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# Gababala banma-li bumala-y gaalanha ngaawa-y guwaa-l:

## Healing through resistance and finding voice

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### Abstract

The article discusses strategies in ways that Aboriginal groups in Australia are overcoming censorship imposed via the hegemonic principals of Western education, neoliberal control of the media and government sanctions against them. The narrative introduces *autobiographical ethnicity* as a unique research methodology that generates greater emphasis on the Indigenous voice rather than either autobiographic or ethnographic writing, in that it moves beyond the qualitative research method framed by anthropologists for which ethnographic studies was born. Autobiographical ethnicity originates from traditional forms of Aboriginal ceremony and storytelling, where deeper meaning is given to the Aboriginal experience rather than purely observational *data* as collected in ethnographic writing. As a form of research-based practice, autobiographical ethnicity creates greater accessibility to the Aboriginal writer in telling

our stories and maintaining her (his) story our way.

**Keywords:** Autobiographical ethnicity, Aboriginal knowledge production, institutional racism, Indigenous representation, research-based practice, Indigenous storytelling.

**Author writing statement.** “My writing engineers a hypothetical cultural and creative third space in reinventing the Aboriginal position beyond its current binary—in wanting to picture events over time and space around me, in returning to the past and seeing my future, to remember the sound of children laughing and ceremony before the impending silence broken by colonisation.”

Australia is one of the richest Western countries in the world, built on an industry of mining from the lands of Aboriginal people who remain living in third world poverty (O'Faircheallaigh, 2008). It is a situation denied global scrutiny due to Indigenous voices being silenced via the hegemonic principals of Western education, neoliberal control of the media and government sanctions. “In reality mass media structures and processes often exclude minority groups such as Indigenous Canadians and Australians, and prevent their participation in debates that may relate directly to their individual and community well-being” (Burrows, 2016, p. 91).

As an Australian First Nation Kamilaroi Aboriginal man who speaks and writes in my own native language and has retained ceremony, I introduce *autobiographical ethnicity* as my traditional narrative in overcoming such censorship. Autobiographical ethnicity is born out of a strategy in revitalisation of Indigenous representation. It allows greater emphasis on the Indigenous voice and counters the “exclusion of Indigenous voices from public sphere processes” (Burrows, 2016, p. 91). My writing introduces autobiographical ethnicity because the academy provides no current formal consensus of what represents true Indigenous epistemology as a working pedagogy within Western knowledge practice. Due to my ethnic background (for the sake of this text, *Aboriginal* written as domestic to Australia and *Indigenous* within an international context) autobiographical ethnicity empowers my sense of *self* rather than silences it. Autobiographical ethnicity introduced as a question of self-definition, that rather than start the discussion, becomes the discussion objective and the closing point. Autobiographical ethnicity, defined simply as *my story*, *my race* originates from traditional forms of Aboriginal ceremony and storytelling in that it moves beyond the qualitative research method predominantly framed by anthropologists and the humanities in autobiographic or ethnographic writing. It is a form of Aboriginal Kamilaroi narrative as old as Aboriginal people themselves.

This custom is still observed, and the first question of a stranger is, ‘What murdoo?’ —i.e., ‘Of what family are you?’ [“Gason’s Dieyeri

tribe,” p.13. Cox: Adelaide, South Australia, 1874]. (Fison & Howitt, 1991, p. 25)

The above excerpt is taken from *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* originally published in 1880. It describes a traditional Aboriginal acknowledgement inherent to lineage *murdoo* as practiced over tens of thousands of years and still maintained today through a diluted Western practice of *Welcome to Country*; this is where Aboriginal elders welcome those in attendance, guests, and dignitaries to their traditional lands (Dempster, 2007). In identifying both one’s authority to speak and one’s intellectual property as representative through traditional country, Aboriginal Australian people formulate a position where greater respect is given to our own Aboriginal voice if we can place ourselves within the very community, the lands and the people we represent. Like Paradies (2006), I refuse to “surrender my other identities” (p. 358) while incorporating Western aspects of structure and narrative. Autobiographical ethnicity, rather than exclude culture(s), is written from within the author’s own reflected ethnicity as part of either the colonised or the coloniser—black and white—Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Let me demonstrate how autobiographical ethnicity works as an inclusive narrative between cultures in regards to the pronoun *we* as intended throughout the text.

