

## Chapter 3

# Indigenous Australian Views on Knowledge production and Indigenist Research

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Goduka book

*"Issues of ownership of knowledge in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research can only be resolved when the power of decision making and self-determination is held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and/or organisation".<sup>ii</sup>*

Increasing numbers of Indigenous Australians<sup>iii</sup> and First Nations peoples around the globe are now undertaking higher degrees involving research at universities. But this has not always been the case. Until recently, Indigenous Australians did not have equal opportunity and access to a university education. Indigenous Australian involvement in research has been at the imposition of a western non-Indigenous researcher's agenda and their universities. Throughout history, Indigenous peoples have been the objects of research and never the initiator, manager or co-investigator of research. Similarly, knowledge productions about Indigenous worldviews and realities have always been obscured by the 'cultural' and 'race' bias of the non-Indigenous interpreter. Over the past fifty years has seen recent transformation in research practices by, on and with Indigenous Australians. A recent conference in Australia has witnessed a radical change in knowledge production taking place in the Southern South Pacific. The rise of Indigenous Research by Indigenous Australian scholars has brought new ways of knowing the past and the call for protection of such knowledges for the benefit of Indigenous peoples themselves. Moreover, Indigenous Australian views of research are exploring news forms of theoretical and methodological issues through what has become known as the Indigenous Research Reform Agenda<sup>iv</sup>. The main purpose of this chapter concerns two main questions. What are the views of Indigenous Australians on research reform? What are the underlying principles fundamental to such reform? These are interesting and important issues to pursue.

### **Research: Indigenous Australian Views**

I have just returned from the fifth annual Indigenous Researchers Forum held on 1-3 October 2003 at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)<sup>v</sup>. Like this year's forum, I recall how excited I was to attend the inaugural 1999 Indigenous Researchers Forum that was hosted then by the Unulliko Indigenous Centre, University of Newcastle<sup>vi</sup>. This conference was the first of its kind

in Australian history. Such a conference would have been unthinkable twenty years earlier. Unthinkable in the sense that it was not until 1966 that Australia witnessed Kumantjayi Perkins<sup>vii</sup>, the first Aboriginal Australian undergraduate to graduate from a university<sup>viii</sup>. Unthinkable, according to Colin Bourke, the first Indigenous scholar to become Dean of a Faculty, who declared that ‘Indigenous Australians rarely, if ever, participated in universities in the first 175 years of European settlement in Australia’<sup>ix</sup>. Indeed the emergence of the Indigenous Researchers Forum specifically correlates to the emergence of the Indigenous Australian scholar and both of these phenomena are recent historical moments<sup>x</sup>.

The Indigenous Researchers Forums bring together Indigenous community historians, scholars, researchers and post-graduate students to rigorously engage in the critique of academic research and the knowledge production process. It also promotes an opportunity to engage in cultural traditions of Indigenous knowledges while sharing experiences and ideas to retain their authority and ownership. Another prime objective is the promotion of an Indigenous body of knowledge and intelligentsia for addressing our status as colonised peoples. Such a forum has become a hub for the new think tank emerging for contemporary critical Indigenous scholarship.

The 2003 forum discussions highlighted that contemporary Indigenous Australian intellectualism has drawn on a long history of social and political activism for self-determination. Many speakers openly acknowledge and celebrate past achievements of early Indigenous activist and scholars whose struggle opened the doors to university for others. The debt owed is enormous but one many acknowledge. The Indigenous Researchers Forums are used as a site of engagement where Indigenous researchers gather to share experiences and to chart an Indigenous theoretical and political future amongst ourselves. Here, we engage in robust scholarly criticism of our own writings and those of non-Indigenous scholars, while also investigating the role of the Indigenous intellectual in an Indigenous Australian future.

The creation of the Indigenous Researchers Forum has been a significant historical moment for Indigenous research in the South Pacific. Prominent researchers in attendance include those from Aotearoa (New Zealand), Pacific Islands and Indigenous Australians from rural and remote locations. Its impact has caused a quiet methodological revolution in research where Indigenous Australian intellectualism seeks methodological reform.

