

Privileging First Nations Knowledge in Education: Looking Back to Move Forward

**Looking forward looking back
I've come a long way down the track
Got a long way left to go
Making songs from what I know
Making sense from what I've seen**

(Slim Dusty, 'Looking forward looking back')

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Declaration of Authorship:

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any other degree and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

.....

Kathryn Gilbey

February 2014

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations:

ACIKE	Australian Centre Indigenous Knowledge in Education
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
ASCH	Actual Student Contact Hours
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
BIITE	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
CAT	Centre for Appropriate Technology
CDU	Charles Darwin University
CSWE	Certificate in Spoken and Written English
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DBATE	Deakin Batchelor Aboriginal Teacher Education
DPC	Desert Peoples Centre
EFTSL	Equivalent Full Time Student Load
FCAATSI	Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders
NSW	New South Wales
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
NT	Northern Territory
PWS	Patriarchal White Sovereignty
VET	Vocational Education Training
WINHEC	World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium
WWII	World War 2

Abstract

This thesis was written as a counter to the dominant narrative of Batchelor Institute being just another Aboriginal organisation that was run into the ground, by Aboriginal incapacity. Instead it is written to highlight the subtle hidden ways that racist ideologies infiltrate a workplace, in this case, an Indigenous tertiary education workplace. I name behaviours in the five data chapters of the thesis and match existing theories to the narratives of these chapters introducing and shining a spotlight on the possessive investment in ignorance that manifests itself as a means of protecting and maintaining white privilege. I look at assimilative mimicry and how it is played out in an educational setting like Batchelor Institute. There are internal contradictions and battles, I have named these as a site of interdiction.

Batchelor Institute has a mandate and a mission statement that seeks to better the lives of Aboriginal people, not in a missionary or false ‘empowering way’ but through the truth about our history and a belief in our culture. When this organisation meets the coloniser’s deliberate denial of truth and history it causes internal conflicts which results in the right environment for an interdictory site.

Often when writing theoretically, concepts become abstracted, when talking of theories it is often too easy to read and distance oneself from the reality of actions. My intention in this thesis is to start with the daily interactions and encroachments on the operations of the Institute to highlight the small, myriad and complex ways that racist ideologies are enacted. This is done in chapters five to nine through narrative and a first person account of important moments as understood through my perspective. It is a step by step account of how whiteness centres itself within interdictory sites and how white privilege operates.

The thesis is designed to provide the theoretical and historical information that informs the reading of the data (narrative) chapters. The theoretical analyses in the final chapters encompass all the information read from the data chapters and concludes with a meta-analysis from which the learnings from my research are presented in a succinct set of action-oriented principles. My theoretical analyses, interweaves theory and past Australian government policies with contemporary accounts of the struggle to embed First Nations cultural knowledges and pedagogies, within Indigenous education. It illustrates how mimicry, interdiction, subjection and abjection are all tools that serve to maintain ignorance which in turn serves to maintain white privilege.

By trusting in our old cultures that have never really let us down we can regain our pride and belief in this organisation as a transformed First Nations site of scholarship, learning and cultural celebration.

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Introduction to self

The protocol for introducing one's self to other Indigenous people is to provide information about one's cultural location, so that connection can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established (Moreton Robinson 2002 p. xiv).

My name is Kathryn Gilbey; I have one younger sister, one older sister and one big brother. I have my roots grounded in a strong powerful people; I am one of many descendants of Minu Pwerle. I am a proud descendant of the Alyawarr people whose country lies north east of Alice Springs, vast lands that follow the Sandover River all the way up to Camooweal in Queensland. My skin name is Kemmare.

The forces of colonialism haven't ravaged Alyawarr culture as they have others and I know how fortunate I am to have gone back to country and immersed myself within language and culture.

Alyawarr people are a strong people who have long and ongoing connections with country. My grandmother is from Alpurulum community (Lake Nash).

Iperelheleme is the actual name of the place but it was wrongly spelt and pronounced

so now it's Alpurulum. It was here where she met my grandfather who was the manager of the Lake Nash Station, where my father and uncles all learnt to be stockmen.

Alyawarr culture and knowledge is alive and well in every aspect of life; nothing sits outside its realm of knowledge. It is part of my heritage and body, an embodied heritage structure long known within Alyawarr traditions by country, spirits, stars and ancestors. I have a large extended family that I am proud of and happy to call my own; they inform me and my worldview more than any western system of education. However this thesis is written not within an Alyawarr worldview and not within a white mainstream worldview but at a point somewhere in the middle.

This thesis speaks of traditional knowledges, it is completely from a First Nations person's perspective, and it celebrates all the strength and wisdom that comes from our old cultures. But it is not uniquely Alyawarr or any other Aboriginal nation. It is general knowledge applied across First Nations cultures. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge is specific to a particular place and people; this is not¹.

This thesis while informed by knowledge positionings, invites you, the reader, to bring your own knowledge positionings to bear on the narratives that follow.

It is written from my point of view, made up of the myriad of information that makes me who I am, informed by my birth order and lineage, informed by my lived experiences in the cultural settings available to me during my formative years, during my education, during my professional life. Mostly my identity has been formed by

¹ The terms Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and First Nations are used interchangeably in this thesis, depending on context. Indigenous is only used when it is written into the name of an organisation or policy.

who I am within my family structure, that is what defines me. I am a descendant of one of the strongest, most enduring living cultures and that too informs who I am. I am appraised by a multitude of cultural knowledges, experiences and challenges. I have drawn on this multitude and this positioning of self in my research for this thesis. The perspective this positioning has placed me, at a deeply personal level, has informed my selection of 'data', my writing and my arguments.

The focus of this thesis is Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education². Batchelor Institute is not a mainstream white Institution. It is very specifically an Indigenous Institute, for First Nations people from Australia. Equally when writing about Batchelor Institute, this is not a white mainstream thesis; it is very specifically written from the point of view of a First Nations academic within the Institute.

All thought and writing is culturally loaded. There is no such thing as a third person neutral analysis. Cultural bias is present in all texts that are created from a single author. This text is no different. This is no third person neutral analysis. I will call out behaviours, like the possessive investment in ignorance and white privilege. I will look at assimilative mimicry and how it is played out in an educational setting like Batchelor Institute. Perhaps most importantly I will look at the internal contradictions and battles that take place in an organization like Batchelor Institute. This is an interdictory site in that it is a site within which there is a struggle for truths and resources. From this struggle internal conflicts and tensions are played out in Aboriginal organisations everywhere. When an organization that has a mandate and a mission statement that seeks to better the lives of Aboriginal people, not in a missionary or 'empowering way' but through the truth about our history and a belief

² Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education is variously referred to in this thesis as either Batchelor Institute, the Institute or BIITE.

in our culture, then you have an interdictory site. When this particular organisation met the coloniser and its deliberate denial of truth and history then you have the internal conflicts that Batchelor Institute went through as a site of interdiction.

I am a lecturer at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) and have been for the past twelve years.