Kamilaroi, unlike English makes use of a dual pronoun. Thus between a singular *I* and first person plural *we* is first person dual (we: just two people). Between second person singular and second person plural is a second person dual (you: two people). And between third person singular and plural is third person dual (they: two people; Ash, Giaccon, & Lissarrague, 2003). In using Kamilaroi languages (there are a number of dialects), we have this grammatical distinction, in all *we* (as Kamilaroi: a language group) distinguishes between nine forms, following on from the additional distinction between duality and plurality. These distinctions branch out from present groups to also identifying lineage, in documenting different space and time, past, present, future belonging to *kubbaanjbaan* (bloodlines), *yanguru* (moiety as genetic memory) and *yarudhagaa* (totem) groups; these are then divided again between *yulay* (skin

groups for marriage and kinship groups, *ngumba* (mother), *bubab* (father) and *gaaynggal* (child).

For non-Indigenous or even Kamilaroi who no longer practice ceremony or can speak language, this can all get a little confusing. To make things easier in sharing my Kamilaroi *voice* through autobiographical ethnicity I will now break it down to English (i.e. ‘What murdoo—Of what family are you?’); where I will be utilising first the *royal we* in referring to oneself when expressing a personal opinion. But as the royal *we* is usually employed by a person of high office, I am using it as a documented ceremonial Kamilaroi who has passed three levels of traditional tribal customary sovereign initiation rites. This rite of passage demonstrates an intellectual position of high office over those, both non-Indigenous and Kamilaroi, who remain uninitiated. I will also use the editorial *we* identifying myself in the role as a spokesman on issues relating to Kamilaroi on behalf of those with whom I have established kinship ties and understand to agree with my commentary. I will also use the author's *we* directly to *the reader* as *author*, for the sake of brevity in the assumption that the reader knows certain principles or statements obtaining to general knowledge outside the complexities of Kamilaroi intellectual property.

Etymologically, the term autobiography is derived from the Greek *auto* (self), *bio* (life) and *graphein* (to write). Autobiographic writing was located within the late-Latin category of apologia. Apologias are statements in “defence especially of one's opinions, position, or actions” (“apologia”, 2016). The term ethnicity is commonly used in national population demographics to categorise people on the basis of heritage—“a group of people who have the same culture and tradition” (“ethnic”, 2016). Ethnography is the term used to describe a qualitative research method predominantly used by anthropologists, whereby *data* takes the form of field notes and or audio-visual documentation derived from the researcher's close observation of peoples and immersion in their daily lives. This term has been co-opted by researchers from the humanities and social sciences undertaking autobiographical projects to create the conjoined term auto-ethnography. In the 1960s, theorists of social interaction focused

attention on the role of language in the creation of social order. That is, the collective adoption and internalisation of commonly shared values and norms. A new school of thought known as ethnomethodology arose out of the work of Harold Garfinkel who critically evaluated the documentary process, arguing for *deeper analysis*, adding a greater layer of complexity to the idea that a person became a member of a group “by virtue of their aptitude for language and sense-making” (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 78). Garfinkel argued such definition provides for the view that members of a society do not make sense of actual actions in daily social life by simply perceiving them as they currently appear. Instead, it assumes that particular actions can only be interpreted as recognisable by reflexively drawing on past (and then future) “appearances-of-familiar-events” (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 78).

Writing about the autobiographical voices of those who do not recognise themselves in the traditional images that literature and society project and uphold as models, Françoise Lionnet proposes that the term autoethnography is more suited to works that define “one's subjective ethnicity as mediated through language, history, and ethnographical analysis, in short ... a kind of ‘figural anthropology of the self’ ” (Lionnet, 1989, p. 99). In applying autobiographical ethnicity as my research methodology, I therefore allow myself the opportunity to create a hypothetical third space through *reflection, language and sense* making separate from the binary relationship of authority and status established between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in current Indigenous studies (Moreton-Robinson, 2003). The binary as representative of the dominant white culture is everywhere—so much so that the preservation of traditional Aboriginal culture feels like a useless task (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). The trap of such a binary relationship of hierarchy is that once taken on it becomes impossible to reverse, and only serves to reinforce the power relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

It is considered a sign of success when the Western world, through one of its institutions, pauses even momentarily to consider an alternative possibility. Indigenous research actively seeks to extend that momentary pause

into genuine engagement with Indigenous communities and alternative ways of seeking to live with and in the world. (Smith, 2005, p. 104)

Autobiographical ethnicity allows me a shift from contemporary Indigenous studies, from negative to positive, by being separate from—yet experienced in and able to analyse the systematic evils of colonisation, rather than be alienated and subjected by them.

