centres of empire" (2005, 597) and states that their relationship to the dominant political and social structures is

always “oppositional”. By this they mean that all Indigenous peoples, whatever their heterogeneity, have in common that they:

> struggle to survive as distinct peoples on foundations constituted in their unique heritages, connections to their homelands … natural ways of life … as well as the fact of their existence (being) in large part lived as determined acts of survival against colonizing states’ efforts to eradicate them culturally, politically and physically. (2005, 597)

This “struggle” has lived veracity as well as academic insights and overviews: the experience of contemporary colonialism hidden within the dominant culture is readily identifiable by him as a form of “postmodern imperialism” that affects Indigenous peoples “culturally, politically and physically”. The eradication of Indigenous peoples that was actual, geographic and physical in the first wave of colonialism is now, Alfred and Corntassel state, a form of psychic as well as physical degradation and depletion. Indigenous peoples, then, are still being “dispossessed and disempowered in their own homelands”. It is also, then, a form of capitalist oppression (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, 50; Schwab & Sutherland 2001).

Indeed, they identify the state of aboriginality in contemporary colonialism as being a way in which the state organises the Indigenous peoples to define themselves within its own terms. In doing so, they are moved away from the particularity of their precolonial backgrounds to a form of censored homogeneity that denies their original heterogeneity. Alfred and Corntassel identify this quite uncompromisingly as “a powerful assault on Indigenous identities that is based upon reliance on the state for ‘physical survival’” (2005, 599). In this way, Indigenous peoples remain subject to colonial cultural, educational and social oppression (Rigney 2001) and internationalisation of an Indigenous anticolonial cultural critique of research methodologies (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist 2003).

This is not merely a political matter: cultural matters such as the social dominance of big business and the neo-imperial influence of dispossession of lands and the loss of ceremony and language are also involved in “threatening their sources of connection to their distinct existences and the sources of their spiritual power” (Alfred & Corntassel 2005, 599). This reconstruction of Indigenous identity by the neo-colonial state, society, and local and global cultural imperatives, then, is one leading to “dependency and disconnection” and hence continuing negative and harmful “colonial legacies” (Alfred & Corntassel 2005, 600). Such colonial legacies are too clearly able to be seen in the credentialling of knowledge within the academy.

Alfred and Corntassel (2005) assert that “it is ultimately our lived collective and individual experiences as Indigenous people that yield the clearest and most useful insights for establishing culturally sound strategies to resist colonialism and regenerate our communities” (601). Within the context of this article, which considers the narratives of individuals being accepted as a contribution to knowledge, this assertion has much power to it.

Neo-colonialism is described by Alfred and Corntassel (2005) as being a form of “shape-changing”. That is, pressures brought to bear upon Indigenous people, even those activated by a type of common-good domestication-style argument, are insidious and hidden and also extremely powerful in counteracting Indigenous resistance. The suggestion that there can and should be “zones of refuge” and “‘spaces of freedom” (605) seems at first glance to resist entering into the established academic knowledge domain even through such a new doorway as practice. I survey in this article, however, how PLR

can help postgraduate students enter into PhD programs from an uncredentialled as well as a credentialled position through taking into account their Indigenous knowledge.

Practice-led research PhD

This PLR model of the PhD is a useful addition to a discussion of bridge-crossing between Indigenous and traditional scholarly knowledge because it allows creative practices to be brought into focus in the academy. Such a creative model means that artistic expressions can form the artefact element, and a complementary framework exegesis can develop scholarly insights into that practice. Thus, the bridge crossing is clearly two-way.

Perhaps this one PLR answer becomes possible when we consider that such academic publications will also be practicum published within a broader scope such as books, art, sculpture, dance, as well as within the academy itself. In this way, too, Indigenous practitioners will choose what they place within the dominant cultural practices, and in doing so will also bring greater heterogeneity both for the meta-culture and for their own Indigenous cultures (Arnold et al. 1988).

