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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Broadening academia: an epistemic shift towards relationality

Maryanne Macdonald ^a, Eyal Gringart^b, Darren Garvey^a and Kenneth Hayward^a

^aKurungkurl Katitjin Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup, Australia; ^bSchool of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup, Australia

ABSTRACT

In this article, we present a critical reflection on the academy's approach to knowledge production and dissemination in Australian universities and propose a paradigm shift towards an approach that actively promotes Indigenous knowledges within the academic canon and searches for complementarity and shared interests between Indigenous and Western epistemes. We begin this article with discussion of the role of the academy, and Western and Indigenous discourses around knowledge. From there we discuss contemporary issues of bushfire management and the Juukan Gorge destruction as illustrations to make a case for the role of the academy in engaging with knowledges that arise outside Western paradigms; and translating those knowledges to diverse audiences. Finally, we examine obstacles that must be addressed in a robust academic pursuit of epistemological synergy. Issues of knowledge ownership, epistemological and methodological challenges, and neo-colonialism are discussed as critical aspects of all collaboration towards knowledge integration.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Introduction

In this article, we present a critical reflection on the academy's approach to knowledge production and dissemination in Australian universities and propose a paradigm shift towards an approach that actively promotes Indigenous knowledges within the academic canon and searches for complementarity and shared interests between Indigenous and Western epistemes. We draw on the tradition of decolonisation that has arisen from the work of other scholars (Agrawal, 1995; Brigg, 2016; Bullen & Flavel, 2017; Christie, 2006; Meyer, 2008; Ober & Bat, 2007; Moreton-Robinson, 2017; Robertson et al., 2016; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020; 2019), and explore the benefits that a collaborative, and de-imperialised research and curriculum agenda, can bring to varied disciplines of higher education.

We discuss the work of eminent Indigenous Australian scholars, as well as Western and global voices, to argue that the Australian academy has much to benefit from normalising robust engagement with diverse knowledges, particularly Indigenous knowledges, which have been developed over extensive time within the local environment. We discuss frameworks that may allow non-Indigenous academics to engage

meaningfully and respectfully with those knowledges, and which put boundaries on how such engagements might occur.

Many of the arguments made in this article centre on relationality, relatedness and the contextual nature of knowledge. So, we first begin by explaining our own context and relatedness to the arguments in this article. One author is Anglo-Australian, another Jewish-Australian, another Whadjuk Noongar and one author of Torres Strait Islander heritage. We are colleagues who have been brought together by our shared work teaching about Indigenous knowledges, within the disciplines of education, psychology and health. Each semester, we witness a particular misconception which non-Indigenous students, who comprise the majority in our university and Australian higher education more broadly, bring to their learning. These students enter our courses with an assumption that Indigenous perspectives are of relevance to their studies only insofar as they may expect to professionally interact with Indigenous people. Through our courses, we hope to convince non-Indigenous students of the same argument we present in this article: that the local, contextual and relational knowledges inherent in Indigenous perspectives hold professional value for all practitioners across all disciplines. The argument for authentic scholarly interaction with Indigenous knowledges is supported by eminent scholars within both Western and Indigenous traditions and underlined by the strategic directions in higher education policy documents (Universities Australia, 2017), calling for academics to embed Indigenous perspectives across all disciplines.

We begin this article with discussion of the role of the academy, and Western as well as Indigenous discourses around knowledge. From there we explore illustrations of knowledge integration and make a case that observations made by people of different societies and epistemologies can be brought together to create new, formally accepted and empirically defined knowledge. Finally, we examine obstacles to be addressed in the academic pursuit of epistemological synergy. Issues of knowledge ownership, epistemological and methodological challenges, and neo-colonialism are discussed as critical aspects of collaborations towards knowledge integration.

Paradigms, relationality and interest convergence

We begin from the principle of relationality, believing that all peoples and knowledges are connected in ways that may be temporal, cultural, physical, material or spiritual, and that our role as scholars is to identify new learning that arises from those connections. From this basis, we define contextualised research as that which is reflexive and identifies connections and interdependence of all things, living and non-living (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003).