It is from within this new hypothetical space that I am now able to identify and manage difference. I cannot ignore that internationally Indigenous children are still identified as failing in Western schools across the world (DESA, 2009) and in particularly Australia (Gray & Beresford, 2008). As Indigenous scholars, we need to interrogate how we can utilise our position of social mobility to disrupt this persistent image of failure and bring to the world via this third space the assets our youth possess, rooted in centuries of cultural wealth and intellectual property. In Australia non-Aboriginal children do not have to learn any of the culture of the people whose traditional lands their school sits on. In autobiographical ethnicity we would maintain a more inclusive curriculum that successfully negotiates the binary, not only for Aboriginal children, but also for non-Aboriginal children who would rather become inclusive with us in occupying this *third space*. Traditional Aboriginal storytelling could then become the most significant tool to assert this cultural third space between black and white.

The journey, like any reflexive project of self, (Ellis, 2009; Giddens, 1991) means we would be required, as Indigenous scholars, to share our life experience as data in applying the methodology of autobiographical ethnicity as a research tool that actively engages the reader in a reciprocal process—in both the present location and the accumulated stories of the past. The key question is whether such Indigenous epistemology can be nurtured into the future as Indigenous scholars join the academy and as what was once unique in cultural practice becomes embedded outside of our own cultural space. We must take notice of, and position strategically, the traditional strength of the now isolated parallel tradition (the *other side* of the

binary) and, ensure it is no longer relegated from an inferior position. Autobiographical ethnicity becomes a tool to negotiate the meta-narrative landscape and assert our voice as *(ab)-origine*: from the beginning. In exploring the liminal space as it opens up to us, we are able to journey inwards into the crucible of our ancestry, a space in non-linear time that accesses these experiences observed within thousands of years of ancestral wisdom. In finding our own voice as Indigenous scholars, we are equipped to assist our students in connecting to theirs, reminding ourselves that we are inheritors of a cultural legacy based on the inter-relatedness of all things (Martin, 2008). Rob Pope (2005) talks about this unique sense of interrelatedness between time and space, as opposed to the way non-Indigenous or Western people think:

The distinction is an important one. Plato's image of the magnet suggests a one-way transmission of energy from a divine source through physical and human intermediaries to the audience. His is essentially a monologic, top-down model of the inspirational process. That of the Aboriginal elder is more dynamic and dialogic. It involves two-and many-way flows of energy, and through them, kinds of reciprocal support and inter-animation. Clearly, then, a lot depends upon the precise process of inspiration; who or what is reckoned to be 'breathing into' whom or what, through what means, and with what effects. (Pope, 2005, p. 92)

The acknowledgement of our own intellectual property is and remains essential in breaking down new forms of contemporary oppression such as classroom standardisation which continue to marginalise our Indigenous children and identify them as failures in a punitive Western school system (Cox, 2014). As Indigenous scholars we must remain critical; we must also push each other to interrogate our practice in relation to the subjects whom our practice impacts. In this case, our children, students in school and ourselves as scholars. Then ask ourselves what we can do both inside and outside the classroom to effect change.

For me personally, it was outside of the classroom where I went looking for answers taking a 12-month sabbatical from the university towards the end of 2014 to initially take part in the G20 protests in Brisbane. I could no longer

justify the compromises I make daily as a black man working in a position of privilege within a Western university while our people continue to suffer in our communities, denied the same institutional privilege that I receive. Not only do we have more children taken into care and protection today than we did during the *stolen generation* (Pilger, 2014), we also suffer the highest suicide (Georgatos, 2015) and incarceration rates (“We jail black men”, 2009) in the world. These are statistics that make action not only an obligation but an imperative. In wanting to become an agent for change we must return, not only to the origins of our history, but also to the current abuse faced within our communities and see it first-hand. In the university environment, such abuse is sanitised, theorised and critiqued—by leaving the classroom behind, I stand in my own autobiographical ethnicity where theory, critique and sanitisation are replaced by the immediacy of the lived experience.