During my time at the Institute there have been many upheavals and vigorous debates around race, racism, education and what role Aboriginal people's worldviews, cultures and knowledges can play in the development and implementation of Indigenous tertiary education. This has led me to these questions:

- What is the significance of the Institute?
- Why has it been so important in the lives and communities of Aboriginal people in the Territory and Nationally?
- What are the internal contradictions that have led the Institute to the point of rupture at the beginning of 2011?

This thesis is written from a deep affinity, if not love, for Batchelor Institute. It is from my belief in its as-not-yet fully accomplished role, of the potential and promise the Institute holds for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for an education on their terms, that I embarked upon this research.

Historical background of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

The main BIITE campus is located 110km south of Darwin, with a campus in Alice Springs and annexes in Katherine and Tennant Creek as well as study centres throughout Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. BIITE's development has seen it grow from a teacher aide training organisation attached to Kormilda College, a

residential secondary school in Darwin, to a dual Vocational Education and Training/Higher Education sector Institute offering tertiary courses from Certificate 1 through to a PhD program.

The scope and focus of academic scholarship and research skills at Batchelor Institute has evolved with the goals of the Institute and the changing student body.

Arbon (2008) describes the early days of Batchelor College in the late 1960s as growing out of a need for training and a demand for stronger Indigenous control of community schools as well as a need for skilled and trained support staff in remote communities. The Institute then developed to specifically address a need for training to meet the growing number of support jobs in communities and a demand for Indigenous control that was very community and student-centred and focused (p. 79).

During the 1980s and early 1990s, Batchelor Institute was primarily focused on training teaching assistants as qualified primary teachers. These teachers were predominantly from the Northern Territory and would return to their communities with a dedication to implement bilingual and culturally relevant programs into their local schools. These BIITE courses were designed for a community based program and grounded in classroom practice that existed in multi-lingual, multi-cultural classrooms. At this stage of its development Batchelor Institute had the profile of a small teacher training institution and, whilst there was limited exploration of academic principles or theories, it was deeply embedded within a “both ways” methodology that incorporated Aboriginal worldviews within a western academic tradition. This I will explain later in the thesis.

By the mid 1990s, the range of courses and certificates offered by Batchelor Institute had extended to include Aboriginal Health Workers, Administrators, Council Managers and Land Management professionals, with the development of a strong linguistic program with a focus on Indigenous Australian languages. But up to this point the management and control of the Institute was still in the hands of non-Indigenous people. The transition to Indigenous management and control was still a threshold to be crossed (Arbon, 2008).

The focus within the Institute shifted as its governance and senior management moved more to reflect the student body. In 1999, Veronica Arbon became the first Indigenous Director; former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Leader and Yolgnu Elder, Gatjil Djerrka became Chairman of the Institute's Council and Alyawarr / Arrente Elder Rose Kunothe-Monks became the Vice Chair. Batchelor Institute was now headed by a powerful force of Indigenous people representing a vast area of the Northern Territory.

The focus on learning supportive of Indigenous cultures and languages intensified in the 1980s again as the Institute was controlled by firstly a majority of Indigenous Council members and then later by a total Indigenous Council (Arbon, 2007, p. 66).

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, there was an emergent consensus within Batchelor Institute that it should continue its evolution from 'training college' to 'community college' towards becoming a fully-fledged multi-level tertiary institution that included Higher Education degrees and postgraduate awards. This began a new phase within the Institute that saw the development of degrees, post graduate qualifications and the move towards becoming an 'Indigenous University' that could

measure itself against mainstream criteria in Higher Education whilst maintaining a strong Indigenous voice and worldview. This became a focus for Council and senior management. Staff and students were invited on the journey of institutional development and transformation on terms of remaining grounded within a framework of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander paradigms of knowledge and cultural values. This insistence on the value of Batchelor Institute's difference on these terms was deeply held by many but not all staff as this thesis later shows.

Batchelor Institute began to move towards becoming a body that was unknown in an Australian context, an Institute that awarded degrees recognised within the Australian Higher Education sector but was grounded within the longest living educational system in the world, that of Indigenous Australia. Arbon (2008) described the Late Chairman's and Council's vision as

The aim was to move the Institution to a position where it had at its core a strong Indigenous identity.... This was a vision of an Aboriginal institution, an Indigenous University, in which indigenous knowledge was to be central to all aspects of the institution (p. 85).

Background to the research

The basis of BIITE's current and former vision statements is that educational success should not come at the expense of identity. Batchelor Institute's philosophy is an attempt to bring together the two paradigms, that of western knowledge and education with that of First Nations worldviews and epistemologies.

In 2001 the vision statement of the Institute was:

Batchelor Institute's aim is to become 'a unique place of knowledge and skills, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians can undertake journeys of learning for empowerment and advancement while strengthening identity' (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2001,p. 1).

Today the Institute's vision statement is:

Batchelor Institute: a site of national significance in Indigenous education - strengthening identity, achieving success and transforming lives (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2013).

The commonality between both these statements, the intersection between education and the strengthening of identity, the uniqueness of this vision statement within a larger Australian education context will be explored in this thesis through an historical analysis of the Institute. There is an implicit tension when dominant and subjugated cultures meet and attempt to disrupt established and entrenched power relationships. Thus Batchelor Institute becomes a micro site of the many tensions and colonial assumptions that are played out in the larger Australian context in relation to Indigenous peoples, a site in the struggle against an unending wave of colonialism and assimilation. It is Batchelor Institute's aim to maintain individual and collective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and culture within a western educational framework. This is what makes the Institute unique, tense, exciting, cutting edge and in trouble.

The Research

The title of my research study, *Privileging First Nations Knowledge in Education: Looking Back to Move Forward*, explains both my intent and my methods. My intent is to look at the history of Batchelor Institute to gain a sense of what we were before and what we could have possibly grown into. The aspirational statement of moving forward poses the question of where to from here. The Institute has a long history that I would like to explore to understand the point we reached at the beginning of 2012. The question of how the organisation arrived at this ‘point of implosion’ is explored and recommendations for the future are posed. However the majority of the research looks back so that the lessons of the past will provide a passage into the future. By examining closely five selected moments in the life of the Institute during my association with it I hope to create a research-based and theoretically grounded framework that can see future incarnations of the Institute, or any other autonomous First Nations educational institute, learn from our recent history and strengthen the arguments for, and the implementation of, an inclusive education for First Nations peoples.

My other motivation for writing this thesis was so there was a counter narrative on the record. Batchelor Institute is in a troubled place at the moment, and the newspapers talk of a lazy ideology and Indigenous incapacity, but that’s not how I saw events that led to this troubled place transpire. Where are the discussions of hegemony and white privilege? The popular narrative is one of Batchelor Institute just being another Aboriginal organization that was run into the ground by Aboriginal people. In my time at the Institute I witnessed much. However, amongst all that I have witnessed, a generalised Aboriginal incapacity was definitely not evident. There was and is no

lack of love or commitment to this place that I saw. So what happened? This is what I endeavour to answer, and if nothing else, this thesis will stand as a record against the popular narrative of gross over spending and Aboriginal incompetence. This thesis will instead speak to hegemony, white privilege, assimilative mimicry and interdiction. We are all subjects of power Butler (1997) but we are not all subjected to subjugation and abjection. But that is the common experience of First Nations people in this country and this thesis contains my recollection of that experience as I saw it.