The opening address at the 2003 forum was presented by acting Chairperson, Lionel Quartermaine, of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). His paper titled “*Indigenous Research: What's It About?*” raised some interesting insights for public policy that affect Indigenous lives and its connection to research<sup>xi</sup>. A key element of his paper was the need for Indigenous agencies and individuals to forge partnerships with governments, business and peak bodies including universities and researchers to advance the policy agenda.

Quartermaine was clear that researchers can and must help Indigenous communities and individuals to maintain control over their cultural knowledges.

Equally researchers can assist Indigenous peoples to reach their full potential by improved social outcomes. However, Quartermaine premised his comments on the notion that ‘history has shown a poor relationship existed between Indigenous peoples, researchers, universities, governments and policy makers’,<sup>xii xiii</sup>.

Historically, the tensions and dilemmas between researchers and Indigenous peoples included issues of representation, power and control. These factors were exemplified in a body of knowledge about Indigenous peoples in what non-Indigenous authors Walton and Christie<sup>xiv</sup> called ‘Aboriginalism’. ‘Aboriginalism’ is defined as ‘the story about Aborigines told by whites using only white people’s imaginations. Aboriginal voices do not contribute to this story, so in Aboriginalism, the Aborigines always become what the white man imagines them to be’<sup>xv xvi</sup>. To overcome ‘Aboriginalism’ Walton and Christie suggest that ‘Aboriginal peoples develop a counter-discourse to such narrowly written texts that ignores Aboriginal voice and agency’<sup>xvii</sup>.

Australia has a strong intellectual tradition of ‘Aboriginalism’ that until the 1960s has been the main discourse upheld in numerous academic disciplines<sup>xviii</sup>. Quartermaine’s address offered insights into problematic issues that an Indigenous counter discourse agenda must target for reform<sup>xix</sup>. These include:

- Research that is framed by the researcher’s priorities and interest rather than the needs of Indigenous communities;
- The reduction of Indigenous ownership of Indigenous knowledges and intellectual property;
- The lack of ongoing consultation, negotiation and involvement of Indigenous communities in the design, facilitation and publication of research;
- Inappropriate research methodologies and ethical research processes; and
- The need for effective, appropriate and culturally sensitive research in relation to ethics and protocols.

The development of an Indigenous counter discourse to ‘Aboriginalism’ was a clear sub-text to the 2003 Indigenous Researchers Forum. Other papers by prominent Indigenous Australian scholars were offered. These included Tracey Bunda, Eve Fesl, Marcia Langton, Len Collard, Mick Dodson, Sally Morgan, Jilpia Jones and John Lester. Dialogue between speakers and participants addressed many research issues needed for reform. These generalisations centred on the production, reproduction, legitimation and dissemination of knowledge about Indigenous peoples and the role of universities and funding institutions that support research. Indeed, many of these discussions at the forum mirror the key points of research reform identified by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health<sup>xx</sup>. The CRCATH is a leading national research organisation that advocates transformation in health knowledge production through what it describes as the “*Indigenous Research Reform Agenda*” (IRRA). Issues for reform include:

- Involvement of Indigenous communities in the design, execution and evaluation of research;

- Defining a coordinating role for Indigenous community controlled organisations associated with the research;
- Consultation and negotiation with Indigenous organisations as ongoing throughout the life of a research project;
- Mechanisms for ongoing surveillance of research projects by Indigenous partner organisations;
- Process to determine research priorities and benefit to the Indigenous communities involved;
- Transformation of research practices from ‘investigator-driven’ to an adoption of a needs based approach to research;
- Determination of ethical processes for the conduct of research;
- Linkage between research and community development and social change;
- Training of Indigenous researchers ; and
- The adoption of effective mechanisms for the dissemination and transfer of research findings<sup>xxi</sup>.

Similarly, another leading national research organisation, the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies<sup>xxii</sup> has addressed some of the above issues by developing nationally accepted guidelines for ethical standards and practices in Indigenous research. These guidelines maintain Indigenous authority and ownership of their knowledges through partnerships and reciprocity via agreements with researchers.