The environment I found in returning to my community is one of hostility toward our Aboriginal culture, our people and our ways of life. But in doing so I can write freely about these experiences as a black man, not from hearsay, or opinion—but life experience as research-based practice-in-action, independent of the restrictions applied within the academy. To do otherwise would mean that the power imbalance would continue, to the detriment of any progressive cultural and/or creative activism I might achieve. Having left the hegemony of power relations (Midgley, Tyler, Danaher, & Mander, 2011) within the university behind, I also disconnect from what non-Indigenous scholars symbolize to be truth, knowledge, merit, achievement, trustworthiness, objectivity and normality (Fine, Weis, Power Pruitt, & Burns, 2004). Through autobiographical ethnicity I remain opposed inherently to the requirement that the marginalised member adopt the privileged member’s assumptions, ideologies, values and indeed their culture as a way of becoming legitimate. The problem is that in adopting the *values of the privileged* to gain acceptance, this creates common misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples which in turn become better known than the reality:

The problem that always arises with this particular way of operating is that, because you are not interacting with people based upon who they really are, but instead are relating to them according to your own limited ‘understanding’ of them, consequences will result from this interaction that by necessity will result in injustices for those who are unable to operate in the world in a manner consistent with who they are. Such injustices also, by necessity, lead to interactions between the representor and the represented that are fraught with conflict. (Chalmers, 2005, p.162)

The National Indigenous Higher Education Network (NIHEN), conducted a study in which it was reported that some Indigenous students were still experiencing the university as a “hostile and racist place” (Anning, Robertson, Thomas, Demosthenous, 2005, p. 49). Similar findings were also reported in Anderson, Singh, Stehbins and Ryerson’s (1998) investigation into the structure of Australian universities where they concluded that the university is still predominately an institution for the white person (Anderson et al., 1998). Autobiographical ethnicity is a process of decolonisation, where I have to emancipate myself mentally and recondition my POV (point of view). To return where my first thought, worldview and reading of any subject rather than as an academic or an Australian, becomes first and foremost as Aboriginal Kamilaroi above and beyond all else. I had to discipline myself via autobiographical ethnicity in allowing myself to move away from the “strange in-between ambiguous space” (Russell, 2002, p. 139) for which I previously occupied within the university, to once again find myself within my community.

Autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film- or videomaker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes. Identity is no longer a transcendental or essential self that is revealed, but a ‘staging of subjectivity’—a representation of the self as a performance. In the politicization of the personal, identities are frequently played out among several cultural discourses, be they ethnic, national, sexual, racial, and/or class based. (Russell, 1999, p. 276)

Only in returning to my community can I truly begin an investigative process in better

understanding how colonisation seamlessly continues to reinforce Indigenous poverty as a consequence of non-Indigenous heritage and cultural capital. Yes, we can have Indigenous academics, we can receive PhD's, but only within the restraints of what has become accepted... the university rather than be a place of learning becomes restrictive in understanding alternative narrative and text, which leads to frustration and anxiety for those who don't belong.

The following is an excerpt chosen just after I left the university to join my people on the front line of the G20 protests. It is written in such a way that I would like to propose as an example of fully interactive narrative applying to autobiographical ethnicity in practice:

*Shortly after leaving the university to attend the G20 protest I found myself at the Sovereign Aboriginal Embassy at Musgrave Park in Brisbane, a significant cultural space where our people have gathered for tens of thousands of years (Steele, 1984). I was greeted by around twenty people—mostly old women and men with some young people taking warmth from a sacred fire on the outskirts of the city. The sacred fire is maintained by my Uncle Wayne 'Coco' Wharton, a Kooma man, and a stalwart Aboriginal resistant leader, activist and protester. These Aboriginal fringe dwellers are without government funding and limited resources but are providing travel, food, accommodation, and utilities to the thousands coming to attend the protests. This is the voice of the most vulnerable people in Australia. Most of that discussion was in developing a peaceful demonstration and to avert opportunities for police violence during the G20. Discussion soon turned to Noel Pearson, a conservative Aboriginal who mainstream Australian media, big business together with government, had hailed a brilliant leader for his support of punitive neoliberal austerity politics against his own people (Altman, 2007). Noel had arrived in Brisbane for a public lecture the next day. Noel has received funding from both State and Federal governments to the amount of \$146 million over seven years for communities that total a mere 2961 people (McQuire, 2015). Pearson's programs receive more Aboriginal funding per capita than any other organisation in Australia, this despite these programs demonstrating no qualitative evidence of any demonstrated social change within any of the programs he manages (Hamilton, 2016; Cox, 2014; Lasslett, 2013). The group agreed we would attend and confront Noel at the lecture with questions challenging his divisive*