In the current article, we define paradigm as a system of assumptions, concepts, values and practices that is principal in the construction of a worldview and guides methodologies for evaluating, testing and validating such conceptions of the world as well as their components. This definition is congruent with Kuhn (1977) and allows the understanding that incorporation of Indigenous and Western knowledges in academia could lead to epistemological synergies and a paradigm shift.

Relationality has been defined as a key paradigm within Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies by Indigenous scholars (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Moreton-Robinson,

2017). One of the first scholars to write of Indigenous relationality within the academy was Noonuccal woman Dr Karen Martin:

All things are recognised and respected for their place in the overall system. Whilst they are differentiated, these relations ... serve to define and unite, not to oppose or alienate. (Martin & Mirraboo, 2003, p. 207)

Such an approach is not unique to Indigenous epistemes. Some of the Western academy's most prominent scholars have criticised the scientific claim to objectivity, instead highlighting that a fundamental reality of all knowledge creation is its contextuality, being created within paradigms, which are affected by social, historic, political and cultural forces (Foucault, 2003; Kuhn, 1977). Frequently, the prevailing Western scientific paradigm emphasises empiricism and is often positivistic. We propose that the 'normal science' facilitated under this paradigm is inherently limited, and we call for a paradigmatic shift to knowledge production that is broader than either the Western or Indigenous epistemologies on their own, a paradigm which would be based on relationality, cultural equity and mutual respect.

This is not to say that knowledge is relative or disengaged from material reality, only that there are forces driving what and how knowledge is pursued. As Bazzul and Carter (2017) state, 'Scientific knowledge can be empirically valid *and* co-extensive with socio-political and historical contexts that employ, produce and order such knowledge' (p. 441). In this way, they explain Foucault's (2003) argument that knowledge is employed by institutions of power and becomes a powerful political tool. Ministries of knowledge segregation that facilitate power differentials must be dissolved so that collaborating and learning would be horizontally and not hierarchically conceptualised.

Critical race theorist Derrick Bell identified that when political and economic interests of the powerful converge with social justice, the resultant change can benefit all groups (Bell, 1980). In this article, we utilise Bell's (1980, p. 523) 'interest convergence' framework to argue for paradigmatic shift. That is, our argument for the Academy to robustly and genuinely engage with Indigenous epistemologies is based on a belief that doing so enables the academy to create sustainable solutions that benefit diverse groups (Bonta et al., 2017; Brigg, 2016; Meyer, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2017; Yunkaporta, 2019; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020).

Other scholars have already noted that there are knowledges within Western and Indigenous epistemes that do not easily mix (Christie, 2006). We agree with Christie (2006) that there is no sense in forcing synthesis where the interests of different knowledge holders diverge. The exploration of knowledge synergies should not become a basis for loss of heritage, or for appropriation of intellectual property. Relationality requires that there is safety in disagreement; an ability to learn from each other without fear of appropriation or loss of rights. Non-Indigenous researchers, organisations and governments should expect to be tested for their preparedness to act responsibly with Indigenous knowledge. Within Indigenous knowledges there is a strong connection between theory and praxis, argues Brayboy (2005), hence, activism becomes a natural outcome of Indigenous perspectives and may reasonably be expected within an epistemology that prioritises accountability and relationality between entities.

Finally, the arguments made in this article are based on the work of many scholars who have explored the place of culture, identity, race and knowledge within the

academy through ideas known as Cultural Interface Theory (Nakata, 2007a), Standpoint Theory (Foley, 2003; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020) and Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1980; Brayboy, 2005; Dunbar, 2008).

The role of the academy

Formalised higher education in Australia aims to produce and reproduce knowledge of global significance. Doing so requires that universities move on from academic traditions that deliver a purely Eurocentric curriculum and canon of knowledge (Foley, 2003; Pitman, 2020). The problem is not that European knowledge is reproduced by Australian universities, rather, that Indigenous knowledge is not consistently afforded gravitas, despite its relevance to contemporary society (Moreton-Robinson, 2017; Nakata, 2007b; Tibebu, 2011).

