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## **A FIRST PERSPECTIVE OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN PARTICIPATION IN SCIENCE: FRAMING INDIGENOUS RESEARCH TOWARDS INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN INTELLECTUAL SOVEREIGNTY**

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### **Introduction**

In Newcastle in March 1999, I attended the first forum in Australian history that brought together Indigenous scholars, researchers and post-graduate students to rigorously engage in the critique of academic research and the knowledge production process. The prime objective was to develop Indigenous research methodologies that were inclusive of the Indigenous experience. The forum was organised by one of several Indigenous Higher Education Research Centres now operating in Australia, the Umulliko Centre at the University of Newcastle. Before engaging in the critique, we first celebrated our survival and the continued Indigenous struggle. It was only following this collective recognition that we could begin discussions on our struggle for participation in Western science. High praise and optimism were given in recognition of the growing number of Indigenous academics and postgraduate students, but we also acknowledged the major historical events that led to our celebration of this moment.

It is only during the last decade that research by Indigenous scholars has attempted to represent our perspectives in Western scientific traditions.<sup>1</sup> Whatever gains we as Indigenous peoples have made in science are a form of progress. However, what progress have we made and what are the historical origins associated with this progress? We can never accept that our progress can be measured by liberalist notions of 'equality'. During the 1970s it was thought that 'equality' could be reached in higher education by simply adding Indigenous peoples to the academy of science and giving it a stir. It would be incredible to consider the affirmative action policies of the 1970-1980s era, with strategies of 'equal opportunity and access' in universities, to be the major factor in the genesis of Indigenous participation in science. To suggest that Indigenism<sup>2</sup> and its scholarship owe their birth to the rise of movements such as feminism, postmodernism and post-colonialism would be equally incredible.

Indigenous scholarly investigation into the emergence of Indigenous participation in Western science has only emerged in the last ten years (see Bin-Sallik 1990). Whilst this is a small but growing field of

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term science in the main throughout this paper to describe social science although at times where indicated I refer to the Western tradition of scientific investigation and philosophy in both the social and natural sciences.

<sup>2</sup> By Indigenism I mean a body of knowledge by Indigenous scholars in the interest of Indigenous peoples for the purpose of self-determination. Indigenism is multi-disciplinary with the essential criteria being the identity and colonising experience of the writer. Similarly, by the term Indigenist I mean the body of knowledge by Indigenous scholars in relation to research methodological approaches.

study, researched and written from an Indigenous perspective, I propose that there is a fundamental need for Indigenous scholars to map this field further to bring different perspectives, expertise, and political orientations to this movement. The political context of Indigenous Australia in the now post-war and post-Mabo historical moment has seen Indigenous historians of Western science emerge. However, the urgency for a more modern science that is inclusive of Indigenous research ethics, epistememes and methodologies has at times overridden the need to historicise and politicise the emergence of a renaissance regarding Aboriginal intellectual life.<sup>3</sup>

To map the history of Indigenous peoples' participation in Western science, I will consider four areas. The first looks at the scope of the debate in order to analyse Indigenous Australians as scientific 'objects' of knowledge in Western history. The second charts the historical moments that led to the accommodation of Indigenous Australians in Western science. The third draws attention to the emergence of contemporary critical Indigenous scholarship. The fourth area complements the third by analysing and framing the emergence of Indigenism within a broader struggle for Indigenous Australian intellectual sovereignty.

### **Scope of the debate**

To contextualise the scope of the debate I begin by asking a fundamental question: What is the intellectual history of Western science authority in relation to Indigenous Australians?

### **Us Mob: From scientific object to scholars of science investigation**

Science and research is one of the largest industries within nation states. The amounts pent on scientific research is rivalled only by private enterprise and corporate business. Moreover, higher education is a major cultural force equal to the power of mass media and popular culture. Science as a social institution produces, consumes and markets a knowledge economy. Science is a cultural phenomenon that is simply big business for nation states. Therefore it is not surprising that science is widely accepted as authoritative in constructing 'truthful' realities in modern Western societies. Clearly science and its knowledge production methods, steeped in Western epistemologies and ontologies, are regarded as fundamental for social transformation. It is produced by 'rational' scholars who are steeped in the traditions of the scientific community.

However, we as Indigenous Australians realise the role Western traditions of science have played in our colonisation, and recognise science's alignment to the policies and priorities of the nation/state. More recently, Indigenous peoples have embraced higher education and scientific research as tools for social and economic mobility, although with some reservation. Higher education is fundamental for preparing Indigenous peoples with the necessary skills not only to reclaim, protect and nurture Indigenous cultures but also to prepare the next generation for an ever-changing modern society.