Clearly Indigenous Australian scholars and leading government research organisations recognise that complexities and contradictions continue within knowledge production processes and the institutional management of such research. In this chapter, I have no intention of casting my net as widely for solutions as my Indigenous colleagues, but to emphasise that the task of research reform is as wide and as varied as its dilemmas. However, methodological reform has clearly become a central issue in Australia. Yet the issues of methodological reform are not new to the debate of Indigenous knowledges and their representation.

Back in the 1980s Indigenous scholars Ros Langford<sup>xxiii</sup> and Marcia Langton<sup>xxiv</sup> among others, were instrumental in announcing to the academy of research that Indigenous identities and cultures can only be partially understood from within inherited Western scientific research traditions. In addition such writings demonstrated how ‘Aboriginalism’ promoted ‘othering’, homogenization, and reductionism of Indigenous cultures. Static and fixed constructs of ‘Aboriginality’ fundamental to ‘Aboriginalism’ are totally rejected by the newly emergent intellectual criticism known in Australia as Indigenism.

### **Influencing Developments on Indigenism**

Over the past thirty years, a highly productive discourse has emerged that has witnessed Indigenous scholars in Australia and the Pacific challenge research and its applications to more progressive kinds of knowledge seeking methods that privilege

the diversity of Indigenous experiences<sup>xxv</sup>. As I have argued elsewhere, I have used the term Indigenism to describe and define this body of knowledge and its discourse<sup>xxvi</sup>. Later in this chapter I move to build on this work to define Indigenism more comprehensively. For now, what I mean by this term is a distinct Indigenous Australian academic body of knowledge that seeks to disrupt the socially constructed identity of the ‘archetypal Aborigine’, as a controlled and oppressed being, that informed the emergence of a distinct yet diverse Indigenist Research epistemological and ontological agenda.

There are clearly many historical, social and political factors that have led to the emergence of Indigenism in Australia. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore such factors in depth. However, it is important to note that classic scholarly works of anti-colonialism have provided valuable theoretical approaches to the contemporary Indigenous Australian Intellectual Movement<sup>xxvii</sup> in its interrogation of dominant research tendencies that assume central positions of ‘power’ and ‘truth’<sup>xxviii</sup>. Moreover, the debates in Aotearoa (New Zealand), the United States and Canada by First Nations peoples, scholars of colour, and non-Indigenous people, have also influenced methodological reform developed by Indigenous peoples in the Pacific<sup>xxix</sup>.

Australian Indigenism has also capitalised on new and flexible ways to conduct research. In other words, while research and its methodologies have always been in a state of transition, intellectual space was created for Indigenism in Australia, as the academy of science responded to particular research concerns from the disciplines of Feminism, Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism. Essentially, over the last two decades the theoretical problems outlined in the social sciences through Feminism, Post-Colonialism, Post-modernism, have brought about an ‘undisciplining’ of the disciplines in science. This has seen traditional disciplines being de-stabilised to allow space for emerging theories of social discourse. Denzin and Lincoln term this process as the ‘blurring of distinct disciplinary boundaries’ between social sciences and humanities<sup>xxx</sup>. Accompanying this transformation is the development of new qualitative research practices. Denzin and Lincoln highlight that the ‘post-positivist period of science in the early 1990s saw a variety of new interpretive and qualitative research designs being developed’<sup>xxxi</sup>. The academy’s acceptance of multiple methodologies in qualitative research and the acknowledgment of the ‘crisis of representation’ in research fostered the right conditions to nurture Australian Indigenism. Clearly, these shifts in research approaches, and the increase numbers of Indigenous postgraduates since the 1980s, have enabled an active environment for contemporary Indigenous Australian scholarly criticism.

## **Indigenism**

In Australia, Indigenism has sought to conceptualise methodological reform using a variety of approaches that advocate a research compatibility with Indigenous realities, interests and aspirations. For the purposes of this chapter I seek to highlight two approaches by Indigenous scholars.