The Implosion

In 2009 (four years after Arbon left as Director of the Institute) the Institute was six weeks from insolvency and as a result was put under receivership with KordaMentha, a business specialising in enterprise insolvency and restructuring services, taking over the administration of the Institute and responsibility for its governance for 18 months. KordaMentha's mandate was to propose to the Federal Government solutions to the Institute's financial issues and its organisational future.

In early 2000 – 2002, the Northern Territory University became Charles Darwin University (CDU). Part of this transformation into CDU saw Centralian College, Menzies School of Health and other independent training organisations come under the umbrella of CDU. It was also the beginning of the push for Batchelor Institute to become the Indigenous Faculty of CDU.

Batchelor Institute managed to resist this push for almost a decade, a resistance strongly spearheaded by Arbon during her time as Director. But with the collapse of BIITE Council and KordaMentha running the organization, a proposal was put to the Federal government that BIITE retain VET delivery while its undergraduate Higher

Education courses be offered through the Australian Centre of Indigenous Knowledge in Education (ACIKE), a proposed joint BIITE and CDU entity. The proposal identified the undergraduate Higher Education courses of ACIKE as CDU accredited degrees thereby placing ACIKE's delivery of these courses as accountable to CDU academic board and aligned with CDU's structures of governance, strategic directions and processes.

Batchelor Institute's Higher Education students were transferred into (where possible) analogous CDU courses and all new ACIKE students are enrolled as CDU students since 2012. Batchelor academics teach into these ACIKE designated undergraduate courses principally through its traditional form of delivery involving short residential workshops at the Institute's main campuses in Batchelor and Alice Springs. Batchelor Institute could no longer design and deliver Higher Education undergraduate courses, all programs had to go to ACIKE or be lost.

At the time of writing this thesis, this is where Batchelor Institute stands with all undergraduate Higher Education delivery through the ACIKE structure.

Batchelor Institute now has no Indigenous staff in leadership positions. The number of academic positions held by Indigenous staff has dropped markedly since the midpoint of the last decade contrary to recommendations of the Behrendt Report (2012).

The Council is chaired by a respected Indigenous academic from an interstate university but the Council is no longer comprised of representatives from Northern Territory Communities. The Batchelor Institute Act (1999) was now replaced with the Batchelor Institute Act (2005) with the revised act being passed through

parliament on the 14th February 2012. Council is now comprised of ten appointees with a 6 person Indigenous Advisory group attached but separate.

My Research Focus

The relevance of the inclusion of this brief account of the ‘implosion’ in the introduction to my thesis is that this research study was motivated by this loss of representative Council and Higher education delivery as felt by Indigenous staff, students and community members. I wanted to reflect on ‘what could have been’ and to understand more deeply ‘why not’. My thesis charts my reflective journey towards this understanding.

I have not posed a series of research questions to be answered by my doctoral study. Instead I have presented a research focus; an exploration of the struggle to transform an Indigenous tertiary institution into a more authentic First Nations educational provider in the period prior to its implosion. This exploratory focus highlights both highs and lows through personal narratives centred on five significant moments of this transformative struggle.

Thesis Breakdown

The structure of the thesis in terms of its chapters is as follows.

Chapter one introduces myself and the Institute. In this chapter I contextualise some of the issues relevant to my doctoral study and define the focus of my research.

Chapter two is an historical analysis that looks at the construction of structural racism in this country.

Chapter three provides an explanation of the theoretical framework of the study and how it will be applied in the later analytical chapters.

Chapter four is my methodology chapter that spells out why I started writing this thesis and the research approach I have adopted.

Chapter five is the first of the data/ narrative chapters and is a step-by-step account of how white privilege and mimicry work in a organisation like BIITE. The subtle hidden ways that racist ideologies operate in a workplace is explored within the narrative account of this selected example.

Chapter six The second data chapter examines the period of rupture in the Institute's trajectory and how, through undermining First Nations peoples' authority, white privilege re-centres itself.

Chapter seven is a celebration of the Common Units of the Institute's Higher Education undergraduate degree courses and their eleven year history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-centred education and how this was counter-hegemonic to white authority and ignorance.

Chapter eight explores how Batchelor Institute's graduation ceremonies and the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander knowledge within these ceremonies has been eroded over time. With the privileging of Western ways, standards, time management, confidentiality and formality of ceremony, the opportunity for student and community involvement has been lessened and then removed.

Chapter nine celebrates the Desert Peoples Centre Opening in Alice Springs, and how successful we can be when we privilege Aboriginal knowledge, when we begin from a place of strength.

Chapter ten is a theoretical analysis drawing on the theories presented in Chapter three, the history of racial legislation in Chapter two and the narrative content of the five data chapters. A second level analysis of the data chapters leads in turn to a third level meta-analysis of all the data chapters.

Chapter eleven is the conclusion to the thesis in which I include a set of Principles upon which to build authentic forms of inclusive Indigenous education.

Conclusion

The thesis is designed to provide the theoretical and historical information that informs the reading of the data chapters. The theoretical analysis in Chapter ten encompasses all the information read from the data chapters. The theoretical analysis looks at how mimicry, interdiction, subjection and abjection are all tools that serve to maintain ignorance which in turn serves to maintain white privilege. The thesis concludes with a summation of my learning as to what is required to frame the application of an authentic form of inclusive First Nations education within an autonomous First Nations tertiary institution.

Chapter 2: Understanding BIITE as a Creature of this country here.

Introduction

This chapter looks at how policy has impacted on the development of Batchelor Institute. It provides the ideological background showing how Batchelor Institute is very much a creature of the Northern Territory. In so doing, the chapter also shows the effect of broader Australian policies and their lingering effects today on the Institute and the people working within it. Some of the behaviours and attitudes demonstrated in the data chapters of this thesis find their roots in the deeply ideological forms of racism embedded within Australian politics and mainstream views about Aboriginal people.

Veronica Arbon (2008) sent out a call that a deeper interrogation of Indigenous education, its history and the allocation of funds is needed, to be conducted by Indigenous academics.

Indigenous interrogation of such situations need to be pushed to the deepest levels in order to understand. There is a need at this very moment to shift to a much more nuanced and Indigenous knowledge critique from within our world views (p. 63).

This is the intent of this body of work presented in this thesis. By looking through the microscope of moments and interactions narrated in Chapters five to nine the nuanced

critique that Arbon demands will emerge in the final chapters. This chapter then is the anomaly within the body of this thesis as there is nothing subtle, hidden or nuanced about an analysis of Australian and Northern Territory policies and their impact on both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people through to the present. By over-viewing these policies and their accumulative effects, my intention is to expose the harsh reality of Australian racism.