Whilst we welcome our accommodation into the university system, we as Indigenous peoples remain dissatisfied with scientific philosophies and practices that underpin Western knowledge systems. Before we can begin to investigate scientific methods that move beyond Western cultural models, the Indigenous scholar must first understand the basis of Western ontological and epistemological principles on which science stands.

The development of modern science has its own substantive history; Indigenous inclusion within such history has unique factors. Traditionally our inclusion was only as an object of study. This history in the main has escaped interrogation by contemporary Indigenous scholarship. To state the point with

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<sup>3</sup> In the mid-1960s, the Indigenous movements for human rights and land rights also saw the emergence of Indigenous scholars like Charles Perkins (graduated 1966 from Sydney University-see Perkins, 1975, Reed 1990) and Eric Willmot (graduated 1968 Newcastle University, New South Wales) (see Bin-Sallik, 1990:13). Clearly, the agenda and context in Indigenous scholarship is to further the political cause for citizenship and recognition of Indigenous peoples and their rights. Most Indigenous scholarship has followed this trend in order to achieve better political outcomes for their (our) people with good cause. Mapping Indigenous participation in the history of social science and the transformation undertaken within Western science itself to allow Indigenous participation has not been a part of the intellectual landscape up until the 1990s.

slightly greater nuance, the study of the history of Western science, and those historical moments when Indigenous peoples engage in its practices, is of fundamental importance.

Modern sciences today and their investigative methods are not detached from the social and historical circumstances of their origin. According to Hughes and Sharrock (1990:25), it is customary to trace scientific traditions back to philosophical ancestors of the early Greeks. Aristotle (322-384BC), the Greek philosopher, is often claimed to be the founder of science. However, the origins of positivist epistemology emerged from European traditions of thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Rene' Descartes (1596-1650) are two key figures that feature strongly in the history of Western scientific philosophy. Hughes and Sharrock (1990:25) argue 'that the former continued the Aristotelian legacy of empiricism as the account of the foundations of human knowledge, while the latter continued the Platonic rationalist tradition'. Both were looking for an intellectual method that would defeat scepticism and provide certainty about knowledge of the world. In doing so, Western scientific traditions developed distinctive techniques and methods of investigation, which purported that 'true facts' of the world could be established.

In a post-modern world these particular techniques and the philosophical conceptions informing them are now being questioned and challenged. Paul Feyerabend (1970), through the writings of his predecessor Karl Popper<sup>4</sup>, and his contemporary Thomas Kuhn<sup>5</sup>, brought forward critical discussions on why certain scientific methods of investigation carried more intellectual authority than others<sup>6</sup>.

Despite such critiques, positivist orthodoxy remains entrenched in the social and natural sciences, although today it is no longer unquestioned and its authority is less than absolute. Nevertheless, Western ontology and epistemology are based on principles of 'validity', 'reliability', and the authority of positivism that view the nature of 'reality' as mechanistic.

The notion that science is 'authoritative', 'neutral' and 'universal' privileges science. It gives science the status of a standard measure against which all other 'realities' may be evaluated and judged to be either 'rational' or otherwise. If science indicates to us that there is no such thing as Indigenous Dreaming, then the Indigenous Australians whose realities are informed by the logics of Dreaming are therefore deemed irrational. Indigenous realities that are unique and may appear to defy the logic of science are challenged as legitimate systems of knowledge.

The encounters between Western science and Indigenous Australians in the early phases of colonisation reveal the perpetuation of Western science as the teller of 'truth'.

Early scientific paradigms of philosophic reasoning such as functionalism in Sociological and Biological Theory, Evolutionary Theory and Psychology included Indigenous peoples as 'objects' for scientific human understanding<sup>7</sup>. Scientific development of the constructs of 'race' and the 'other' are prime sites to examine Indigenous participation in science. Historically, scientific inquiry has engineered an overwhelming collection of so called 'facts' and 'half truths' about Indigenous peoples that has contributed to hegemonic colonial construction of Indigenous identities. Scientific accounts of human 'origin' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries involved the ranking of supposed 'races' into hierarchies of superior and inferior (Moore 1993, 1994; Montagu 1974; Miles 1989). The philosophical consequences for Indigenous peoples of the world were that they were constructed as uncivilised cultures. This was accompanied by a strong rejection of our humanity.