In his criticism of Anthropological representation of the ‘other’, Torres Strait Islander scholar Martin Nakata has developed Indigenous Standpoint theory. Nakata seeks to ‘develop an intellectual stand point from which Indigenous scholars can read and understand the western system of knowledge’<sup>xxxii</sup>. For him, the ‘dilemma facing Indigenous scholars is ‘how the position of Indigenous peoples is understood both by others and by themselves as they view their position through the knowledge of others’<sup>xxxiii</sup>. His pursuit and advice to Indigenous tertiary students is ‘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 thoughts and ideas and knowledges that have been instrumental in producing our position’<sup>xxxiv</sup>. He concludes that ‘students are tutored to view and understand the position of Indigenous peoples through the same system of thinking, logic and rationality that have historically not served Indigenous interests at all’<sup>xxxv</sup>. Nakata has therefore focused his attention on the need for new reading positions through research methodologies as a basis for de-colonisation of ourselves. Nakata suggests that:

*Colonial discourses and their narratives are now so dense that it is very hard to make out whether one speaks from within them, or whether one can speak outside of them, or whether one can speak at all without them*<sup>xxxvi</sup>.

The issue as rightly pointed out by Nakata is one of how does the ‘Indigenous scholar speak back to the knowledges that have been formed around what is perceived to be the Indigenous position in the western order of things’<sup>xxxvii</sup>.

Nakata’s reading position seeks to inform the Indigenous student and scholar of the way knowledge construction and legitimation works, how it represents and misrepresents, and provides strategies to negotiate when reading the text. For Nakata, his advice to the Indigenous scholar as a way forward is directed at methodological reform.

*We all need to develop strategies that will assist us to read these knowledges, as others read them, but in full cognisance of their relation to our history, our current position and us. We need to do this within an intellectual framework and we need to do this in a way that will speak to those knowledges, that will speak within the discourse, but will extend the discourse to include what has been hitherto submerged, our understanding of them and how they give expression to relations of power*<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

Indigenous Standpoint theory as articulated by Nakata is timely to furthering the process of methodological reform toward understanding the way power is embedded in knowledge production within the texts of the colonial and post-colonial. This is a likely genesis for Indigenous scholars to adapt old methodologies or invent new ones for their own interests.

Like Nakata's call for methodological reform, Australia has recently witnessed Feminist reform through the emergence of Indigenous Woman's Standpoint Theory. In her book titled "*Talkin' up to the White Women: Indigenous Women and Feminism*", Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson outlines her definition of this methodology and how it differs from dominant Feminism. Her definition of Indigenous woman's standpoint theory is worthy of lengthy mention.

*An Indigenous woman's standpoint is informed by the social worlds imbued with meaning grounded in knowledges of different realities from those of white women...they include sharing an inalienable connection to land; a legacy of dispossession, racism and sexism; resisting and replacing disparaging images of ourselves with self defined images; continuing our activism as mothers, sisters, aunts, daughters grandmothers and community leaders, as well as negotiating sexual politics across and within cultures. Such a standpoint does not deny the diversity of Indigenous women's experiences. Indigenous women will have different concrete experiences that shape our relations to core themes*<sup>xxxix</sup>.

Moreton-Robinson methodologies seek to make visible 'whiteness in power relations between white feminists and Indigenous women through examining their self-representation and representations of others'<sup>xi</sup>. Feminist texts are interrogated to disclose orthodoxies around notions of 'sisterhood' and to 'challenge the right of white anthropologist to speak on behalf of all Indigenous women'<sup>xii</sup>.