This chapter begins with a look at broader Australian policies about Aboriginal people and their intent. I will look at specific legislations and actions that were introduced over the last two hundred years to enact the intent of the broader policy positions. The enactment of intent will be demonstrated through legislation and action throughout the last two hundred years. The legislations and actions of the day reflect the broader political and ideological orientation of white Australia towards Aboriginal people. If the broader policy position was Protectionism or Assimilation then both the legislation and actions of the people reflected that position. Australian citizens were and are, given permission to hold views concordant with their government's position and to behave accordingly. The implication of this insight in today's era of paternalism and benevolence will be explored later in the thesis. This chapter will also look at how this evolving policy environment has played out within Aboriginal education.

One key way to ensure that the dominant ideologies of control and benevolence remain prevalent is to systemically and systematically shut Aboriginal people out of any authentic political process; to systematically deny Aboriginal people the opportunity to represent themselves politically, socially or within the education system. This effectively allows all presentations of Aboriginality to be filtered

through the government or the nation state's institutional filters, whether that be the media, the legislative assemblies or the education system.

The broader policies and their subsequent laws and actions when laid against a backdrop of initial invasion to recent amendments to land rights acts reveal an intent of genocidal dispossession. All of these policies can be seen to have a concrete intent attached to them; that is the illegal acquisition of land, the erasure of Aboriginal difference and resistance and the desire to keep control.

Without going into any commentary on the nature of colonialism and violent conquest of others' lands, even within the logic and rules of those times, 'Australia' as a nation state was founded illegally. Either a war should have been declared and won or a treaty should have been reached. Aboriginal peoples' sovereignty as owner occupants should have been recognised from the outset of Australia's colonisation. The rules of colonialism applied everywhere else, but Australia was declared "Terra Nullius", vast lands belonging to no one. The echoes or rather shockwaves of this decree are still felt today despite the Mabo High Court decision (1992) and the subsequent Native Title Acts (1993, 1998). The trajectory of Aboriginal policy formulation needs to be understood from this perspective; that is, from the perspective that white Australian society grew from an illegal and genocidal theft of country. That the lingering effects of Terra Nullius can be felt today and cannot be under estimated.

The Broader Australian Policy Context

Australia seems to be unique in the way that it legislates its racism. Australia quite unashamedly puts its theories of racial superiority in the public domain from the segregation policies of the 1890s to the *Northern Territory Emergency Response Bill*

2007 with its amendment of the *Northern Territory Land Rights Bill* 1975 and the removal of Aboriginal people from Australia's *Racial Discrimination Act* 1975.

This flaunting of racist ideology, I argue, finds its legitimacy in the first lie and foundation of the Australian Nation, "Terra Nullius", uninhabited land. Gary Foley (2000) in his essay *Assimilating the Natives in the US and Australia* says :

In 1788 the imposition of British Sovereignty on Australia was justified by the notion of Terra Nullius, which was a convenient means to avoid the problem of just reparations for the Indigenous inhabitants who, in the process of being dispossessed, were thereby deemed sub human (p. 1).

The consequence and lingering effects of this will be demonstrated throughout this thesis. The enduring violence of this offence is played out in our daily rituals, the brutal effect of being labelled less than human is present in both First Nations communities and non-Aboriginal people's imaginations. Shockingly for those unfamiliar with Australian politics are that no treaties were ever formed. No recognition of prior occupation was ever admitted until the Commonwealth Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act (1976) where recognition was restricted to the Northern Territory. The Mabo High Court decision (1992) and the subsequent Native Title Act (1993) opened recognition under strict circumstances to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country. Both of these Acts acknowledge prior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander occupation but not sovereignty over these lands.

Foley (2000) argues Terra Nullius came about because “despite an early fear that the French might contest the annexation of Australia, the continent was colonized by a single European power, rather than the situation that developed in America” (p. 1). This large land then through this claim of Terra Nullius became uncontested. There was no one to monitor the colonisers and their brutality was felt across the continent through the many Indigenous nations. This has significance given that in comparison, “within the emerging American colonies, defacto recognition of indigenous sovereignty had been bestowed in the formation of treaties with many Native American groups”(Foley, 2000 p.1).

Though many of these colonial treaties were subsequently ignored and violated by governments, recognition was at least given in Canada, North America, New Zealand, Pacific Islands and in almost all other colonised countries. The lack of Aboriginal recognition in Australia lies in the British fabrication, Terra Nullius, and its impact in subsequent policies and attitudes.

Eckerman et al (2010), in *Binan Goonj : Bridging Cultures in Aboriginal health*, state:

Every Act imposed on Aboriginal people between the 1890s and the 1960s can be classified as an example of institutional racism embedded in cultural violence....It could be argued that the attitudes, beliefs and practices of colonisation were well and truly extinguished in the 1960s, but we do not agree. Aboriginal people are still subject to attitudes, beliefs and practices born out of the history of colonisation (Eckerman et al. 2010 p 21).

The history of Australian colonialism is not a relic of the past. This history shapes the ideological present and its continued presence is demonstrated and practised in the Northern Territory today and, of particular relevance to this thesis, in Batchelor Institute. Batchelor, as an organisation, bears the imprint, the scars of this history.

In order to position the ‘present’ that is explored in my research I now provide in this chapter a historical overview and presentation of Aboriginal policies and actions of successive Australian governments beginning in 1788. This overview is necessarily brief and in outline only, but it exposes what lies behind what Pilger (1989) calls ‘white Australia’s secret’ and what Reynolds (1987) refers to as ‘the whispering in our hearts’, and what I will later refer to as a possessive investment in ignorance, that contradicts non-Aboriginal Australians’ adherence to a vision of a fair and just nation-state.

Official Government Policies of the colonial states of Australia prior to Federation in 1901 and of the subsequent Commonwealth of Australia

The policies that have ruled over First Nations people can be broadly put into five overarching categories. These categories are invasion and conquest, segregation and protection, assimilation, integration and self-determination and self-management.

Within these categories there are hundreds if not thousands of ordinances, pieces of legislation and institutionally racist laws that were created to keep Aboriginal people in their oppressed place after their progressive dispossession across the continent starting in 1788. The rapid fire changing of the goal posts through legislation can be read as a direct response to Aboriginal resistance. Colonial governments and later the State, Territory and Federal governments literally kept changing the laws to more and more directly rule over First Nations people.

The overarching policies begin in this ancient land with invasion in 1788. Though no war had been declared, from this point in time Australia's history is marred with genocide, poisoning waterholes and flour, taking land, killing traditional food sources, introduced diseases, massacres of whole tribes, killing men, women and children. This was a time of torture and conquest and there was strict retaliation to any resistance, devastating the local Aboriginal populations. With the staggered and phased invasion and conquest of this expansive continent, these brutal times of torture and conquest were inflicted on Aboriginal populations up until the 1930s depending on which part of the continent your country was within.