Two racial theories that were especially significant in Australia were Polygenesis and Social Darwinism (McConnochie, Hollinsworth and Pettman 1988). By the second half of the nineteenth century 'race' theory had moved to the forefront of scientific investigation. 'Anthropology, Archaeology, Anatomy, Physiology, Histology and Palaeontology' began to shape the construction of racialist science (Stepan 1982:5). Miles (1989:31) states that 'there exists widespread agreement

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<sup>4</sup> The influential works of Karl Popper investigates the function and role of the classical hypothetic-deductive model of research. Through this work it is now claimed that theories cannot be proved only disproved and through this process scientific knowledge advances (Popper. 1959).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Kuhn's historical work provides significant insights into the empirical problems in science on which many contemporary scientists draw insights (Kuhn 1970).

<sup>6</sup> I have found Paul Feyerabend's work extremely gratifying in understanding the genesis and growth of scientific investigation and method (Feyerabend 1970).

<sup>7</sup> The work of Robert Miles (1989) charts this terrain well.

amongst historians that a major transformation occurred in European representations of the 'other' as a result of the secularisation of culture and the growth, and increasing hegemony of Western science'. From this we can see that it was science that informed colonial society's belief that differences in 'races' are primarily 'biological' and 'natural', and therefore inherent and unalterable. 'Natural' signs of inferiority were in skin colour, thickness of lips, hairstyle and the worshiping of 'pagan' gods.

*The land alienations and killings were legitimated by the Polygenesis theory, the removal of the 'halfcaste' children and the imposition of assimilation policies were the product of Social Darwinism. (Moore 1994:14)*

I have argued elsewhere that racism is the 'construction and use of the concept 'race' as a category of systematically oppressive social organisation' (Rigney 1999a: 112-113). In other words, the historical process of oppression, grounded in the construction of the concept 'race', saw every facet of Australian society being racialised (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Moore 1993). Indigenous Australian systems of knowledge, governance, economy and education were replaced by non-Indigenous Australian systems on the assumption that the 'race' of Indigenous peoples were sub-humans, and thus had no such systems in place prior to the invasion (Rigney 1997a: 636).

It is the racialised research structures, philosophies and methods of investigation that we have inherited from colonialism, within which Indigenous peoples function, that have been fundamental in the Indigenous scholar's own oppression. We Indigenous scholars function within these structures because we have no other choice. Hence, if we recognise that Australian science is racialised, we must also recognise that non-Indigenous Australians alike have learnt to devalue and give little recognition to Indigenous contributions, intellects and cultures. Whilst the construct of 'race' informs and legitimates 'terra nullius', it also informs the assumption by colonists and subsequent generations that Indigenous traditions of intelligentsia equate to 'Intellectual Nullius'.

From this history we can assert that the colonists saw themselves as the scientists. If one's racial superiority could be scientifically legitimated then the logical conclusion could be drawn that the scientific methods used in 'other' cultures to investigate or transmit knowledges were inferior and irrational. Indigenous intellectual traditions and knowledge transmission, which sustained Indigenous cultures and humanity for thousands of years, were not considered worthy science or even science at all. 'Race' theories laid the firm foundation for determining whose knowledge was valid and whose science was legitimate. More importantly, they determined who could do science and who could be a scientist.

The Australian historical consciousness, scientific or not, subscribed to thinking which failed to recognise the enormous contributions that Indigenous peoples' intellectual knowledges and physical labour have made to the shaping of this country. Moreover, such thinking monopolised intellectual and moral thought and evaded the recognition that within Indigenous communities, pre and post colonisation, thinkers as great as Plato, Einstein and Marx existed and continue to exist. In this instance Western science has done more than merely define reality. It has manufactured partial 'truths' by constructing racially biased theories, either consciously or unconsciously, and produced a self-fulfilling prophecy for interracial relationship in Australia.

Although enlightened movements of Post-modernism, Feminism and Post-colonialism have emerged in the last century, hegemonic versions of Indigenous 'reality' are distressingly biased in contemporary social science. Let me clarify my argument. I am not suggesting Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics are dishonest, or that their research intentions are dishonourable in their construction of Indigenous peoples. Rather, applying Western scientific logic produces inconsistencies. This scientific rationalism is no more an accurate reflection of reality than those of other cultures.

By critiquing the origins of Western scientific rationalism the Indigenous scholar can begin to recognise a process of liberation from the colonising aspects of such traditions. Similarly, we can explore alternative research results, and the methods that are generated, to offer counter explanations and to develop non-Western alternatives. For much of the history of Western scientific method, it has been difficult for academics to imagine ways to investigate and study their methods systematically. As a result, a powerful orthodoxy exists in the assumptions of Western scientific rationalism, in that it assumes it is the most powerful tool we have for knowledge production and the investigation of social human behaviour (Harding 1986).