Artistic artefact elements might include photography, videos, games, novels or creative non-fiction. This means that ways of knowing, ways of thinking and ways of doing have been acknowledged to enrich scholarship. Each artistic product must reach a high standard and lead to scholarly reflections upon its production, place and possibilities. Such creative thinking processes are valuable to scholarship but are also significant contributors to cultural and industrial change.

Scholarly reflections and insights in the framework exegesis draw together practice and theory, the known ways of producing knowledge and the possible ways of extending this. Because it asks for academic insights into the creation and application of such works, this model enables new and interesting knowledge to enter into scholarship. Creative industries provide employment for a large number of people in a large number of areas such as working in museums, teaching, research, film and television, information technologies and entertainment. This PhD model, then, offers a rich cultural and social resource.

Indigenous researchers themselves identify “peoplehood”—which Alfred and Corntassel define as “four interlocking concepts: sacred histories, ceremonial cycles, language and ancestral homelands” (2005, 609)—as the main area of contestation against contemporary colonialism. I believe that these four interlocking concepts can be quite readily correlated with PLR.

Rather than a pan-Indigineity, Alfred and Corntassel identify a “fourth world” wherein there is a resistance to neo-imperialism, and a number of common needs can be recognised and met. Such fourth world commonalities are described as being “founded on active relationships with the spiritual and cultural heritage embedded in the words and pattern of thought and behaviour left to us by our ancestors” (2005, 610). These too, I believe, can be both seen and accommodated in the contribution of recognising different modes of knowing within the academy, such as PLR. The most effective argument for such a commonality resides in Alfred and Corntassel’s assertion that a process of Indigenous regeneration “begins with the self”, as “decolonization and regeneration are not at root collective and institutional processes” (2005, 611). Becoming a practitioner scholar in this model PhD certainly begins with the practitioners’ selves.

Indigenous peoples have all too often been domesticated and tamed, and their resistance diverted by patriarchal and imperial government policies that have increased their reliance for daily living upon the state (Alfred 2009, 42). As a result, there has arisen what Alfred describes as:

> a complex relationship between the effects of social suffering, unresolved psychophysical harms of historic trauma and cultural dislocation (that) have created a situation in which the opportunities for a self-sufficient, healthy and autonomous life for First nation people on individual and collective basis are extremely limited. (2009, 42)

Alfred states that this is caused by a significant dependence upon the "very people and institutions that have caused the near erasure of our existence and who have come to dominate us" (2009, 42). A defensive but destructive enervation has resulted, he argues, because such "oppression experienced over such a long period of time affects people's minds and souls in seriously negative ways" (Alfred 2009, 43). I believe that such negative energy can be transmogrified if we see the present as a hallway through which new ways of perception might be discovered and that it is in this liminal space that the opportunities offered by practitioner research, dialogic knowledge and other knowledge bases that recognise different modes of knowing within the academy may take up their existence (Arnold 2010).

Disempowerment is the most significant element in the formation of negative energies within Indigenous persons (Kenrick & Lewis 2004). Thus, the empowerment involved in recognising Indigenous ways of knowing within the academy, rather than co-opting such knowledge for analysis and comment by non-Indigenous peoples or Indigenous peoples within the given framework of traditional knowledge bases within the academy, is an important contribution to resistance towards cultural metanarratives that form neo-colonial pressures upon Indigenous peoples. Alfred suggests that such individuation may lead to "atomization" of Indigenous communities and peoples: a sort of divide and conquer (2009, 44). He argues that a return to a reintegrated Indigenous community is the baseline. However, this relies upon matters of such political, economic and cultural change that may take many years of alienation to reach, if ever. For me, this is the impossible dream of a return to the precolonial culture.

Cultural metanarratives

Cultural metanarratives are the ways that we take things for granted as "natural" or "normal" ways of being, doing and knowing (Kirmayer et al. 2003; Reading & Wien 2009. Decolonisation of knowledge relies upon a critical analysis and reversal of cultural metanarratives as they influence learning and research within the academy. PLR itself is based upon a dispersal of certainties. The postmodernist critical thinker lives in a world that draws together the real and the fantasised and tries to draw these two worlds together. Perhaps the best example of this comes in the work of Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleueze and Felix Guattari.