The next set of official government policies and approaches is the segregation era 1840s – 1950s. This era is also called the era of Protectionism with the establishment of missions and the 'smooth the dying pillow' policies firstly in the south eastern colonies and later in the Northern Territory following the phased invasion and conquest of Aboriginal nations. Over this extended period within the various States and Territories jurisdictions Protection Acts were passed, for example, The Aborigines Protection Act 1896 (Vic). This era was based on the view that Aboriginal people will eventually die off so we will remove them from country herd them up into missions and make it a bit nice for them as they die. Like the era before it this era was all about an end goal of the complete extermination of the many Aboriginal nations. This was the era of A.O. Neville, Darwinism and the white Australia policy, all setting the expectation that 'mixed blood' people will be absorbed within the white population in three generations and 'full blood' people will die off. The forced removal of children from their families was one of the policies that was enforced to achieve this end. These children and this policy would later become known as the "stolen generations".

The Assimilation period followed from 1950 – 1960s, a time of increased Indigenous resistance and when public attention was turned to discussions of Aboriginal rights. Embarrassed by the fringe camps and a miniscule of scrutiny of the appalling mission conditions, the new set of policies had the intention to assimilate First Nations people into the broader white population. The plan was that through access to housing and health services and newly acquired access to education, Aboriginal people were to become good white people. Not the bad white people who murdered, stole and lied; these white people have by this stage been conveniently erased from the popular memory.

The Integration era followed in the period from 1967 – 1972 espousing not assimilation but rather integration. This era was based on the view that “we (white Australia) know what is best for you if only you could see it. So we won’t overtly try and change and mould you, rather if we ignore difference and squint our eyes a little bit no one will notice that you are there. Forget your land, history and culture. Forget all your knowledge and lived experiences, embrace white culture.”

Following this was a three year period of self determination as an overarching policy from 1972 –75. This policy coincided with the Federal Whitlam government’s policy of multiculturalism. Under this policy Aboriginal Australians had to resist the expectation that they were now but one cultural group within an Australian polity of many cultural groups with no more rights than those granted to other Australians irrespective of their origins.

Self determination was replaced by self management from 1983 up to 1991.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2009) in her paper ‘imagining the good indigenous citizen’ demonstrates the hold that “patriarchal white sovereignty”: has in this country by exposing the mindset behind these last two policy eras. In the section entitled ‘Race war and the discourse of Indigenous pathology’ she writes:

Since the 1970s, government policy has oscillated between self management and self determination. The former was concerned with administration and management of communities and organisations, while the latter implied control over policy and decision making.... While it is often argued that self determination has been the dominant policy framework since the early 1970s, a closer analysis of government processes and practices would reveal that self management has occupied centre stage (Moreton-Robinson 2009, p. 66).

Though the setting up of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1989 by the Hawke-Keating federal government, ATSIC’s representative regional councils and commissioners were presented as the “epitome of Indigenous self determination”. ATSIC actually did not have the delegation to control policy and the way that people were being treated and did not actually have the power to affect change in any meaningful way in communities. The ATSIC commissioners were still on a very tight leash.

Moreton-Robinson (2009) goes on to say that:

When the ATSIC commissioners did change the policy agenda, under the stewardship of Geoff Clarke, from one of

self management involving decision making to a self determination model that advocated Indigenous rights, the newly elected Howard Coalition government, in concert with the media, represented the Commission as being mismanaged, misguided and corrupt. Howard deployed a discourse of pathology strategically to win electoral support aided by the mainstream media (p. 66).

The three year official policy period of self determination gave rise to real fear within the white Australian populace who thought their backyards would be taken. Moreton-Robinson neatly sums up the difference between an illusion of control and what was really happening. The difference between self determination and self management then became one of power and control again. But what was the fear? It was so tangibly felt that John Howard could gain electoral confidence and support for the removal and demonisation of ATSIC, the only body even remotely positioned to argue for a treaty, for real recognition of sovereignty, for real changes to be felt in communities. That local control and Elders be given recognition and the ability to control what happens in their communities, to their people and their country, and also that people be compensated for their trauma wrought through the stolen generations and stolen wages, was to be avoided at all costs.

Any rights based conversation would seem to induce panic both in the government and in the general population. The collective denial and amnesia was reinforced and re-inscribed as the correct way to be and act. Later I will discuss the possessive investment in ignorance that has permeated through all levels of Australian society but now I want to look at some more specific moments of legislation to show how the

government, through its use of law, has collectively enabled the Australian people to be ignorant of any truths surrounding the building of nationhood and the lies that this nationhood is based on.

In 1991, Reconciliation was a sweeping federal policy and led to the ongoing Reconciliation Movement premised on healing the distrust between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Australia. But Reconciliation initiatives, without acknowledging the true history as lived by Aboriginal Australians and Aboriginal accounts of history of the past, failed to address the countervailing force of white Australia's possessive investment in ignorance. As a consequence Reconciliation became a slogan without leverage for significant and radical policy change.

I want to drill down into some of the detail of this history of policy enactment in the Northern Territory. I make no apology for the length of the next section because this is the history that percolates into the 'present' in the mindsets of non-Aboriginal Australians who come to live and work in the Northern Territory. Many if not most of these non-Aboriginal Australians often arrive in the Territory having had little to no personal contact with Aboriginal people, but as I will show later in this thesis, not necessarily free of an inscription of white Australia's cultural memory in Aboriginal matters.

Northern Territory Aboriginal Policies and related events elsewhere in Australia³

In 1862 McDouall Stuart's third attempt to cross the Australian continent from South to North was successful. The invasion of the Centre and Top End of Australia quickly followed. In 1870 Darwin was established and Undoolya Owen Springs became the

³ This section has drawn on: Class Notes Aboriginal Organisation and History, <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/aboriginal-history-timeline>; and <http://australianmuseum.net.au/Indigenous-Australia-Timeline-1901-to-1969>

first Central Australian pastoral station. By 1882, one fifth of the Northern Territory was taken up in pastoral leases with the Overland Telegraph linking Adelaide to Darwin completed a decade earlier.

In 1901 at Federation the Australian Commonwealth Constitution was put in place and the six colonial states in Australia become the six states of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Constitution stated: that in reckoning the number of people, Aboriginal natives shall not be counted. It also stated that the Commonwealth will make laws for any race but not for Aboriginal people except for those Aborigines living in the territories of the Commonwealth. The NT was one of these territories and, after an extended period being under the legislative control of the South Australian government, came directly under the control of the Federal government in 1911.

In 1909/10 the NT Aborigines Protection Board Act was passed giving the Protection Board legal control over Aboriginal people. By 1911 the NT Aborigines Act was also enacted giving legislative control to a Chief Protector. By 1918, the NT Aboriginal Ordinance Act regulated the employment of Aborigines in towns and by 1928 new ordinances were introduced. These were aimed at controlling “half caste” people, establishing prohibited areas and determining that only the Chief Protector could issue licenses to employ Aborigines.