To paraphrase Kuhn (1977), the nature of knowledge is best understood when the history of knowledge is also known. The avoidance of Indigenous and non-Western knowledges within the mainstream Western academy is not a new phenomenon, rather, it arises from a history of scientific racism that believed the White European race was the epitome of civilisation and intelligence (Tibebu, 2011). The Western academy today has the opportunity to explore what earlier Western scientists did not, and engage productively in the exploration and generation of holistic knowledges.

Further in this article, we present case studies, which illustrate the mutual benefits that arise when scholars identify ways to translate Indigenous knowledges for a broader audience. We further submit that where Indigenous Australian knowledges are recognised within the mainstream canon of Australian higher education praxes and teaching, the Australian academy can contribute to decolonisation and reconciliation in meaningful ways (Dunbar, 2008; Foley, 2003).

In Australia, policy imperatives have reinforced the utilitarian goal of higher education for over a century (Pitman, 2020), imperatives demonstrated most recently by changes to higher education fee structures for arts and humanities degrees (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020). Such goals often do not merge well with Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies (Brigg, 2016; Bullen & Flavell, 2017; Walter, 2016), yet there are examples such as those discussed later in this article, which demonstrate the capacity of scholars to find beneficence for both Indigenous knowledge holders and government policymakers, by translating knowledges from one form to another. In this manner, the academy, driven by robust intellectual research emanating from a new paradigm, can employ interest convergence to make that research translatable and mutually beneficial to diverse groups, even those which still operate under the previously 'normal science'. Before we present illustrations of the shared beneficence that arises from a holistic approach, we ground our argument within the understood nature of Indigenous and Western epistemologies.

Defining Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledges

All peoples have their own distinct beliefs of what knowledge is and what knowing entails. (Meyer, 2008, p. 217)

Although the broad terms ‘Indigenous Knowledge’ and ‘Western Knowledge’ have been used for some time by sociologists and philosophers, neither of these worldviews is unanimously held within either cultural group, nor are they static (Agrawal, 1995; Barca & Arenas, 2010; Moreton-Robinson, 2017; Turnbull, 1982). Academic discussions of these broad terms typically ascribe empirical, positivist, rational, reductionist, quantifiable and commodified approaches to Western Knowledge (Pitman, 2020), and observational, functional, constructivist, metaphysical and relational approaches to Indigenous Knowledge (Barca & Arenas, 2010; Brayboy, 2005; Meyer, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2017; Seroto, 2014; Turnbull, 1982; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). Under this ascribed duality, we see that through Indigenous Australian epistemologies, knowledge informs humans as to who we are, how we belong and our obligation to other entities both in humanity and nature (Moreton-Robinson, 2017; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). Conversely, the dominant discourse around Western epistemology reflects a paradigm shaped during the Enlightenment era; namely that humans are the masters of knowledge, using it for individual and societal advancement (Pitman, 2020). Under such a paradigm, knowledge creates opportunity, and rights, and cannot be divorced from a utilitarian agenda.

Such dualities can overemphasise the perceived empiricism of Western knowledge. Western epistemologies are couched in trial and error, temporal observations and evidence-based practices. These same practices are applied across other cultures including that of Indigenous Australians, and their knowledge as well as practices have successfully stood the test of time for thousands of years and, hence, deserve equal recognition in the academy (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2014; Seroto, 2014).