*politics and authority to speak on our behalf. As we arrived at the conservatorium, there was security everywhere—from both federal and local police and also men dressed like they had walked out of the set of Men in Black. It was surreal to say the least. You could almost see the disappointment on their faces when only Uncle Sam Watson, his wife Aunty Cath Watson and I walked in. Uncle Sam is elderly and requires aids when he walks, but due to years on the frontline immediately commands attention. Our true and proper community leaders are not chosen by force, social, and financial capital, but instead on wisdom, endurance and their service to the most vulnerable. We entered the lecture theatre and had to wait for another hour before Noel was introduced. He then went into a long explanation of what had to change, how Aboriginal people had to take responsibility for their own poverty with no apparent obligation or change being required by white Australians for this to happen. The problem was not institutionalised racism, but instead a lack of reciprocity on the behalf of Aboriginal people leading to a culture of welfare dependency... yes, we Aboriginal people remain the problem. Just as with Pontius Pilate two thousand years earlier Pearson allows white Australians to wash their hands of responsibility. He is willing to let every non-Indigenous Australian off the hook, for the wealth they have obtained from generations of stolen Aboriginal lands, our natural resources, and our intellectual property—and the dark shadows of invasion colonialism, disposition, exploitation, institutional racism and attempted genocide as the perpetrators of white aggression and racism against generations of Aboriginal people (Curtboys, 1999).*

*Uncle Sam, Aunty Cath and I sat silent—we were there as a collective and we had strategy. We also knew there were others who were coming later in order to avoid the opportunity for hostility from police and Noel Pearson's minders. We know how white people appear to react when we are in groups. With this many police and security—we were never going to give them that opportunity. It was when Noel was talking about how our people (Aboriginal) need to stop thinking collectively, to take on the attributes of self-interest and become motivated in material possession and introduce greed and jealousy into our communities that things really got interesting. Yes, Noel said all that. He said he "wants jealous mothers" in our community. He wants people jealous of homeowners and those with possessions. This is Noel's answer to our lack of agency and privilege.*

*The whitefella's were all nodding their heads agreeing with everything Noel was saying and that is when my*

Uncle Paul Spearim, one of those who had entered through the back door into the lecture room, spoke up. It really did feel as if we were witnessing the Gordon Gekko “Greed is Good” speech from the movie *Wall Street* and Uncle Paul, a Kamilaroi songman and ceremony leader, decided it was time to call enough is enough. Why? Because the very ideology of our custodial obligation and responsibility to look after one another as Aboriginal people was coming under threat. The predominantly white men who attend Noel’s public forums have influence and capital. What Noel has done is rather than move our case forward, he has taken the Aboriginal struggle back decades because these white men of influence and power believe what he is saying. It was time to put our plan into practice. We all knew our spoken roles and we were united. This was autobiographical ethnicity in action—if anyone of us had chosen to speak out as Uncle Paul had done, we were ready to respond. Uncle Sam just nodded and then it was my turn to support what Uncle Paul had said.

I addressed Noel directly, once my Uncle was finished—introducing myself culturally in my own Kamilaori language “yammaa ngiginda Gamilaraay winun-guldab” and we began our discussion. Noel agreed, that yes, he had indeed enjoyed the ear of government for over twenty years going back to Prime Minister Keating, he agreed with me that, yes this was frustrating to others on the ground who are denied that same opportunity and most importantly he agreed with me that in every aspect of progression we had gone backwards in this time ... towards a new Stolen Generation and our brothers and sisters in custody, and now the trauma of youth suicide. Then after waiting for the question and answer session to begin, Uncle Sam spoke. Uncle Sam received a public commitment from Noel that he would meet with us at the Brisbane Sovereign Embassy to speak of our concerns. That is a commitment yet to be honoured now two years later.

Then it was Aunty Pat Leavy, again as customary our women always have the last word—she told those in attendance how she was born and raised on the riverbank of Cunnamulla, on a dirt floor excluded and forced to live under the Aboriginal Act, not even a citizen of her own country.