In 1937 a conference of the Commonwealth and State Chief Protectors was held in Canberra. This conference was the first national think tank on what to do about the fact that First Nations peoples and their cultures were proving too strong and had survived the early genocidal practices. “Smoothing the dying pillow” was not working. The Protectors met to work out a policy solution to the growing Aboriginal population and the perceived problem of Aboriginal people to the White Australia

established by the Commonwealth government in 1901, its first year of existence. This conference marked the first stage of the governmental push from Protectionism to Assimilation and then to Integration. A. O. Neville, the Western Australian Chief Protector, announced his plan to breed out the Aboriginal population. His openly genocidal scientific plans revolved around removing children from their communities and through state controlled and scientifically (mis)conceived miscegenation to breed out the Aboriginal population. The NT Chief Protector at the time, C.E. Cook, was influenced by the 'crisis' talks of this conference and by the ideas of Neville. Cook demanded plans for absorption at the conference. His presentation was born out of a fear that the growing number of black and brown people in the NT would soon outnumber the white population.

The outbreak of WWII in 1939 saw the Aboriginal Protection and Preservation Act passed along with a rapid increase again in the white population of the NT due to the influx of military personnel. By the end of the war in 1945, a policy was established in the Northern Territory to remove all so-called fringe dwellers to missions.

Importantly Aboriginal men fought in this war but were not recognised as men or citizens or returned soldiers upon returning to this country. In Western Australia at this time Aboriginal cattle station workers held a strike over living conditions in the Pilbara.

In response to this growing empowerment amongst Aboriginal people, including Aboriginal returned service men and pastoral workers, the NT Welfare Ordinance was passed in 1953 making all Aboriginal people wards of the government. This ordinance was basically again defining Aboriginal adults as children.

In the 1950s, with the onset of the Cold War, the Australian Government allowed the British Government to conduct nuclear bomb tests on Maralinga lands at Emu, South Australia. A black cloud passed to the north and many Aboriginal people suffered radiation sickness. This continued in 1956 /57 with more nuclear bombs detonated on southern Pitjantjara homelands adjoining the southern border of the NT.

In 1963, a bark petition against mining on the Gove Peninsula in Northeastern Arnhem Land was drawn up by the senior Yolngu men of the affected clans. On 28 August of that year the petition was presented to the Governor General. However the Federal Government failed to recognise the Aboriginal political and territorial structures underlying the petition. The petition was rejected because of insufficient signatures, despite all the senior men and elders from the communities signing it.

In 1964, The Northern Territory Social Welfare Ordinance replaced the Welfare Ordinance, supposedly putting Aboriginal people on the same level as other Australians. But the Ward's Employment Ordinance remained in force leaving Aboriginal people on Christian missions and government settlements. Also continuing were the unequal conditions affecting Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory in the areas of employment, wages, vocational training, health and housing.

In 1965, the NT Integration Policy was introduced, meaning that Aboriginal people were supposed to have more control over their life and society. At this time NT patrol officers 'bring in' the last group of Aboriginal people living an independent life in the desert. These people, the Pintubi, were relocated to Papunya and Yuendumu in Western Central Australia.

But by 1966 the tides of change were turning. Brave and courageous stockmen and women at the Wave Hill pastoral station walked off in protest at their appalling work and living conditions. They moved to Wattie Creek demanding access to and return of some of their traditional lands. This was to be the beginning of a seven year battle for the Gurindji and formed the basis of Land Rights protests and, in time, the Native Title legislation by the Commonwealth Government in 1976. Vincent Lingiari, a Gurindji Elder, petitioned the unions and other organisations in the southern states to come and help the Gurindji. Aboriginal rights to lands and basic human rights were beginning to be spoken about openly in mainstream Australian society and in the media. A movement was born.

On the 27th May in 1967 a national referendum was held to count First Nations people on the Commonwealth census and to allow the Commonwealth to have powers to legislate over Aboriginal peoples across Australia. This contradicted a clause that had specifically been written into the Constitution in 1901. Australia voted overwhelmingly in support of change. There was a 91.77% vote to make two changes to the Australian Constitution. The Commonwealth was now to have powers to legislate on Aboriginal Affairs and Aboriginal people were to be counted on the Commonwealth census. This was the first time Aboriginal people were to be counted as Australian citizens.

Whilst the jubilation and triumph of this success was undeniable, particularly given that few referenda had ever been passed and none with such a large percentage of the population voting 'yes' to constitutional change and citizenship rights, it would seem that the majority of Australian people had seemingly turned a corner in terms of Aboriginal rights.

Aileen Moreton Robinson (2009) though points out some pitfalls around the 1967 referendum. It's often only in hindsight that we can see through the smoke.

The impoverished conditions under which Indigenous people lived were televised and beamed into the living rooms of white middle class Australia and represented within the print media. White Australians voted in overwhelming numbers to endorse the 1967 referendum believing they were casting a vote for Indigenous people to be granted full citizenship rights and thus be included within the nation. Within the white imaginary citizenship represented equality and it was assumed that this status would enable Indigenous people to overcome their poverty and become the same as other Australians (p. 62).

This joy and celebration at so decisively winning the referendum seemed to mark a turning of targeted racialised legislations. The era of Assimilation took hold as Aboriginal people were supposed to embrace their newfound citizenship, buy a house in the suburbs, forget the times of old and any connection to country and culture, and join in the Australian dream. Citizenship was to be the panacea to solve all the issues surrounding access to land, health, education and structural racism.

However the idea that full citizenship rights had been granted and that this therefore meant equal access to resources and services remained in the imagination of the citizens within the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture.

(Moreton-Robinson 2009), went on to say:

Since 1967 Indigenous people have continued to live in poverty irrespective of the level of economic prosperity of the nation or whether there are Labor or Liberal, federal and state governments in power implementing their ‘different’ Indigenous affairs policies.

..... These differential outcomes and their history raise a question : do citizenship rights enable or constrain Indigenous people within society? I argue that patriarchal white sovereignty as a regime of power deploys a discourse of pathology as a means to subjugate and discipline Indigenous people to be extra good citizens (p. 62).

Following Moreton-Robinson, this thesis will illustrate how citizenship as a nominal status for Aboriginal Australians is but a first fragile and faltering step towards the attainment of full equality and actual recognition as sovereign beings.

From 1967 to the present, the policy domain in Australian Aboriginal affairs has been one of recognition of Aboriginal rights followed not necessarily by the advancement through equal rights but by negative outcomes. For example in 1968, Aboriginal workers were included in the Northern Territory Cattle Industries Award. Aboriginal stockmen were now to be paid equal wages. Following this inclusion, many Aboriginal stockmen lost their jobs and they and their families were moved off cattle stations across the NT to live in fringe camps on the outskirts of NT townships.

In 1971, Yolgnu Gumatj Elders, mounted the Gove Land Rights Case following on from the Bark Petition against the bauxite mining company Nabalco and the Federal Government. Recognising the arguments of the Federal Government, the Northern Territory Supreme Court ruled that the Yolngu people did not, under Australian law, own the Arnhem Land reserve on which the mine was located even though these clans had lived on this country for thousands of years.