The reluctance of the broader academy to robustly and intellectually engage with Indigenous knowledges has led Indigenous authors to powerfully define and defend the place of Indigenous research methodologies and epistemologies within the established academy (Brayboy, 2005; Bullen & Flavell, 2017; Dunbar, 2008; Foley, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2017; 2004; Nakata, 2007b; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). To argue that Western Knowledge is universal, and not culturally located, falsely creates a sense of homogeneity that allows Western Knowledge to be perceived as generalisable, whilst Indigenous Knowledge is perceived temporally, spatially, and as culturally specific and therefore only relevant in a narrow field of disciplines (Barca & Arenas, 2010). All science is epistemic, historically contingent and socially contextualised to answer the questions and problems apparent within the scientists’ paradigm and lived experience (Bazzul & Carter, 2017; Kuhn, 1977). Bazzul and Carter (2017) employ Foucault’s (2003) work to argue that interrogation of contemporary paradigms and assumptions is essential to the discovery of solutions to contemporary problems. The development of a relational research paradigm requires non-Indigenous scholars to move away from any reductionistic and individualistic paradigms of knowledge, to collectivist, relational conceptualisations that acknowledge the interconnectedness of different societies, and the environment (Moreton-Robinson, 2017; Sonn, 2009; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020; Yunkaporta, 2019).

Turnbull (1982) argued that all knowledges are formed in answer to two basic questions: ‘How do we survive?’ and ‘Why are we here?’. Applying theories of Western philosophers Marx and Whorf, Turnbull (1982) suggests that societies attempt to answer these questions based on observations influenced by economic, demographic, social,

biological, environmental, technological, linguistic and metaphysical determinants. It is easy to see how such determinants, which vary so widely by location and over time, have led to the evolution of different epistemologies in societies whose experience of such determinants is so varied. In our contemporary multicultural and globalised world, many of these determinants are conflating as divergent cultures interact, giving impetus to the search for a more integrated worldview that recognises the knowledge of different epistemologies. The key to such integration is that it arises from a strategic collaboration that meets the requirements of interest convergence, answering Turnbull's (1982) two questions 'Why are we here?' and 'How do we survive?' for both Indigenous and Western knowledge holders.

Illustrations of interest convergence in the Australian academy

Through the paradigm of relationality, we realise that global survival is dependent on the ability to integrate diverse knowledges through strategic and contextualised collaborations. One of the greatest contemporary concerns for survival for all people is that of environmental sustainability and resource capacity. Hence, the illustrations we present are focused on an issue of strategic and immediate relevance to the Australian environmental context; that of fire management. The increasingly frequent occurrence of catastrophic bushfires in Australia devastates people, destroys wildlife and stock and damages property. Further, they cost billions of dollars per annum, through loss of agricultural and economic productivity as well as environmental vitality (Sharples et al., 2016), hence understanding how fires promulgate and how they can be managed is an essential concern facing contemporary Australia.

There is growing scholarly recognition that Indigenous fire management knowledges have quantifiable ecological and economic benefits for Australia (Bonta et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2012; Russell-Smith et al., 2013). Before European colonisation of Australia, Indigenous peoples had engaged in sustainable fire management practices that shaped the environment and supported local populations as well as ecosystems to live without threat of catastrophic fires. These practices were misunderstood and deemed inferior by early British colonisers who forcibly and violently removed Indigenous peoples from their Country under the legal guise of *terra nullius*, to create large swaths of grazing land for cattle (Bonta et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2012). Since the late twentieth century, Traditional Owners in parts of rural Australia, having won legal recognition of their rights to their land, have consulted with scientists regarding the need for a return to Indigenous burning practices to reduce the prevalence of uncontrolled wildfires, with their concurrent cost to ecosystems and human life (Bonta et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2012; Russell-Smith et al., 2013). Russell-Smith et al. (2013) identified that application of Indigenous fire knowledges at scale, such as throughout the 28,000 km² West Arnhem Land Fire Abatement Project, resulted in quantifiable reduction in greenhouse gas emissions as required by Australia's international commitments on climate change, at the same time as providing cultural connection and employment opportunities for Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

In another example, anthropologists Coddington et al. (2015) quantified the economic benefit to the Western Australian government of fire practices employed by Martu

peoples in the Central Western Desert region, demonstrating that the economic contribution of Martu fire practices to ecosystem conservation outweighed Government spending on remote community infrastructure in that region. That is, Coddling et al. (2015) demonstrated that remaining on Country was not only beneficial to Martu people who enjoyed the social and cultural benefits of connection to their land and kin, but also beneficial to the Commonwealth, who enjoyed economic and environmental return on their investment. At the time of their writing, these returns had not been investigated or quantified by Commonwealth representatives who were considering the closure of remote communities, an outcome that Coddling et al. (2015) hoped to prevent.