The *Aborigines Protection Act 1909 to 1969* was 'An Act to provide for the protection and care of aborigines; It provided the *Aborigines Protection Board*, which had existed since 1881, with legal powers to 'provide for the protection and care of *Aborigines*.' It was the first piece of legislation that dealt specifically with Aboriginal people

in New South Wales. It applied to all Aboriginal people but contained particular provisions for children, including the right of the Protection Board to remove youths from Aboriginal Reserves and place them into service. The Act was repealed by the *Aborigines Act 1969*. (*Aborigines Protection Act, 1909 - 1969*).

Note from the author: As I write this article I have just seen for the first time the dates in referencing the above. I was born in 1968. I should have been aware, having grown away from my community after being taken from my Aboriginal mother—but this is the first time I have seen it written (*Aborigines Protection Act, 1909 - 1969*). It’s hard to describe the feeling.

Aunty Pat explained how she sacrificed to make sure every one of her children graduated from university. How even though she buys her clothes from Myers department stores, owns her own house, that the white people, just like those in the room, make way for her when she sits on a bus rather than sit next to her. She began wailing sharing the full emotion of the humiliation it feels when the only seat vacant on public transport is the empty seat next to you.

What we were witness to was a highly emotive and subjective narrative (Kane, 1988) initiated as an intuitive third space between black and white. This was achieved through an interplay between the sensibilities of narrator-character and audience in providing an alternative, non-essentialising, contemporary relationship to history and place. This was an example of gifted Aboriginal storytelling and the formation of interdisciplinary Aboriginal subjectivities influenced by real life experience in such a way that the non-Indigenous audience could not ignore. The use of deliberate signposts are what Kane (1988) describes as “extrinsic” in that they “at first appear to stand outside of the actual discussion...” (p. 54) 1. Born and raised on the riverbank of Cunnamulla, 2. A dirt floor, 3. Excluded and forced to live under the act, 4. Sacrificed for every one of her children to graduate from university, 5. Buys her clothes from Myers, department stores, and finally, 6. The only seat vacant on public transport is the empty seat next to you...but are established early as a clue to the organisation of the discussion that negotiates opposing Indigenous and non-Indigenous views of the world. When utilising autobiographical ethnicity effectively, the author, writer or speaker, in this case Aunty Pat, chooses to engage the audience by enlisting their own point of view towards a discussion, which becomes personal. This is done through a choice of words “fully appreciating implied

*overtone, sharing values and meanings that colour the perception between author and audience” (Kane, 1988, p. 257). This pedagogical mode shapes the author’s impression of meaning directly into the mind of the audience—and in doing so moves beyond abstract statement to images in details that appeal to the senses of the audience. These images become so emotionally charged, they make the impression seem real.*

*Aunty Pat knowingly demonstrated a traditional form of Indigenous Kamilaroi storytelling to embed deep into the consciousness of a non-Indigenous audience as an alternative way of seeing the world. As with Rosalie Kunoth-Monks (Knox, 2014) months earlier Aunty Pat let everyone in the room know we were not the problem. To the non-Indigenous and those Aboriginal people trapped within a process of assimilation, we may appear as a rabble of vagabonds and ragamuffins, but within 24 hours of this motley crew of Brisbane blacks meeting we had stolen Noel Pearson’s thunder. As across Australia the next day people woke to the story of “Brisbane Elders Abuse Noel Pearson” (Waterford, 2014).*

*Noel had started the lecture, as we do in Australia, with a “Traditional Acknowledgement to Country” (Kowal, 2010) by giving his respects to the local Aboriginal people, traditional owners past and present; this was where autobiographical ethnicity gave us our one cultural capital over and above everyone else in the room - it is also why I greeted him in my Aboriginal language. They may have been university pro-vice chancellors, bankers, politicians, business men and women but we were the traditional and local Aboriginal people acknowledged at the very beginning of the lecture. The audience were told we were to be respected and this protocol provided our leverage to now have our say—this went beyond protest, this was a form of autobiographical ethnicity in reclaiming cultural practice, and we were representing living breathing Aboriginal culture in action.*

In justifying ‘crises of representation’, Aboriginal writers draw upon their own lived experiences, offering insight into the real experiences of real people to produce political, historical, and sociological tales embedded in class, gender and identity. Aboriginal women in particular write about personal struggles that are political battles.