But in 1975, Gurindji people received leasehold title to some of their traditional lands and the Federal Government passed the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* making it illegal to discriminate against anyone on the basis of their race.

Land rights was recognised through legislation for the first time in 1976 with the *Commonwealth Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act*. This most significant Land Rights legislation in Australia transferred reserve lands to Aboriginal ownership and the administration of these lands to Aboriginal Land Councils. This Act was followed in 1978 by the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Ordinance* which instituted prosecution for trespass and desecration of Aboriginal sites. Land titles were granted to 15 Aboriginal Land Trusts in the Northern Territory. The Northern Land Council and Commonwealth Government signed the Ranger uranium mining agreement, a large scale uranium mine on the edge of the world heritage listed Kakadu National Park. In 1982 the Hermansburg mission, NT, became freehold Aboriginal land, to be followed over the next three decades with significant numbers of successful Land Rights claims.

In October 1984, having been alerted to their presence, Pintubi community members and patrol officers bring in the last group of nine Pintubi living an independent

traditional life in the desert. These people, became known as the Pintubi Nine and eventually relocated to Kiwwikurra.

The Northern Territory became a self-governing territory in 1987 and elections were held for the first time. Voting was compulsory and this included Aboriginal people resident in the NT.

The Prime Minister of Australia in 1988, Bob Hawke, attended a festival at Barangu in the NT and, in accepting the Barunga statement presented by Wenten Rubuntja and Galarrwuy Yunupingu and other traditional owners and elders, promised to legislate for a treaty with Aboriginal Australia. This never happened. But in the following year the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was established by the Federal government.

The 1990s became the decade when the struggle for the recognition of Aboriginal rights reached an acute level, too acute for some. The High Court of Australia handed down its landmark decision in *Mabo v Queensland* in 1992. It ruled that Native Title still existed over particular kinds of lands - unalienated Crown Lands, national parks and reserves - and that Australia was never *Terra Nullius* or empty land. Federal Government under the stewardship of the Prime Minister Paul Keating, passed the Native Title Act in 1993, an Act that reflected the High Court's *Mabo* decision. Prime Minister Paul Keating then delivered his Redfern address recognizing the injustices by previous Australian governments on Indigenous Australians.

In 1996 there was a change in the Federal Government and the conservative coalition was back in power. Soon after Pauline Hanson, a member of the coalition government, left the government to form her One Nation Party, complaining that

Aboriginal people were getting special treatment and advantages over other Australians. The backlash was underway.

In 1997 The Bringing Them Home report (Australia 1997) was tabled in Federal Parliament. The report concluded that the forcible removal of children was an act of genocide, contrary to United Nations Convention on Genocide ratified by Australia in 1949. Many Australians were shocked by the report's details.

The Howard government in 1998 moved to successfully amend the *Native Title Act* placing restrictions on Native Title claims under a 'Ten Point Plan' that protected the interests of pastoralists over those of Traditional Aboriginal Owners. By 2005 ATSIC was dismantled by the Howard government.

The NT was to bear the effects of this backlash most drastically when in 2007 Prime Minister John Howard and his Government's Aboriginal Affairs Minister Mal Brough announce the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) policy later to be referred to as the Northern Territory Intervention. This policy suspended the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* in order to target NT Aboriginal communities. The policy suspended the permit system that restricted non-Aboriginal access to Aboriginal communities in the NT, enabled the compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal lands and the quarantining of half of welfare payments to all Aboriginal people, to go to a so-called basics card. The army was used to enforce mandatory health checks on Aboriginal children. The policy abolished the community development employment program, one of the only avenues available to employment in remote NT Aboriginal communities.

In this same year John Howard lost the federal election and the incoming Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, promised to apologise (which John Howard had refused to do) to the people of the stolen generation and consult with Aboriginal people. He delivered the apology in 2008 to a packed House of Representatives in Canberra.

The NT government, in the following year, ruled that the first four hours of education in all NT schools would be delivered in English. This put an end to thirty four years of bilingual education in the NT by abolishing the remaining bilingual programs in nine remote community schools.

In this same year, 2009, the Federal Government allocated the largest amount of funding for a single year in the history of federal budgets to Indigenous Affairs: \$4.8 billion. The biggest single item, with \$106 million, was for the Canberra bureaucracy to manage the income of Aboriginal people under the Northern Territory Intervention. The control over welfare payments in the Northern Territory had happened with most of the money never leaving Canberra.

Two years on in 2011 the Australian Labor Federal Government passed the Stronger Futures legislation with bipartisan agreement, with only the Greens opposing the legislation. The legislation extended the NTER for a further ten years thereby continuing the exerting of control and restricting the rights of Aboriginal people in the NT.

Jeff McMullen (2012) in his article *Protector Macklin's Intervention*, an article critiquing the NTER under the previous Commonwealth Minister for Families, Community Services and Aboriginal Affairs, Jenny Macklin, quoted Frank Vincent, a

former Justice of Victoria's Supreme Court, who observed that the legislation offended just about every reasonable view of what it is to be Australian.

'They believe racism sells. They accept we have a racist society ... but is that what we are really like? I hope it is not', he said.

'This is largely racist legislation ... both major parties have sold out Aboriginal people ... it's a complete denial of democratic process', added former Chief Justice of the Family Court, Alastair Nicholson, one of the strongest legal voices opposed to the Intervention (Cited in McMullen, 2012, p. 22-23).

The *Stronger Futures 2012* legislation was passed with no fuss or fanfare despite ongoing and desperate pleas from Aboriginal elders around the Northern Territory. Again in Jeff McMullen's article we hear the voice of Dr Djiniyini Gondarra, a Yolngu leader from Galiwinku, Elcho Island. He spoke to the senators warning them of the inherent dangers in such discriminatory and targeted legislation, dangers to young and old alike when he said:

'This legislation is going to kill us. We are losing nine or ten people every week. People can't live. They have lost their will and all hope' (Cited in McMullen, 2012, p. 21).

A Commentary on Australia's Colonial Policy Heritage

I know the listing of policies and the associated overview is long but the history of subjugation of Aboriginal people is long and on going. I also know this list and timeline is not all-inclusive. It is an overview of policies and government actions that

affect people in the Northern Territory. It is a mere scratch on the surface not definitive by any means. And most importantly, I know that this account does not include the resistance to colonialism, the ongoing fight and battle for rights and recognition. And with a heavy heart I have not included the moments of survival, the celebrations, the achievements or the positives. I have done this strategically. It is not an oversight and those moments are certainly not outside of my consciousness: survival day, FCATSI, William Ferguson, William Cooper, Pearl Gibbs, Pastor Dough Nicholls, all the localised leaders and heroes who fought daily, I honour you. This is a list from invasion to the present day that speaks to the ongoing and systematic way that Australian governments have tried to erase Aboriginal peoples and their cultures. These are the ways that the Northern Territory government tried to enforce the 'smooth the dying pillow' policy of protectionism. These are the ways that the governments have tried to mainstream, assimilate, exterminate and eradicate the strength of Aboriginal Australia.