Methodological reform for Moreton-Robinson centres on the need to move beyond research epistemes that centre the privileges, experiences and values of the middle-class white woman. She draws upon 'postcolonial critique of epistemological foundationalism to argue that all knowledge is situated and therefore partial'<sup>xiii</sup>. The solution for Moreton-Robinson<sup>xiiii</sup> is methodological inter-subjectivity – the need to get beyond self-hegemonic privilege to examine realities from a multitude of differing perspectives. In other words for Non-Indigenous women to move beyond the conditions of their own privilege and therefore their own hegemony, they must begin to understand their position, and those of Indigenous women through Indigenous realities and experiences. Moreton-Robinson's works expose how non-Indigenous researchers in Feminism tend to assume that appropriate research questions are framed around social difficulties and 'problems' in the Indigenous community, rather than how Indigenous peoples are treated socially and institutionally through the concept of 'Whiteness' by non-Indigenous society. Moreton-Robinson promotes a conversation with Feminism and Whiteness in order to move beyond research methodologies that subjugate, vulgarise and marginalise the 'problems', expectations and aspiration of Indigenous women. In doing so Moreton-Robinson seeks to broaden the use of current methodologies that reproduce partial knowledges of Indigenous women toward a productive search for methodological reform.

The ongoing challenge for Australian Indigenous scholars is re-thinking research methodologies toward the development of reflexive practices which

investigate and represent Indigenous worldviews. The clear potential of such challenge is to take seriously the need for methodological reform in order to strengthen knowledge production methods toward privileging Indigenous voices throughout the entire research process. While this means that Indigenism privileges the diversity of Aboriginal ontological and epistemological frameworks it does not necessarily mean radically different theoretical and/or methodological research methods. What is distinctive about Indigenism is the Indigenist scholar speaking back to research epistemes that have contributed to the social construction of Indigenous Australians as oppressed. As outlined in the works of Nakata and Moreton-Robinson, Indigenism has no one singular method for research transformation and or praxis. In other words there is no one essentialised Indigenist research epistemology and ontology. Rather there is a clear commitment to recognise the diversity of Indigenous ontology among Indigenous Australians while bringing reform to the process of knowledge production itself, according to the discourses of preference, engaged and employed by Indigenous scholars.

Having examined some of the theoretical issues within Indigenism, it is important to briefly explore some key principles within Indigenist Research. Below I begin to identify three inter-related principles of Indigenist Research to bring context to its definition. In identifying the foundations of these principles as Indigenist, I need to clarify what I mean and what I do not mean by this concept.

### **Toward a Definition of Indigenism: Three Key Principles**

There are a number of significant dimensions to Indigenist research that sets it apart from traditional research. In addressing these, I understand Indigenist Research to be informed by three fundamental and interrelated principles:

- The involvement in Resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research
- The political integrity of Indigenist research
- The Privileging of Indigenous voices in Indigenist research

### **Resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research**

Indigenist research seeks to chart our own political and social agendas for liberation from the colonial domination of research and society. I have written elsewhere on the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research <sup>xliv</sup>. My thoughts on this principle include:

*‘Indigenist research is research undertaken as part of the struggle of Indigenous Australians for recognition of the right of self-determination and de-colonisation. It is research that engages with the issues, which have arisen out of the long history of colonisation, occupation, and oppression of Indigenous Australians, which began in earnest with the invasion of Australian by Europeans in 1788. It is research that deals with the history of*

*physical, cultural and emotional genocide. It is also research that engages with the story of the survival and the celebration of resistance struggles of Indigenous Australians to racist oppression. It is research that seeks to uncover and protest the continuing forms of oppression that confronts Indigenous Australians. Moreover, it is research which attempts to support the personal, community, educational, cultural, and political struggles of Indigenous Australians to carve out a way of being for ourselves in Australia in which there is healing from the past oppressions and cultural freedom in the future’<sup>xlv</sup>.*

The functions of Indigenism encompass intellectual criticism that are embedded in Indigenous Australian experiences, and that is influenced by the intellectual work of Indigenous scholars to transform Indigenous Australian oppression. My definition here understands that while Indigenism is highly politicised it is not premised on a total rejection of English language or the culture of the dominant. Nor are orthodox research paradigms and methodologies repudiated for ‘Indigenous only’ knowledge production methods. Let me be clear that Indigenism should not be simplified or misunderstood as an argument for ontological or ‘methodological separatism’. At the heart of Indigenist Australian intellectualism is the exploration of theoretical frameworks that encourage the possibilities of intellectual, political, social and economic emancipation. In this sense Indigenism is not atheoretical nor anti-intellectual. Indigenism seeks the building of a robust Indigenist intelligentsia for the revision of ethics, meta-theories, research epistemes and methodologies to move beyond dichotomies such as object/subject, rational/irrational and white/black.