The need to challenge the established ways of acquiring knowledge, particularly knowledge that is collected, analysed, published and taught about the ‘Other’, the Colonised, the Indigenous. (Houston, 2007, p. 45)

These personal stories have generic application. Academic writing accomplishing the same outcomes is difficult to master. Factual precision is required, autobiographical ethnicity involves skill in composition to produce an objectively descriptive essay that is historically correct, accurately referenced, forcefully presented with a point of view that is both interesting and a successful contribution within the parameters of the academy. Kane (1988) discusses subjective essay writing where the writer is no longer “an impartial observer” (p 265), but instead becomes personal, and words have overtones of value and meaning that through feeling, colour the perception. Autobiographical ethnicity had put Noel Pearson into a difficult position, where, as Albert Memmi (2000) observes, “Usually something does not appear as a privilege unless it is lived as a deprivation or injustice by those less privileged” (p. 102), which in other words means: Noel, once confronted by his own people outside the safe haven of *institutional whiteness*, had little choice but to refer to what was already understood and perceived as truth—that we as a people represent the most disadvantaged of our society. The public media were watching and listening. Within 24 hours social media had gone into a frenzy citing articles written about what had happened across the country “Brisbane Elders Abuse Noel Pearson” and “Noel Pearson is a great orator but he’s essentially a leader without followers in Aboriginal world” (Waterford, 2014). As stated by both Castells (2008, p. 90) and Dahlgren (2015) “horizontal methods of communication, including face-to-face conversations, have the power to influence people’s minds and foster social change” outside of the “State control”. The G20 protests had begun and autobiographical ethnicity was reclaiming our traditional Aboriginal storytelling around Australia.

As political leaders from around the world arrived for the G20, the then Australia Prime Minister Tony Abbott made comment at a formal breakfast: “As we look around this glorious city, as we see the extraordinary development, it’s hard to think that back in 1788 it was nothing but bush” (Henderson, 2014). It was clear that Tony Abbott still clings to the myth of colonisation as pioneers of great white



explorers who ventured out and conquered the unknown in bringing civilisation to primitive savages (Curthoys, 1999). In response to a consensus of elders in consultation with Brisbane's traditional owners, the Yuggera and Turrbal First Nation peoples agreed to burn the Australian flag in protest (Rose, 2014). Over the duration of a week more than six thousand people took to the streets in three separate marches; there was traditional language and smoking ceremonies as the grass-root Aboriginal people made a stand. Since the G20 we have seen a renaissance of Aboriginal resistance re-establish itself in the political climate of Australia. Following the G20 in November 2014 over 150 traditional owners, language speakers and ceremonial people met in Alice Springs to set out a framework for *decolonisation* as part of The National Freedom Summit (Adams, 2014). On January 26, 2015 the delegates along with 500 supporters converged on Old Parliament House in Canberra to stage a sit-in, protesting the occupation of their land for the last 227 years. The Freedom Summit presented a manifesto, as politicians from both sides of government met with the leaders to discuss their grievances. The most significant cultural shift coming out of both the G20 protest and the National Freedom Summit was the endorsement of a number of young Aboriginal people nominated as leaders from within their own communities; Mekiri Onus, a Gunnai and Gunditjmarra woman, Pakeri Ruska, a Quandamooka woman, Jade Slokee, a Gumbanji woman, Bo Spearim, a Kamilaroi man, and Callum Clayton-Dixon, a Nganyaywana man, along with others became the founders of the youth group Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance (WAR.). With an injection of youth, the protest movement was about to go through a significant change.

In 2015 and again in 2016, we saw record numbers march on *Invasion Day* protests as opposed to attending Australia Day celebrations ("Australia Day: Invasion Day rallies held across nation", 2016). What this new generation of younger Aboriginal leaders had over and above the old guard was a command of social media where a new form of protest had begun; within a remote Aboriginal community called Wangkatjunka, in the Kimberley region of

Western Australia, Nelson Bieundurry posted on Facebook:

Hmmm, maybe the best question to ask is this, do we even give a sh\*t about what's happening to us now? The truth is...if you're a blackfella and you live in the Kimberley...in one way or another...this is going to affect you. (N. Bieundurry, personal communication, March 11, 2015)

The above post was written in response to the then Australian Prime Minister's comments that Aboriginal people living on their traditional homelands were making a *lifestyle choice* rather than fulfilling any cultural obligation (McCarthy, 2015). Western Australia Premier Barnett then recommended the closure of over 150 remote communities which would remove over 20,000 people from their traditional homelands after tens of thousands of years of occupation (Wahlquist & Davidson, 2014) forcing them to become Indigenous refugees in their own country.