Sadly, science has only recently encouraged Indigenous participation in Western scholarship. In a climate of immense social engineering, First Nations peoples of the world have been excluded from Western societies and the scientific project. We Indigenous scholars have always had to justify not only

our humanness and our Aboriginality, but also the fact that our intellects are 'rational' and that we have a right to take our legitimate place in the academy of research. It is therefore important as Indigenous scholars to know what forces were responsible for only allowing Indigenous Australian participation in higher education since the 1960s. What moments in the history of Western science have removed the blinkers to allow space in the academy for Indigenous peoples? Indeed, many questions regarding the rise of Indigenous involvement in Western science need to be investigated and answered.

### **Our involvement in their science**

The works of Mary Ann Bin-Sallik provide us with a major review of Indigenous education and the tertiary sector by an Indigenous scholar. She argues that the 'participation of Aborigines in the higher education system is a recent event' (1990: xii). Bin-Sallik's work investigates Indigenous activism and the development of Aboriginal educational policies from the 1960s-1980s, which contributed to the first wave of Aboriginal graduates in higher education. Bin-Sallik argues that 'it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that any hope for a renaissance of Aboriginal intellectual and cultural heritage appeared' (1990: 4).

A high water mark for Indigenous access to higher education was the shift from policies of protectionism to assimilation. Assimilation was adopted as official policy at the 1937 conference of 'Native' Welfare Ministers allowing Indigenous migration from isolated mission reserves to the cities. The year of 1957 saw the establishment of advancement bodies such as the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). FCAATSI advocated Indigenous civil and legal rights and equality (McConnochie et al. 1988: 123). Bin-Sallik (1990: 16) claims that whilst political progress was evident from FCAATSI, the historical problems facing Indigenous Australians seeking higher education remained. These were:

- The failure of secondary school systems to equip Aboriginal people with conventional entry qualifications meant that most were being denied entry to tertiary institutions;
- The situation of being the only Aboriginal in an otherwise white environment resulted in many of the early students being overwhelmed and dropping out of these institutions; and
- The university subject guides showed little vocational interests for Aboriginal people, and gave a gross distortion of their history and worth.

These factors are of importance in understanding the issues of tension for Indigenous peoples accessing higher education. The rise of Indigenous resistance movements of the 1960s and 1970s was influential in calling for Indigenous equality and justice. Moreover, the 1967 referendum was a crucial historical moment, with Indigenous Australians becoming citizens in their own country and being included in the census. Other benefits were the extension of legislative power for Indigenous Australians from the state to the federal government. In 1975 the Federal Race Discrimination Act was passed, outlawing prejudice and discrimination. This was a defining moment for Indigenous inclusion in higher education. Whilst racial discrimination was outlawed in many universities, institutionalised and oppressive structures remained.

Aboriginal education progressed via the formation of the National Aboriginal Educational Committee (NAEC), which in 1985 played a pivotal role in the increased participation of Indigenous peoples in higher education (Commonwealth of Australia 1985, 1989). A further crucial factor for the inclusion of Indigenous Australians in higher education was the establishment of Indigenous enclaves within universities to recruit, support and maintain Indigenous students. 1973 was a landmark year in Aboriginal tertiary education in Australia with the implementation of the Aboriginal Task Force programs within the school of Social Studies at the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT) in Adelaide (Bin-Sallik 1990).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The development of Indigenous enclaves in universities, and their successes and failures to recruit, maintain and support Indigenous peoples have received research attention but are published little outside the reporting obligations to the commonwealth on funding expenditure/outcomes. Most of this research remains in the numerous conference proceedings of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Association. The role such centres played in the development of Indigenous Studies as a discipline and the supportive nature of these centres in the earlier careers of Indigenous scholars are also yet to be analysed in depth. Indeed, some institutions admitted Indigenous students as

Other research has framed the emergence of Indigenous scholarship via the growth of Indigenous Studies as a discipline. This research was conducted by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in 1999 for the Australian Research Council (ARC). The ARC (1999) report, titled *Research of Interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, highlights as a key historical moment for Indigenous participation in science the increasing role played by Indigenous scholars in the critique of social sciences, especially Ros Langford (1983) and Marcia Langton (1981, 1985).<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, the inclusion of Indigenous scholars in disciplinary analysis and theoretical debates allowed Indigenous perspectives to be realised. Langford's (1983) and Langton's (1981, 1985) papers were instrumental in announcing to the academy of science that Indigenous identities and cultures can only be partially understood from within inherited Western scientific traditions. Moreover, these works show that dominant scientific discourses of racial difference were rooted firmly in historical notions that were socially constructed. This has had sociological, political and economic consequences for the Indigenous scholar and his/her community. It is here that the strength and courage of those earlier Indigenous scholars comes to the fore. Not only did the Indigenous scholar have to be a political advocate for Indigenous peoples, but s/he also had to rapidly become familiar with classical Western epistememes in order to identify partial distortions and racial biases within the philosophic reasoning of science.