Althusser (2001) discusses two main ways in which we are formed as social beings practising a specific culture and supporting the state: repressive state ideological apparatuses and ideological ones. The repressive ones are obvious: the police, the law, the armed forces, political structures and so on. The ideological ones are more pervasive and less easy to isolate, understand or read against. They include architecture, dress, education, speech patterns and so on. Ideology becomes "… the very medium in which I 'live out' my relation to society, the realm of signs and social practices which binds me to the social structure and lends me a sense of coherent purpose and identity" (2001).

Clearly, these oppressive ideologies are different for Indigenous people, as a survey of the statistics of imprisoned Indigenous Australians would quickly show (Baker 2001).

Investigating ideology and how it permeates society, Althusser proposes that society makes citizens who fulfill the needs it has for production. It does so overtly (repressive apparatuses) and covertly (ideological apparatuses). Ideology pervades every aspect of our identity: we are constructed by the ideological practices, beliefs and expectations of our cultural group within our society. Ideological state apparatuses are "… in fact unified, despite its diversity and its contradictions, beneath the ruling ideology, which is the ideology of the ruling class" (2001, 146). This leads to a "social unconscious", which is like the repressed psyche. For Althusser, the primary ideological tool of the state is education, and society is made up of economic, practical and ideological practices. He defines practice itself as:

> Any process of transformation of a determinate product, affected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means of production. The economic practice (the historically specific mode of production) transforms raw materials to finished products using human labour and other means of production, all organized within defined webs of inter-relations. The political practice does the same with social relations as raw materials. Finally, ideology is the transformation of the way that a subject relates to his real life conditions of existence. (Weathers 2015)

Making a bridge between Indigenous knowledge and traditional scholarship is one way to alter this, and I propose here PLR as one way to acknowledge and enact bridge crossing in the academy by emphasising non-traditional research as knowledge production with particular reference to Indigenous dialogic and practice based knowledge.

Thus, according to Althusser: "All ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constructing' concrete individuals as subjects" (Weathers 2015). In broadening the definitions of scholarship to involve PLR, I propose that the PhD by artefact and exegesis acts to address this dominant Eurowestern scholarly ideology that keeps citizens subject to the social codes and conditions. These act to keep social practices alive and as a social cement that reproduces society by allowing only answerable questions. Cultural metanarratives act to oppress movements outside an established "reality" by determining which problems, questions and answers are acceptable and overtly or covertly establishing what will be ignored, blacklisted and unmentionable.

Because ideology is manipulative, there is a problematic. This relates to what is allowed and what is excluded, and how power operates to establish omissions as well as inclusions in society. Deconstruction of the cultural discourse works through the problematic. Deconstruction allows the ideology to be unpeeled to reveal the "real" conditions of existence. "Ideology is a practice with lived and material dimensions. It has costumes, rituals, behaviour patterns, ways of thinking" (Weathers 2015). Capitalism is the dominant global culture and it conveys the practices of the West as objects of desire. Much of Althusser's work has been disputed, but his contributions about ideology have remained an important consideration when we look critically at culture, particularly in the Indigenous context.

Two important voices we might listen to about dominant cultural discourse are Deleuze and Guattari (Sermijn et al. 2008). They argue that advanced capitalism is currently reaching a stage of transition. This involves breaking down old certainties and cultural "givens" and "norms" so as to enable a more fluid and galvanising potential to emerge. They call this "deterritorialisation". Its goal is to build even greater "territories" or

enculturisations for global capitalism than existed before. For Deleuze and Guattari, however, it also presents the opportunity to move into the “grid of representation” and shatter it. In doing so, they propose a rhizomatic text that is lateral, rather than the traditional root-tree metaphor for knowledge production.

Their idea of the rhizomatic text is a way of critiquing and challenging the hierarchical Western society ways of knowing and being. The “arboreal text”, the aborescent system, shows society and its knowledge to be metaphorically expressed as a tree. The root system is connected to the main branch, which has many minor branches, fruits and leaves coming from it while relying upon it. This kind of system is essentially a controlling one. Everything in this model is controlled and controlling: it is in its place, in order of its importance. The main tree survives all assaults and losses. Meaning, as well as social activities, can only take certain controlled paths, and only certain circumscribed choices can be made within the system. Once a choice is made, other choices are unavailable, and selected choices lead to certain predetermined paths. This is a very patriarchal model of social structures. It dominates advanced Western capitalist social constructions.