Morphy (2016) identifies that Coddling et al.'s (2015) economic quantification of Martu fire practices is clearly intended to speak to a capitalist epistemology, and that as such, Coddling et al. (2015) were well aware that such an argument was unlikely to reflect the ontological perspectives that Martu themselves applied to the value of their work. By identifying an economic argument for the Commonwealth, which aligned with the political goals of Martu in remaining on Country, Coddling et al. (2015) enacted an excellent example of interest convergence theory. Such work is strategic in the manner which it identifies shared beneficence even where there is no shared epistemology between stakeholders, and demonstrates the unique potential of the academy in translating Indigenous knowledges for a wide audience.

Over the last five decades, movement within the academy towards recognition of Indigenous ecological knowledges has been slow (Cook et al., 2012), a likely result of the difficulties that have arisen out of epistemological difference and beliefs within the academy of superiority of European epistemologies (Bonta et al., 2017; Tibebu, 2011). In their work on avian fire-spreading (or 'firehawks') in northern Australia, Bonta et al. (2017) are notable within the academy for beginning with the presumption that Indigenous knowledge holders do not need their knowledge to be authenticated by non-Indigenous researchers in order for such knowledge to be valid and authoritative. Yet, having begun with the belief that Indigenous knowledges (encountered both in Dreaming stories and in conversation) about avian behaviour were correct and only needed quantifying for translation to a wider audience, these researchers were able to gather rigorous empirical evidence documenting the behaviour of certain raptor species in spreading controlled fires, thereby improving the corpus of data informing regional fire management policy (Bonta et al., 2017).

Each of the examples presented here identifies significant new knowledges entering the academy through non-Indigenous researchers engaging robustly and respectfully with Indigenous knowledges. These knowledges are intimately linked to place and yet hold ecological, economic and social value for Australia and other parts of the globe.

The cost to the academy, and non-Indigenous society, of not recognising the importance and global relevance of Indigenous knowledges was highlighted by the destruction of caves in Juukan Gorge in May 2020. Mining company Rio Tinto blew up the caves in order to expand its iron-ore production, despite having been made aware, at least six years earlier, that the caves contained evidence of continuous human habitation going back over 46,000 years (Hunt, 2020; Wahlquist, 2020). Although reprehensible, the destruction was lawful under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 (WA) as approval had been granted before the company and Traditional Owners were provided archaeological evidence of the sites' particular significance (Altman & Tout, 2020; Hunt, 2020; Pearson,

2020). Notably, archaeological evidence of human habitation at the caves going back 35,000 years was first published over ten years prior to the caves' destruction, that is, before the permissions to destroy the site were granted (Slack et al., 2009).

In this situation, ethnocentric bias appears to have prevented bureaucratic recognition of the global relevance of the cultural and scientific heritage held within the Juukan caves, until after the fact of destruction. The public and political outrage that followed the destruction at Juukan Gorge was accurate in its assessment that the Traditional Owners of the area, the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura peoples, had lost something immeasurable and were ill-served by an outdated law that provided no meaningful protections for their cultural heritage against the weight of state economic interests (Altman & Tout, 2020; Hunt, 2020; Pearson, 2020). Aboriginal Heritage laws are intended to protect sites that hold ancient and sacred significance for Indigenous Australian communities as 'Indigenous cultural heritage' in an accurate and appropriate acknowledgment of the close and continuing connection that many Indigenous people have with Country and ancestral heritage (Hunt, 2020; Pearson, 2020).