Professor Colin Bourke (1994: 1), the first Indigenous scholar to become Dean of the then Faculty of Aboriginal and Islander Studies at the University of South Australia, claims that 'Indigenous Australians rarely, if ever, participated in higher education courses in the first 175 years of European settlement in Australia'.<sup>10</sup> He also reminds us that according to the '1971 census, 3.5% of Aboriginal People aged 15 years and over had proceeded beyond year 9 at school compared to 29% of the rest of the population'. In 1976, the census recorded just 78 Aboriginal people with university degrees. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students doubled over the five years from 2,565 in 1988 to 5,578 in 1993 (Bourke 1994: 3). In 1992, the Department of Employment, Education and Training estimated that over 6,000 Indigenous students would be enrolled by 1995 (DEET 1992). Recent Department of Employment, Education and Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA 2000: 15) statistics on Indigenous participation in higher education claim that Indigenous participation rose from approx 2000 students in 1987 to approx 8000 students in 1999. This increasing trend is an indicator of the importance of higher education to the career aspirations of Indigenous Australians.

The limited participation of Indigenous peoples in formal education in the first 175 years of colonisation highlights the very slow movement towards Indigenous intellectual integration into tertiary institutions. At times, Indigenous inclusion to the academy was considered morally wrong, if not illegal. It is also helpful to understand that Indigenous scholarly participation in Western science had to engage in two fundamental tasks simultaneously. Whilst unsettling some institutional barriers that prevented Indigenous participation, early Indigenous scholars also had to examine and rethink traditional scientific research methodologies. They had to revise old methods, or invent and apply new ones to expose 'racial' matters as they really were. My brief charting of a small but growing field of study by Indigenous scholars has the purpose of calling for more in-depth analysis and re-assessment of Australian history regarding the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in higher education and science.

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late as 1963 to have them graduate in 1966 (see Read 1990:51-81). However, 1973 marked the evolution of Aboriginal tertiary education in Australia, with the implementation of the Aboriginal Task Force programs within the School of Social Studies at the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT), Adelaide, South Australia (see Bin-Sallik 1990). Little is understood of the role and function Indigenous enclaves played in the removal of overt and covert restrictions on Indigenous participation in science and the space these centres created for Indigenous scholars. These areas require extensive investigation that is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>9</sup> Langford (1983) and Langton (1981, 1985) papers are essential reading for any Indigenous scholar. Whilst these papers specifically address social sciences in particular the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology, the ideas contained within these papers pertain to research and Indigenous representation more broadly.

<sup>10</sup> Bourke's keynote address in 1994 was instrumental in critiquing Commonwealth funding structures to argue that Aboriginal enclaves in higher education are more mainstreamed with little or no Indigenous autonomy

More questions than answers arise from this history: How did early Indigenous scholars contribute to the inclusion of further Indigenous peoples in higher education? Did the inclusion of the Indigenous scholar necessarily ensure better representations of Indigenous peoples and issues in the sciences? What difference did the Indigenous scholar make to exposing cultural bias in research epistemologies and research methodologies? What is the role of the contemporary Indigenous scholar? It is to this last question I now turn.

### **A new basis for contemporary critical Indigenous scholarship**

There is a new basis emerging for contemporary critical Indigenous scholarship. Since the mid 1960s, Indigenous critiques of science in Australia have called for the transformation of Western science and its applications to more progressive kinds of knowledge seeking methods. Contemporary Indigenist thinkers have challenged the 'racialised' foundations of science. Indeed, Western scientific epistemologies, ethics and meta-theories are not only racialised but also sexist and classist. Indigenism must overcome the dichotomies in scientific thought such as object/subject, rational/irrational and white/black. Indigenism is now asking: 'can we participate in Western science without reinventing the hegemonic colonial imagination about ourselves?' If Western scientific traditions and structures are intimately connected to 'racialisation' through neo-colonialism, can the Indigenist scholar use such science for intellectual and political emancipation?