Government has historically utilised mass media together with business represented as *the State* to not only inform the public, but also to disseminate such knowledge (Cottle, 2000). What these new internet cyber Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance achieved, as stated by Bruns, (2008) and Dahlgren, (2015) is usurped mass media's dominance and exclusivity in promoting instead "horizontal communication" outside the realms of "the old mass media" (p.22) via internet and user-generated media. As stated by Castell (2008) these new Aboriginal leaders, and there are many more including Arrernte woman, Celeste Liddle, Kamilaroi and Torres Strait Islander woman, Nakkiah Lui, and Nyikina woman, Sam Cook, are identifying emerging global media and internet networks as the new global public sphere.

As defined in autobiographical ethnicity:

Subaltern publics are usually culturally bonded and constituents use culturally appropriate communication styles and techniques that facilitate debate, promote their own identity and challenge stereotypes (Miloni, 2009, p. 419).

A website called "SOSBLAKA AUSTRALIA" was then founded, by Sam Cook (Cook, 2015) with over 70,000 followers, which now spreads the

word as an estimated thirty-five thousand people marched in a call to action around the country with rallies taking place in Brisbane and Sydney. Then Australia took notice as a third demonstration occurred in Melbourne which saw over twenty-five thousand people invade the city centre bringing it to a complete standstill. After the demonstrations Western Australian Premier Barnett distanced himself from his earlier comments (Wahlquist, 2015). The website #SOSBLAKAUSTRALIA was a form of “regroupment”, in providing spaces to “invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit oppositional interpretations of, alternative identities, interests, and needs” (Burrows, 2016, p. 92). In other words, the #SOSBLAKAUSTRALIA website gave voice to Aboriginal communities across Australia to further collaborate and negotiate as co-producers a text that reframes public storylines to assert their own voice independent of mainstream media. Squires, (2002) describes this as a “counterpublic” (p. 460) phase, where those denied access to mainstream media make “tactical strikes into the dominant public sphere” (Squires 1999, p. 35). Squires also argues that once informed outside of mainstream media the public is strong enough to undertake “sustained social movement activity” and to take political action in order to “transform” (Squires, 1999, p. 36) debates and generate political action.

In conclusion, having shared with many of these young people (WAR.) their own tribal rites of passage, I feel strongly and believe that via the use of autobiographical ethnicity these young Aboriginal resistance fighters have crafted a mixed media design rooted in qualitative inquiry. And having utilised digital media, now empower our voices as Aboriginal people beyond the confines of not only mainstream media, but government, big business and the Western academy. This presents other Indigenous people a unique opportunity to explore our subjectivities as well as present to the world the complexity of our heritage in new and exciting forms. But let us not become complacent, as although we have found a voice in social media, racism remains deeply ingrained in our historical institutions, including our places of learning. These institutions bolster the power of the

privileged member of a European hegemony that reinforces its own social capital within an institutional binary that maintains hierarchies working to exclude, deprive, and even silence the marginalised. As witnesses after the G20 protests, the Freedom Summit and #SOSBLAKAUSTRALIA we experienced a new literacy within technology to explore and expose racial oppression. While we acknowledge that this achievement is one step in a long journey to disrupt the continuation of Australian racism, and we celebrate the way it legitimates the power of youth and disrupts the outsider and insider power paradigm, we must now access primary source stories in which youth becomes co-authors, no longer negotiating, but shattering the Western institutions of racism.

That is the final question. In this massive cross cultural story mapping, youth chooses from a multimodal landscape to define and perform themselves via the voices of their own communities. This ideology of autobiographical ethnicity crosses borders and has highlighted the importance of digital media in action in giving voice to youth who encountered and developed one another’s strengths; youth who were troubled by the history and perspective of racial inequity and spoke in defiance to a society that upholds whiteness as the norm and racism as a personal problem constructed as a deficit model. Autobiographical ethnicity provides a platform to contribute to the academic discourse as teachers, in positioning ourselves as witnesses to the possibilities of criticality in global collaboration. Autobiographical ethnicity reaffirms the Aboriginal voice as a valid research tool, demonstrating the interconnectedness of Indigenous people over nonlinear timelines across the world. Evolving from the immediacy of the lived experiences of youth, social media is a significant platform enabling story-making that can change their world. And like us as Indigenous teachers within a world of institutional racism, they will realise and echo the refrain... that through autobiographical ethnicity...

“We are the change.”

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