Such research challenges and actively resists the racialisation of Indigenous social, cultural/ideological, and attitudinal and behavior formations. Indigenist research rejects the oppressively dehumanising characterization of Indigenous peoples as oppressed ‘victims’ in need of charity. Indigenist research arises out of Indigenous social experiences, which celebrate the courage and determination of Indigenous people to survive. Therefore, Indigenist research acknowledges Indigenous peoples as resisters to racialisation not victims of it. This approach challenges the power and control that traditional research methodologies exerts and directs attention toward ones that are compatible with Indigenous worldviews.

### **Political Integrity in Indigenist Research**

Indigenist research is research that upholds the political integrity of Indigenous peoples as sovereign First Nations Australians. By political integrity I mean Indigenous ontological and epistemological views about the world that directly translate to Indigenous philosophies, languages, cultural and spiritual values and beliefs. To preserve this political integrity Indigenist research is research undertaken by Indigenous communities themselves who determine their own research priorities and agendas. In doing so Indigenism embraces the need for Indigenous communities to build their own capacity mechanisms to realise the benefits of research. Indigenism acknowledges that history has left Indigenous Australians with deep concerns and suspicion of research. These anxieties if allowed to reproduce threatens the work of

researchers who seeks to engage with Indigenous communities. It is imperative that Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers who work with Indigenous communities uphold the political integrity of the studied group to build trust and cooperation. Moreover, I would argue that Indigenous autonomy and control over Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures are fundamental to Indigenist Research and that such anxieties about these matters must be resolved if Indigenous communities are to value research.

Indigenist research is also research conducted by those researchers who identify themselves as Indigenists. Similarly, Indigenist research principles can be drawn upon by non-Indigenous researchers who uphold its principles for Indigenous self-determination. Within Indigenous Australian writings I acknowledge that there is no unanimous view that exists among Indigenous Australian scholars on the definition, borders and or boundaries of Indigenist Research. Nor is there a unanimous view on method, methodology and epistemes in conducting research with Indigenous peoples. It is my belief that what is central to Indigenist Research is that Indigenous Australian ideals, values and philosophies are core to the research agenda even if there is difference about what constitutes such values and ideals. However, Indigenist researchers are united in the belief that it is inappropriate that research contribution to Indigenous social movements should come solely from non-Indigenous Australians. Non-Indigenous Australians have until this point essentially monopolized research on Indigenous Australians and this paradigm must be forcefully arrested. Indigenism seeks to privilege the Indigenous researcher if for no other reason than because of our exclusion historically from the entire traditional research enterprise.

Is there a role for non-Indigenous researchers in Indigenist research? Power relations have always exerted a decisive impact on the research relationship of the viewed and the viewer. Therefore, I agree with prominent Indigenous Australian academic Wendy Brady in her analysis of power of who has the right to speak, investigate or research Indigenous issues. She further clarifies in stating that:

‘This is not about denying critiques, but it is about the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage in discourse about setting parameters on how engagement with non-Indigenous researchers is determined. It is also about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people taking away the power of 'experts' to define us as the 'other' and placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research in a so-called objective framework which displaces us as people and we become alienated from our own knowledge base ‘<sup>xlvi</sup>.

Indigenist research and indeed the social movements of Indigenous Australians are indebted to the research contributions of non-Indigenous Australians. However, many non-Indigenous researchers have built their academic careers on being 'experts' in all things Indigenous, essentially reproducing them as opposed to according the right of Indigenous peoples to speak for themselves and engage in self-reflection in research. Given the colonial nature of ‘Aboriginalism’ research and the skewed distribution of power between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia, it becomes the role of non-Indigenous researchers and universities in fact to

support the work of Indigenous communities and their researchers to create avenues to facilitate such support. Non-Indigenous researchers do have a role to play within the research futures of Indigenous communities. Indigenism and its writings provide both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous researcher with principles and parameters of engagement with Indigenous communities written by Indigenist scholars and their communities.