The development of contemporary Indigenist research approaches, whilst in its infancy, has contributed to a quiet methodological revolution (see Rigney 1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Nakata 1998; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Brady 1992a, 1992b; Williams and Stewart 1992; Arbon 1992). In seeking progressive approaches to knowledge production, Indigenist critiques of social science seek to locate tensions, conflicts and contradictions within investigative methods. This will help to overcome the 'epistemic violence'<sup>11</sup> forced upon Indigenous peoples. Sivaramakrishnan states what it is like to exist as 'other' and the effects of epistemic violence:

*But you can't even imagine what it is to live in a culture.... Imagine rethinking all your language and all your exchanges and encounters, all your greetings.... And above all imagine having to do this, in the face of the arrogance of a culture which has not only ruled much of the world but also finds it inconceivable that a culture formally its subject and slave might possess anything even resembling knowledge, let alone wisdom. (1989:6)*

Gaps and extensions in research investigative practices are now being sought in order to begin our revolutionary transformation in order to overcome 'epistemic violence'. We know that Indigenous peoples are the most researched group in history. Indigenist scholarship in Australia, whilst diverse in theory and discipline, is unified in its defiance of the denial of rights and of all things Indigenous. These writings are attempting to undermine the monological authority of the Western narrative of representation with regard to Indigenous nationhood. Similarly, such writings reject the universalist tendency of Western research traditions to homogenise Indigenous identities and cultures.

The continuation of Indigenous scholars' engagement with the intellectual traditions of their cultures draws upon the emergence of a broader global intellectual movement through which the 'colonised' and the 'marginal' speak back to the 'centre'. The classics of anti-colonialism have provided valuable theoretical approaches to the contemporary Indigenous Australian Intellectual Movement in its interrogation of dominant research tendencies that assume central positions of power and truth (see Deloria 1969; Said 1978; Ngugi Wa Thiongo 1986; Bhabha 1983; Spivak 1988; & Fanon 1963). Specific theorists such as Standfield (1994) and Asante (1988) seek to specifically identify underlying racist distortions in research epistemology.

Essentially, the rise of Indigenism in Australia is another successive wave of epistemological theorising in social science, like feminism, post-modernism and post-colonialism. Such approaches to knowledge have brought about an 'undisciplining' of the disciplines in science, which has created a space for the emergence of an Australian Indigenism. Traditional disciplines are now being de-stabilised to allow space for emerging theories of social discourse. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) investigate what they call the 'blurring of distinct disciplinary boundaries' between social sciences and humanities. Accompanying this transformation is the development of new qualitative research practices.

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<sup>11</sup> 'Epistemic violence' is a term used by Homi Bhabha (Bhabha 1983).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) the post-positivist period of science in the early 1990s saw a variety of new interpretive and qualitative research designs being developed. It is the acceptance of multiple methodologies of qualitative research and the acknowledgment of the “crisis of representation” that have allowed space in the academy for Indigenous scholars. Clearly, these shifts in research approaches, and the increase in numbers of Indigenous postgraduates since the 1980s, have nurtured a breeding ground for contemporary Indigenous Australian scholarship. Whilst the enlightenment last century has caused a transformation of research practice, orthodoxies of ‘positivism’, ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivism’ maintain their presence in the sciences.

Whilst contemporary Indigenism recognises the power of science to colonise, it also recognises the power of science to contribute to the decolonisation of Indigenous peoples’ lives. I call this process the ‘journey of academic contradiction’. This phrase acknowledges that the academy of sciences has contributed to our own oppression on one hand, whilst raising our consciousness to the functions and location of oppression on the other. Without such a journey, emancipation from neo-colonial discourse falls victim to ongoing epistemic and cultural hegemony. Nakata speaks to this contradiction by suggesting to Indigenous tertiary students that

*In order to understand our own position better and to ultimately act to improve it, we must first immerse ourselves in and understand the very systems of thought, ideas and knowledge that have been instrumental in producing our position. (Nakata 1998:4)*

Such a journey is traumatic and deculturalising for some of our Indigenous peoples. However, without such an intellectual journey our contemporary problems and their solutions remain neither knowable nor visible. The ‘journey of contradiction’ in academe is problematic. However, we simply would not be in the current historical moment of Indigenous epistemic revolution and scientific transformation without it. Contemporary Indigenous Australian critical studies is grounded in the Indigenous struggle for self-determination and sovereignty. It is also grounded in the analysis of power, control and dominance maintained by Western orientated discourses.

“Talkin’ up to the White Women”, a paper by Indigenist scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000), interrogates notions of power in scientific research. The sacredness of identity in postcolonial notions is cleverly exposed by Moreton-Robinson. In her construction of Indigenous Australian standpoint theory, she shows how positions of alterity can be understood through analyses of privilege and power.

The development of Indigenous standpoint theory has also emerged in the works of Indigenist theorist Martin Nakata. Nakata (1998) interrogates the power of very early anthropological texts and their representations of Torres Strait Islanders. His work demonstrates how Western scientific methods legitimate hegemonic racist descriptions of Islanders. Nakata (1998:1) stresses the ‘necessity for Indigenous students and scholars to develop particular standpoint theories from which to read knowledges that have been produced about Indigenous positions by outsiders’.