Yet, it is revealing that much of the public outrage and discussion within Australia regarding Juukan Gorge focused only on the loss of Indigenous cultural heritage, which is significant and catastrophic, without mention that the loss is additionally significant from Western anthropological and archaeological perspectives due to the deep history evidenced in the caves (Pearson, 2020; Wahlquist, 2020). A relational paradigm easily recognises that Indigenous cultural heritage is human cultural heritage, and that understanding ancient human narratives and ways of dealing with changing climates on this continent (Slack et al., 2009) has meaning for the present day in a manner that has economic potential as well as cultural value for all people. Although the legislation that enabled this tragedy is in the process of being reformed by the WA government, (Hunt, 2020; Pearson, 2020), the Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists Inc. [AACAI] (2021) have identified that the new proposed Bill emphasises 'approval mechanisms for destruction of heritage' (AACAI, 2021) and would likely allow another Juukan Gorge disaster. In this situation, the academy could play a more active role in providing evidence and arguments for real change that would protect the rights of Indigenous peoples and increases non-Indigenous recognition of the value of Indigenous knowledges. Such initiatives by academia require robust work to be conducted from a relationality paradigm and with the aim of effective knowledge translation as illustrated earlier.

Models for exploring complementarity between indigenous and Western knowledges

While in the present article we are arguing for normalisation of a relational paradigm, there exist other examples of this approach flourishing. Scholars looking to explore the interconnectedness of Western and Indigenous knowledges can find multiple models that have been developed by researchers utilising a post-structuralist and participatory action research framework (Agrawal, 1995; Hughes, 2000; Mitchell et al., 2013; Nakata, 2007a; Robertson et al., 2016; Yunkaporta, 2019). In one example, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers collaborated to explore the anthropological history of south western Australia through comparison of (Western) geological knowledge with

(Indigenous) Noongar Dreamings, producing work that recognised the scholarly contribution of ancient Aboriginal oral histories (Robertson et al., 2016; Robertson & Barrow, 2020). Robertson and Barrow (2020) explained the methodology as follows:

The two knowledge sets are compared and contrasted so the resonances and dissonances are highlighted and begin to inform each other ... The inclusive, reflexive and emancipatory nature of this research makes it ideally suited to the generation of contemporary interpretations of ancient knowledge. (Robertson & Barrow, 2020, p. 125)

In earlier work, Robertson et al. (2017) identified that researchers can learn more by examining epistemologies and ontologies alongside the knowledges they produce, than to look at knowledge alone. The key to these approaches is attention to reflexivity, reciprocity and relationality.

Engaging with differences in epistemology and methodology

The starting point for researchers from both knowledge traditions is recognition of the inherent validity of both Indigenous and Western epistemes and their ensuing protocols, and of the reality that all paradigms are geographically, historically and culturally located (Barca & Arenas, 2010; Bonta et al., 2017; Brigg, 2016; Pitman, 2020; Tibebu, 2011). Yet even so, the experience of engaging critically and reflexively with other cultural perspectives creates an epistemological tension that transcends the philosophical and encounters very real differences in praxis and cognition; a reality which we authors have experienced throughout the research behind this article, as have many others (Hughes, 2000; Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Nakata, 2007a).

The first and most immediately obvious difference for a Western-trained mind, is the mode by which formal knowledges are represented. Robertson et al.'s (2017) exploration of Indigenous Australian knowledges, and Brayboy's (2005) discussion of Indigenous North American knowledges both identify the use of metaphor, and narrative forms, to convey deeply complex knowledge. Western science does not typically utilise the creative methods of storing and communicating empirical knowledge often used by Indigenous peoples (Martin & Mirraoop, 2003; Ober & Bat, 2007; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020; Yunkaporta, 2019), but researchers who have utilised a relationality paradigm have identified that such differences do not make the epistemologies binary opposites, but rather, complementary in nature (Brayboy, 2005; Robertson et al., 2017; Turnbull, 1982; Yunkaporta, 2019).