So the arboreal or aborescent system has an unquestionable central source that allows everything to be traced back to its sources, thus limiting improvisation and innovation. As it controls what is considered to be knowledge, it has developed intransigent described journeys through it, selecting and valorising only those things that meet its particular needs. This devalues and rejects other models and allows templates and processes to dominate human individuality.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose another way in which knowledge might work, which they term “rhizomatic”. A rhizome is a root that can be sliced at any point and still lead to growth, or grass that creeps and roots anew to expand its territory in multiple directions, unlike the tree, which is bound by its own botanical conventions that dominate its use as a metaphor for “the tree of knowledge”. The plants that surface from a rhizome are unable to be traced back to one root. Many grasses grow from rhizomes: they are not singular and linear … they are wildly lateral and intertwined. Deleuze and Guattari propose that this is a better model for knowledge than the root-tree model because it encourages difference and laterality rather than conformity and linearity.

So the rhizomatic system has multiple possible combinations to produce meaning; it permits individual journeys through the same material and functions without prescribed pathways. In this way it does not inhibit creativity; it is productive rather than reproductive, and it does not follow templates or grammars. Rhizomatic knowledge systems, then, encourage the production of new meanings by making new connections possible and developing semiotic chains that draw together meanings and connections in the arts and between the arts and their struggles with organisations of power.

The range of ideas that a rhizomatic “assemblage” encourages is greater than that offered arboreally. New connections can be made and differences, including binary oppositions, overcome as the rhizomatic permits the creative bringing together of new things, elements and sets of ideas. The tree will always have the same trunk, it will always produce and reproduce itself in the same way. The rhizome is constantly reinventing itself and allowing others to do so. There is no “axiomatic hegemony” to disrupt the sense of multiple possibilities.

In this context, such thinking opens new possibilities for different ways of knowing, being and doing, as well as opportunities to bring practice research arising from and related to practice into the academy as a narrative way to scholarship and knowledge.

'It's always been white people coming to black countries to tell us about ourselves'

Indigenous Australians are subject to research activities that they do not participate in except as subjects (Martin & Mirraboopa 2003). Rigney (2001) refers to intellectual sovereignity as a significant element of the decolonisation of knowledge, and in the context of this article, I see this as being able to narrate practice as non-traditional research within the PhD framework and elsewhere as PLR.

Such discussions are, of course, central to providing a challenge to Eurowestern academic gatekeeping. For example, Indian political activist and Booker prizewinning novelist Arundhati Roy is more sceptical about their relationship and relevance for the "other" of Europe. As with Australian and Canadian First Nations people, she notes that: "It's always been white people coming to black countries to tell us about ourselves" (2010,134). Roy also sees much of the academy as using academic language and publications to make obfuscatory rather than clarifying explanations of ideas and attitudes that exclude many within her country from the discourse. While she sees a role for specialised knowledge, she sees some as privileged unfairly and that "the range of what is valued has become so extreme that one lot of people have captured it and left three-quarters of the world to live in unthinkable poverty because their work is not valued. What would happen if the sweepers of the city went on strike or the sewage system didn't work?" (2010,109-110). She refers to intellectuals and postmodernists as having a "language that is sort of impenetrable" (2010, 151). Moreover, she sees the English language itself as a form of ongoing Imperial repression in India. For her, the "machinery of oppression put in place by a colonial regime" includes "the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the police, Rule of Law", and the English language as not only separating "India's elite from its fellow countrymen", but much more significantly for me, says that it "binds its imagination to the western world" (2010, 176), which she sees as being based upon an "artificial boundary between the intellect and the heart … their fusion is what makes artists and writers … I believe that there isn't anything as wonderful as fierce intellectual passion" (2010, 98). Roy sees that "all writing is political. Fiction is especially subversive" (2010, 186).