The work of Nakata and Moreton-Robinson begins to chart theoretically the journey of a scientific encounter by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The objective is to develop Indigenous standpoints that enable Indigenous scholars to read, write and speak back to hegemonic knowledges that have formed about perceived Indigenous positions in the “Western order of things” (Nakata 1998:4).

Equally, my own writings on Indigenist Research Methodology (see Rigney 1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999a, 1999b) offer a framework to the Indigenous scholar regarding alternative research approaches. Indigenist research is different to standpoint theory, but it also offers a strategy for Indigenous research by Indigenous peoples, for Indigenous peoples, and in the interests of Indigenous peoples. Indigenist Research offers three core, inter-related principles: Resistance (as the emancipatory imperative); political integrity; and privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices.

These new approaches by Indigenous scholars provide alternative conceptual and analytical strategies for contemporary Indigenous Studies. They do not attempt to be free of discourses outside the Indigenous experience, but rather attempt to develop new approaches for Indigenous intellectuals to write and speak about each other, and about the role our work must play in the development of a neo-colonial free future.

The emergence of contemporary critical Indigenous Australian scholarship is forging a new intellectual agenda for Indigenous Australians. Although social science investigative methods have seen a shift in the post-modern era, this is not enough. Indigenist writers still struggle against old dichotomies of



scientific thought such as the crisis of representation, subject/object and rational/irrational systems of thought. Contemporary literary theory in the post-modern era has been successful in a dialogue at the level of theory and methodology in the social sciences, and this has led to the transformation of research practices. However, because of our history in a colonial state, Indigenous Australian scholars are only now beginning to expose the state of historical and contemporary theory. New skills are being developed all the time to dispute and decode investigative research methods that confirm the rhetoric of 'ancientness' and 'oddity' that is unique to the Australian context. Indigenism in Australia is only beginning to ask questions of the social sciences similar to those raised in the past by feminists like Sandra Harding:<sup>12</sup> Who speaks for whom and who can be the knower? What should be the purpose and pursuit of knowledge? For us, we now ask: What is the role of Indigenous scholars in research? How can Indigenous scholars move toward Indigenous intellectual sovereignty?

### **Indigenism: toward Indigenous Australian intellectual sovereignty.**

Utilisation of Indigenous philosophies, ideas and imagery is fundamental to the new Indigenism emerging in Australia. Producers of Indigenous Australian research literature aim to push the boundaries of social science in order to make intellectual space for Indigenous cultural knowledge systems that were denied in the past. The goal of our Indigenist methodological revolution is to overcome alterity by producing counter-narratives through alternative investigative methods. The need for Indigenist theory is therefore still paramount to advance political sovereignty, self-determination and the maintenance of self-identity for Indigenous Australians. The Indigenous scholar also needs to consider the multi-layered problematic of knowledge production. Martin Nakata explains the task ahead:

*One task then is how to inform the Indigenous scholar of the way that knowledges work to discount, diminish, represent or misrepresent, and then to defend from the position of knowledge about knowledge. Not to just force reflection onto the practices of those who produce knowledges about us but for us to more fully understand our position in relation to knowledge and its production. It is also about how to inform the scholar about positive aspects of knowledge production that can then be redeployed to serve their own interests. (Nakata 1998:4)*

Like Nakata (1998), I recognise that the emancipatory goals of Indigenous political sovereignty and self-determination cannot be realised without theory. Therefore, Indigenism must develop a responsible and accountable Indigenist discourse that is theoretically sophisticated and robust. It cannot afford hegemonic and simplistic generalisations and conclusions. What then is the role of contemporary Indigenism and its scholarship regarding research methodologies and the development of contemporary Indigenous Australian critical studies? Moreover, what is the intellectual agenda for Indigenous Australian scholars?

The concept of Intellectual Sovereignty has much to offer in relation to contemporary Indigenous Australian intellectualism. This concept derives from the work of my dear friend and colleague Robert Warrior, an Osage First Nation American whose work has influenced me greatly (Warrior 1995, 1999).