A further point of difference between Western and Indigenous epistemologies, and hence research methodologies, is that of individual versus collectivist knowledge processes. Non-Indigenous Australian researcher Hughes (2000) described the practical difference these processes brought to a community action research project in Arnhem Land. The action research conducted by Indigenous community members was centred in their Dreaming and highly autonomous, whereas non-Indigenous collaborators in the project utilised formal, structured approaches to record their observations. Because the Indigenous researchers came into the process with uniform aims based on their shared ontology, uniformity tended to exist within their findings. Where the Indigenous researchers reported their individual observations back to the group through story for collective reflection and findings, the non-Indigenous researchers tended to reflect

individually to establish findings before subjecting them to later peer review (Hughes, 2000). Operating under an Indigenous epistemology, for the Indigenous researchers, it was the community that defined the learning and created collective knowledge out of the observations of individuals (Seroto, 2014). In such a manner, the community's collaborative approach was not dissimilar to inductive reasoning and the Western academic process of peer review (Robertson et al., 2016).

Collective processes affect knowledge production and knowledge control within societies. Although protocols of knowledge ownership vary within cultural traditions, knowledge ownership and transfer within Indigenous Australian communities are tied very closely to accountability. The New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage's White Paper on *Recognising and Protecting Aboriginal Knowledge Associated with Natural Resource Management* (2014) quotes the following explanation by Aunty Fran Bodkin, a D'harawal Elder.

Knowledge in Aboriginal communities is not owned. It is held by Knowledge Holders who have earned the right to hold the knowledge they hold. It is common for knowledge to be held in pieces so that it is the collective knowledge of a number of Knowledge Holders. (p. 25)

The concept of collective storing, production and dispensing of knowledge requires long-term research consultation and collaborations, with more knowledge holders, and in a more cyclical process, than may be expected through more empirically based paradigms. Mitchell et al. (2013) demonstrate that there are significant benefits to academia and to community when researchers engage authentically with Indigenous knowledge production and governance models. Committing to such an approach requires the respect for a participatory action research framework and collective knowledge production that are inherent within a relational epistemology.

Sovereignty, accountability and boundaries on research engagement

In a postcolonial world, we cannot ignore the tension arising from over 200 years of colonial acts of genocide, intellectual theft and cultural decimation of Indigenous peoples. At the societal level, cross-cultural interactions have been marked by political, economic and military violence enacted by Western peoples, and at the academic level, there is an untoward history of non-Indigenous academics ignoring the intellectual property rights of Indigenous knowers (Fredericks, 2009; Morphy, 2016; Walter, 2016).

Many Indigenous scholars have highlighted that, for Indigenous peoples, a clear goal of Indigenous knowledge inclusion within the academy is cultural survival and self-determination (Brayboy, 2005; Moreton-Robinson, 2004; Walter, 2016). Brayboy (2005) argues that Indigenous community survival in a postcolonial world is only made possible by the ability to integrate Indigenous and European knowledges in strategic and context-specific ways.

Integration of Indigenous and Western epistemologies can occur only through voluntary, bipartisan collaboration, critical interrogation of epistemic assumptions, with a clear respect for Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty over Indigenous knowledges (Brayboy, 2005; Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Morphy, 2016; Nakata, 2007a; Robertson et al., 2017; Sonn, 2009; Walter, 2016). Jones (Jones & Jenkins, 2008) provides an example from her tertiary experiences teaching cultural studies in postcolonial New Zealand.

Jones found that Pakeha (White) students wanted to learn about Maori identity, but Maori students wanted to explore Maori identity *without* having to share this knowledge with the Pakeha.

The existence of tension is a reality to be navigated by scholars who wish to find new and innovative understandings based on a relationality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Although we believe shared beneficence can be achieved through collaboration, the quantification of beneficence remains a strategic and contextual decision to be made by Indigenous communities (Bullen & Flavell, 2017; Morphy, 2016; Walter, 2016).

The paradox of the current agenda

Rappaport (1981) proposed that to address complex social challenges, we need to find the paradoxes at the centre, and push debate ‘in the ignored direction’ (p. 3). The paradox in the current article pertains to the goal of Indigenous knowledges within the academy.