Indigenist Research challenges neo-colonial dominance of research based on traditional relationships of researchers and 'subjects' that benefit the researcher interests. It would be misleading to over-generalize about Indigenist Research as a total solution to hegemonic research practices. This is neither expected nor possible. However, the inclusions of Indigenist ideas for methodological reform are functions that promote the redistribution of power. This is a critical feature of Indigenist research. Indeed, such dialogue gives power to authentic voices and authorities not only to research texts but also to the processes themselves. Maintaining Indigenous political integrity throughout the whole research process is vital to self-determination and is a fundamental ingredient of this approach. Mutual respect and power sharing in methodological negotiation and collaboration is essential.

### **Privileging Indigenous Voices in Research**

'Indigenist research is research which gives voice to the voiceless'<sup>xlvi</sup>. Given the history of exploitation and prejudice, it is particularly appropriate that it is Indigenous Australians who determine their own research agenda to make public the voice and experience of their communities in their own way. Whether the researcher is Indigenous or non-Indigenous, both can be designated as outsiders to the Indigenous community being researched. Therefore it is fundamental that collaboration and cooperation be negotiated with the community of how Indigenous voices will be preserved throughout the entire project.

While Indigenist research seeks to privilege Indigenous researchers where possible, this is not to suggest that Indigenous researchers are free from biased in research about Indigenous issues, but that Indigenous researchers working with their communities can determine their own research needs. In saying this, I am also not suggesting that there is cultural homogeneity among Indigenous Australians. Like Indigenous communities in other continents, there is cultural heterogeneity and diversity. Nor am I suggesting that there are no cultural barriers between or inter-communal hostilities within Indigenous communities in Australia. Like all colonized contexts, tensions exist in and between Indigenous peoples. Put simply, 'there are no automatic or natural rapport between Indigenous Australians'<sup>xlvi</sup>. Neither am I suggesting that the minds of Indigenous researchers are free of the propensity for acting out in colonial hegemonic ways as a result of colonialist psychic and cultural internalisation. It is certainly politically more appropriate that Indigenous Australians be given the option to speak through Indigenous researchers.

Indigenism in its advocacy for methodological reform does not attempt to be free of discourses outside the Indigenous experience. Rather it attempt to modify old methodologies and develop new ones 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. It rejects the notion that research on Indigenous people is for the sake of knowledge itself.

I name this research approach ‘Indigenist’. I am an Indigenous Australian deeply, passionately, and actively committed to and involved in the struggles of my people. The research that I do I see as part of that involvement and therefore must be overtly political. For that I make no apologies. Indigenist research is research which focuses on the lived, historical experiences, ideas, traditions, dreams, interests, aspirations and struggles of Indigenous Australians. I desire that Indigenist research contribute to methodological reform for social justice.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter sought to acknowledge a number of developing views Indigenous Australians have in relation to methodological reform. These include the concerns that Indigenous Australian has about research into our Indigenous lives. These concerns focus on the power and control in research upheld through methodologies. Increasingly the dominance of Western orientated discourse is being challenged by pro-active, Indigenist Research approaches. Recently, Indigenous peoples have embraced higher education and scientific research as tools for social and economic mobility. These approaches are embedded in Indigenous Australian philosophies and principles informed by Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures. Indigenist Research approaches are based on a growing consensus that research involving Indigenous knowledges and peoples needs to be conducted in culturally appropriate ways that fit the cultural preferences, practices and aspirations of Indigenous peoples.