Warrior stresses that American Indian intellectual traditions need the freedom to break out of the strictures of Western academic conventions, as Native American Indians seek out their own ground of intellectual engagement (Warrior 1999:11). Warrior's primary concern is critical reflection on the meaning of freedom through the practice of intellectual sovereignty for Indigenous scholars. Warrior deconstructs the scholarship of Vine Deloria Junior and John Joseph Matthews, two prominent Native Americans, to arrive at his conclusions. In brief, Warrior (1995) makes four major points that outline the need for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty:<sup>13</sup>

- The need to capitalise on the gains made in the previous decade and solidify the process of the Indigenous communities taking control of their own destinies;

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<sup>12</sup> I thank Dr Zane Ma Rhea for introducing me to the excellent work of Sandra Harding (Harding 1986).

<sup>13</sup> This is my overview of a complex concept. To gain the context see Warrior (1995, 1999)

- The responsibility which sovereignty creates is orientated primarily toward the existence and continuance of the group;
- Intellectual sovereignty provides a framework for developing an Indigenous intellectual praxis that can help make sense of the spiritual, political and social lives of First peoples; and
- The diversity of First Nation intellectualism is now to proceed toward intellectual sovereignty and not simply interrogating non-Indigenous work but the works of ourselves as Indigenous scholars.

If Indigenous intellectual sovereignty is to be emancipatory it must be ‘process driven’ rather than outcome orientated. In other words, it is now critical for Indigenous scholars committed to sovereignty to realise that we too must struggle for intellectual sovereignty and allow the definition and articulation of what that means to emerge as we critically reflect on our struggle. A ‘process-centred’ understanding of intellectual sovereignty is a way forward for us as Indigenous intellectuals to recover Indigenous Australian intellectual traditions, and to invent new ones in order to find contemporary solutions to the world that is ours today. In short, Warrior defines sovereignty as the path to freedom. Freedom, though, is not one that can be immediately defined and lived. Rather, the challenge is to articulate what sorts of strategies for freedom are needed as these emerge from the experience of the group. Liberation and the exercising of sovereignty are therefore derived from what the group recognises from their own struggles (Warrior 1995:91).

One could argue that such theory must strive towards developing an Indigenous Australian intellectual praxis that comprehends the political, spiritual and social world in Australia today. The concepts of freedom and liberation from neo-colonialism cannot be discussed meaningfully outside the practice of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty. Indigenous Intellectual sovereignty means moving toward a cultural criticism that is embedded in the Indigenous Australian experience, and that is influenced by the intellectual work we do as scholars for the social, political, economic and cultural struggle of Indigenous Australians. At the heart of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty is a theory that works toward the possibility of intellectual emancipation.

Unless Western knowledge orthodoxies are interrogated, the basis of their power will continue to reproduce the colonised as a fixed reality, including the subtext of Indigenous *Intellectual nullius*. The struggle for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty is to move our humanness, our scholarship, our identities and our knowledge systems from invisible to visible.

Personally, I am still unravelling the colonial encounter, and I have only now come to understand the racialised and ethnic character of the social sciences as institutions and practices. We Indigenous scholars continue to live in a world informed by Western science in every possible way in our daily lives. However, our acceptance of science does not embrace our historical exclusion from science. Rather, it shows our love for the act of discovery and the valuing of ideas that transforms our colonised world. It is here that the need arises to seek a new basis for Indigenous research.

Indigenist scholarship will not give up its speaking or writing positions just because the scientific frameworks we inherited are ‘racialised’. What is clear is the need to understand the causal tendencies of ‘racialised’ practices and to move beyond their restrictions. Indigenism as a body of knowledge has to challenge the fundamental dichotomies of scientific thought such as subject/object, rational/irrational and White/Black. The last decade of development of guidelines to control the behaviour of non-Indigenous researchers in our Indigenous communities has drawn our attention away from the development of alternative Indigenist research approaches. Indigenist scholars now need to move beyond this collaborative process to those hard issues in research methodologies. We must now address some of the things that cause tension between Indigenous and non-Indigenous views of scientific investigation.

## Conclusion

To strive for sovereignty is to strive for the possibility of a non-neo-colonial future. Indigenous intellectual sovereignty must be integral to this process. Such a concept gives us tremendous insight regarding the direction in which Indigenism in Australia must proceed. Contemporary Indigenous intellectual scholarship must go through a process of building an intellectual community<sup>14</sup>. This

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<sup>14</sup> Writing is not a task done in isolation. Writing for me comes at a cost, and I therefore want to give respect and praise. Thanks to Professor Gus Worby, Geoff Grey, Simone Ulalka Tur, Dr Doug Morgan

process will define the future. The return to traditional forms of Indigenous knowledge and cultural realisation can complement the research approaches that are being developed in the contemporary context. The birth of a new body of knowledge by Indigenous scholars is emerging in what I describe as Contemporary Indigenous Australian Critical Studies. Whatever the future holds, it is an exciting time for our mob and other Australians.

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