At the heart of much work on Indigenous knowledges within the academy lies a quest for both restitution and reconciliation. Restitution of past and current injustices require a power dynamic that favours the dispossessed, and necessitates a concerted investment of energy, policy, funding and goodwill to adjust academic praxes in favour of Indigenous rights and sovereignty within Australian research and higher education (Brigg, 2016; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2004; Morphy, 2016). In practical terms, where the academy promotes Indigenist research practices that reclaim intellectual property of Indigenous cultures for Indigenous communities, then it may be necessary that non-Indigenous research and teaching on Indigenous issues be minimised. At the same time, the quest for reconciliation has resulted in a policy agenda requiring the wide-scale inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge in Australian higher education (Universities Australia, 2017). Due to population demographics in both the teaching/research and student cohorts of the Australian academy, it becomes necessary that, at least until such time when significantly more Indigenous Australian assume academic positions, non-Indigenous academics are involved in a sizeable portion of this work. That is, strengthening Indigenous knowledge rights within the Academy may temporarily be an opposing goal to integrating Indigenous perspectives throughout the Academy. Although it can be argued that restitution is necessary on the path to reconciliation, the two aims are an antinomy, a paradox of ideals that cannot currently be achieved by a single action (Rappaport, 1981).

The solution we suggest is that this work is done through a framework of relationality and accountability between peoples, knowledges and their environments. By finding collaborative and relational ways forward for academia, scholars would be role models for the wider community to engage with Indigenous perspectives and knowledge in all manners of professional, cultural and social life.

Conclusion

In scholarly and political circles, there is a tension between the dichotomisation and the complementarity of Indigenous versus Western Knowledge systems (Agrawal,

1995; Hughes, 2000; Meyer, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2017; Seroto, 2014). Solutions to this tension can be found in the work of authors from both epistemes who have explored the contextual and relational nature of knowledge (Foucault, 2003; Kuhn, 1977; Martin & Mirraabooa, 2003; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020; Yunkaporta, 2019).

The academy, and academics, have a key role as narrative producers in society. Our capacity to identify interest convergence can guide national discussions on cultural heritage, identity and value. A relationality paradigm has the potential to equally weight cultural capital, contribute to decolonisation of academic spaces, and create allies for Indigenous knowledge in a country that is disproportionately populated by people of non-Indigenous cultures.

The expertise contained within Western and Indigenous knowledges, be it ecological, economic, linguistic, spiritual, social or empirical, is greatly diverse and often unique. The argument made in the current article for identifying knowledge synergy is not an argument for ad hoc syncretism or assimilation, but rather for an allied approach to identifying complementarity between apparently disparate systems. What it produces can be unique, novel, valid, applicable and timely for application to solving real-world problems.

Our argument for interest convergence should not be taken to mean that Indigenous rights are of value only when they result in beneficence for non-Indigenous people. Relationality and interdependence are the underpinning frameworks, yet convergence of interests is a pragmatic approach to identifying ways to translate Indigenous knowledge for other stakeholders who themselves have not yet recognised their interdependence and connectedness with Indigenous peoples.

We are not naïve to the challenges presented by colonial history, contemporary injustice, institutional power dynamics and Western academic condescension. There is still much to be explored regarding knowledge ownership and accountability. Furthermore, there are many Indigenous communities whose priority is to revive connectedness to spirituality, Country and family. As scholars, we need to explore sensitively, respectfully, collaboratively and wisely.

At both the academic and practitioner levels, there is significant value in working together. Non-Indigenous Australia has much to gain through recognition that knowledges young and old each contribute a part of the solution to contemporary challenges. The potential rewards include a greater understanding of how to survive on this land, a new and respectful understanding of national cross-cultural heritage, and the reclamation of Indigenous knowledges and identity. We call for Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and knowledge holders alike to embrace a relational and collaborative approach across academic disciplines. In doing so, academia may contribute to socio-cultural healing for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, advancing a more harmonious Australian society and facilitating the continuity of knowledge of the oldest human cultures on earth.

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ORCID

Maryanne Macdonald  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7869-9355>

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