In developing the Indigenous Research Reform Agenda, Indigenism is calling for a new engagement with Indigenous Australians to bring research methodologies and practices in line with the priorities of Indigenous peoples. The development of this critical framework for identifying and addressing the barriers in research symbolically demonstrates that Indigenous scholars and their communities are not overwhelmed by these problems nor are we short of solutions. For me, an exciting aspect of Indigenism in Australia is that our success does not rest on whether there is uniformity on the problems nor their solutions, but that a commitment is made to robust debate on reforming the culture of research for social change.

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Narungga, Kurna and Ngarrindjeri Nations. I hope my words here does justice to your wisdom. It is the sharing of your knowledge and your trust in me, for which I am truly humble. Similarly, I could not write one word without recognition of the committed struggle of my fellow Indigenous activists and academic colleagues who came before me. For this I thank you for your struggle. To the current generation of Indigenous leaders and scholars. I hope my writings here assist our relentless intellectual pursuit in academic excellence. For to strive for academic excellence is to serve the struggle for liberation from colonialism.

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<sup>ii</sup> Brady, W. 'Beam me up Scotty, communicating across world views on knowledge, principles and procedures for the conduct of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research', in *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Conference Proceeding*. December, ed. C. White, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia, (1992), pp. 104-115.

<sup>iii</sup> I acknowledge that there is no neutral term that encompasses the entire diversity of Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples. I acknowledge the diversity in languages and cultures within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. Therefore, to be inclusive of both, the term Indigenous Australians in this paper refers to peoples who identify themselves as being Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

<sup>iv</sup> CRCATH. *Indigenous Research reform agenda: Rethinking research methodologies*, CRCATH, Casuarina, Northern Territory, (2002).

<sup>v</sup> See AIATSIS Website for IRF program  
<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/rsrch/conferences/irf2003/index.htm> (Accessed 6-11-03)

<sup>vi</sup> The inaugural Indigenous Researchers Forum of Indigenous academics, Indigenous researchers, and Indigenous postgraduates was the first gathering of its kind in Australia to focus primarily on research. It was organised by *Umulliko* Indigenous Higher Education and Research Centre at the University of Newcastle. Forum proceedings on web: <http://www.ion.unisa.edu.au/umulliko/> (Accessed 27-8-03)

<sup>vii</sup> As is my Narungga custom I use the appropriate name of Kumantjayi here to pay cultural respect to Charles Perkins and his Arrernte Nation. This Arrernte name is assigned to those whose have past away.

<sup>viii</sup> See the following work for further details of Perkins. Bin-Sallik, M. A. *Aboriginal Tertiary Education in Australia: How well is it serving the needs of Aborigines?*, Aboriginal Studies Key Centre, University of South Australia, Adelaide, Third Edition, (1996).

<sup>ix</sup> Bourke, C. 'Aboriginal Autonomy in Higher Education', in *The National Aboriginal Higher Education conference, Conference proceeding final report*, Fremantle Western Australia, 11 July, (1994), p. 1.

<sup>x</sup> The historical emergence of Indigenous Australian scholars can be found in Bin-Sallik, M. A. *Aboriginal Tertiary Education in Australia: How well is it serving the needs of Aborigines?*, Aboriginal Studies Key Centre, University of South Australia, Adelaide, Third Edition, (1996).

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- <sup>xi</sup> The address can be located at [http://www.atsic.gov.au/News\\_Room/speeches\\_transcripts/default.asp?id=2926](http://www.atsic.gov.au/News_Room/speeches_transcripts/default.asp?id=2926) (Accessed 6/11/03)
- <sup>xii</sup> [http://www.atsic.gov.au/News\\_Room/speeches\\_transcripts/default.asp?id=2926](http://www.atsic.gov.au/News_Room/speeches_transcripts/default.asp?id=2926) (Accessed 6/11/03)
- <sup>xiii</sup> This poor relationship is highlighted in the following works. Lippmann, L. *'Generations of Resistance'*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1994.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Walton, C. & Christie, M. 'Aboriginal literature and critical pedagogies', *Ngoonjook*. 10, (1994), p. 82.
- <sup>xv</sup> Walton, C. & Christie, M. 'Aboriginal literature and critical pedagogies', *Ngoonjook*. 10, (1994), p. 82.
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