PLR enacts this subversion within the academy for practitioner-scholars.

Conclusion

In this article, then, I propose that this practicum I am advocating of such methodologies as PLR research (Arnold 2005, 2007) is not another form of "shape-changing" that comes about through integration and assimilation. Rather, it is an opportunity for the academy to be expanded and enriched by the Indigenous knowledge involved, instead of using it as a reflection upon Indigenous communities from a Eurowestern viewpoint arising from colonisation and continuing through neo-colonialism.

Moreover, by giving a sense of ownership of the publication of Indigenous lives through, for example, stories, poems, paintings, sculptures, dancing and autobiographies, PLR may provide a stage upon which resistance can be seen to be necessary as well as happening. This opens up the space that I have called liminal (Arnold 2010), which gives Indigenous Australians their own songlines within the broader community so that repression and neo-colonialism is both resisted and as it is enacted within the dominant culture. This is a

possible space for revitalisation rather than for what Alfred derides as “healing, reconciliation or capacity-building” (2010, 45). He sees these as being implicated in discredited imperialism and neo-colonialism.

It seems to me that Alfred’s identification of “spiritual revitalisation” involves this liminal space that provides the threshold for new possibilities; otherwise, his concern for a “spiritual revitalisation and cultural regeneration” (2010, 45) is incompatible with a world in which colonialism has all but destroyed First Nations. In such a liminal space, there is no one dominant component: all are on the threshold of the new. The academy, in this instance, is beginning to accept Indigenous knowledge bases and ways of knowledge and experience, and the Indigenous scholars are beginning to make their own imprint upon the academy from their practicum and their dialogic knowledge constructs. This leads us within the academy to accept his proposition that “colonialism is the development of institutions and policies by European imperial … settler governments towards Indigenous peoples” (Alfred 2009, 45), and to act to redress it.

Implicating Indigenous ways of knowing within the academy can be read as another “shape-change” or it can be seen in this sense of operating within the possibilities inherent in the liminal. I prefer the latter, while recognising the pressure of the former. The entry space is one of possibilities for all concerned. There are many doors opening from an entry space and many ways that we can go forward. There is in this liminal space a possibility of changing from an oppositional stance to a new relationship that challenges the neo-colonial attitudes of the imperialistic patriarchy as well as the psychophysiological depression of the disempowered Indigenous peoples. There are many small steps that can be taken within the liminal space and change from institutional paradigms that have depressingly resulted in a multigenerational “system that remains the same and annihilates us spiritually and culturally no matter what the strategic outcome of the struggle” (Alfred 2009, 48).

I argue that recognising and valuing Indigenous knowledge within the academy is one of them. Further, such enrichment is not available only to Indigenous peoples. The apophatic nature of the liminal (Arnold 2010) is able to enrich the dominant culture in ways that it has not previously either seen or valued. In the 21st century, and perhaps for the entire time of Western dominance, spirituality is not a guiding moral compass point for Eurowestern societies (Braudel 1981; Tawney 1966).

In addressing spiritual needs of Indigenous people, we need to see that their contribution to the academy could alert it to the spiritual deficiencies that exist within its own guiding paradigms. In this liminal space, an “autonomous and authentic indigenous identity and cultural foundation” (Alfred 2009, 52) could flourish within a space in which Indigenous knowledge is neither consumed nor assumed, but seen as an important and lively contribution to a complex Indigenous/Eurowestern society. This is an important contribution the academy could make and/or is making to a sense of liminality: of making new possibilities by being on the threshold. Rather than becoming “cultural mirrors of the mainstream society” (Alfred 2009, 52), such possibilities provide an opportunity to cut across repressive dominant cultural givens and societal metanarratives.

Linda Smith discusses how power is involved in both “the conceptualization and design of research” (2013, Foreword). In doing so, she wants to be provocative, to provide “some revolutionary thinking about the roles that knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies and institutions play in decolonization and social transformation”. Smith sees

her discussion as at the “intersection of two powerful worlds, the world of Indigenous peoples and the world of research”.

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