The effects of all these policies are felt today not only in the cultural memories and scars that are passed down through the generations on Aboriginal peoples bodies, but also in the way that white Australia interacts with black Australia. The contention lies not in Aboriginal people forgetting and moving on but in the constant and continuous push to remove Aboriginality from the continent.

Darlene Johnson (1993) in her paper *playing and passing vs assimilation* writes:

that Europeans have "forgotten" their massacring of Indigenous peoples. They don't have to remember because their cultural memory does not bear the scars, nor was their race almost annihilated. They can afford to "forget". For Indigenous people, on the other hand, history is inscribed

in the land, and on our bodies as cultural memories, as much in its absences as in its presence. These inscriptions provide a symbolic link to an Indigenous heritage which is re-inscribed and reproduced on our bodies across generations - rewritten, but not erased (p. 19).

This is the effect of colonisation and how it is felt today on Aboriginal bodies. This is the sick feeling I write about later in Chapter five of this thesis when sitting in those meetings, when I swallowed my indignation and developed another crick in my neck. This is the history that we all have to find ways to deal with. These are the stories of my grandmothers and old ladies who talk of white men in Toyotas with rifles, horror stories in living memory told not to anger, not to inspire fear and hatred, told so that they will not be forgotten: so that I will know them but not for me to get angry. Yet how does it not manifest itself in town later that week, when a casually racist comment is dropped at the drive thru, when at the pub a snide comment is made, or you are refused service in a shop? When you have to stare in the face of ignorance whilst remembering the faces of strength who quietly tell you stories, bad stories of very bad acts with strength and resilience.

The stories from the grandmothers are localised incidences. They are very specific stories relating to waterholes, soakages or fought over land along the Sandover Highway and river. But these localised stories have meaning greater than those immediately affected. This happens partly because the stories of massacres happened across the whole continent. The similarities of shocking violence and deeply felt hatred rings true for Aboriginal people from all countries within Australia. It also happens because the deeply felt hatred and disrespect for Aboriginal culture, the insistence on its removal and annihilation is also inscribed in the bodies of non-Aboriginal people.

The true history of this nation called Australia is written in its legislation. Notions of settler societies, settlement and settlers are disrupted when we realise that there was nothing settling about it. So of course there is a tendency in the white imagination to discount the brutality, the systematic and government sanctioned violence, to collectively re-imagine an amnesiac state that is happy and rosy. I understand the desire for this but I cannot fathom the insistence on it when Australia's racism is written into its legislation and the aftershocks of it are present in every classroom, institution, police force, centrelink, bank, public transport and daily interactions.

Darlene Johnson (1993) goes further to say that:

I would argue that genocide must also be understood in terms of the historical effects on a people of institutional colonialism. It is still being written and read off our bodies. The policies of control, segregation, incarceration - the abuses of power, the separation of families and the gaoling of people - have had effects on bodies and have inscribed cultural memories on them (p. 19).

My argument is that, yes, while these historical effects are still inscribed on our bodies so too are they inscribed in the cultural memory of white Australians whether or not non-Aboriginal persons are explicitly aware of this memory. Before I start a riot with any readers I am not talking about all people, not all individuals but rather the nation state's collective consciousness. Perhaps it is more accurate to refer not to the nation state's collective conscious but to its collective unconsciousness, its deep and hidden ideology. I am not saying that there are not good Australians at all.

Indeed there are many who have walked the journey with us and suffered because of that. I am saying that collectively we are operating in the shadow of those early policies, in the shadow of the theories and policies of A.O. Neville and C.E. Cook. The setting up bodies called Protectorates, to create policies that are called Protection policies, to have Chief Protectors that don't protect is just as disingenuous as a Reconciliation Policy that recognises no initial wrongs or a Stronger Futures Policy that has no intent of creating stronger futures. These policies and their intent manifest themselves today in daily interactions. The long term effect of the policies and their lingering presence today apply just as much to white Australians as they do to Aboriginal people.

It is from a deep sense of enquiry that I am trying to understand how as a Nation we got to this point, of denial of history, of refusing asylum seekers, of being so cold and lacking in humanity. And I believe that the answer lies in our cultural conditioning as Australians. Bourdieu's (1986) theories of cultural capital and the way this capital is given by parents to their children to maintain or achieve higher status, the unwritten but known information passed on through generations may have relevance here.

Whether this intergenerational capital conveys an implied status that allows you to behave in a certain way or an expectation of justice and privilege, it is all transferred and learnt in very specific ways that are never articulated as such. Australia's racist ideology, the believed innate superiority of western people and culture over Aboriginal peoples and cultures is learnt in a similar way I believe. And because it exists at this deep ideological level it is hard to identify and define, but it is clearly and keenly felt by those on the other end of that pointy stick. This deep ideology has an historical heritage and it is played out in the minutiae of day-to-day interactions;

subtle interactive person-to-person ways always with another justification but always with intent, clear or not.

Ideology sits as a set of powerful ideas at the back of your mind. Ideology works as a concept because it operates in the subconscious. It operates in un-thinking ways, as a mindset, imparting cultural capital. But it also operates in the political realm as it is about power and control. And I think it is crucial to know ideology as a political tool. Ideology has a political and historical base that this is played out in interactions and institutions throughout the country.

Batchelor Institute grew out of this colonial background and in this ideological context. Veronica Arbon (2008) observes how “(e)ducation became a critical tool in the civilising and assimilative processes” which aimed to “maintain and protect the status quo of the invaders” (p.45). She explains how:

In the Northern Territory the policy of government echoed the intent of twenty, or even two hundred years prior, as the authorities sought to bring change among our people so that they would become “indistinguishable” in the way Aboriginal people worked, learned and behaved in the Australian community. As elsewhere schooling became one of the tools for this transformation (p. 64).

Education today is still both a tool and a product of the assimilative intent Arbon refers to, that has underlay policies and practices of colonisation. The “smooth the dying pillow” or active assimilation policies see themselves continued in today’s educational practices.

Given the role that education has played in conjunction with the sweep of Aboriginal policies in the Northern Territory, the next section of this chapter reviews some specifics of Aboriginal education in the Northern Territory.

Aboriginal Education in the Northern Territory

There can be no doubt that law and legislation have been used to control and subjugate the original people of this land. Numerous laws, ordinances, legislations and government practices and policies have worked towards an end goal of the removal of First Nations people from their country, whether by open genocide, forced removal or subtle erosions of rights, land and culture. With an end game of the removal of First Nations' peoples culture and ties to country I ask again how is this intent enacted, how does it happen in the everyday?

On the facebook page and website 'Schooling the World: The White Man's Last Burden', Films (2010) ask the question:

If you wanted to change an ancient culture in a generation,
how would you do it? You would change the way it educates
its children (Films 2010, accessed Jan 2013).

This seems to be the thinking globally with schools being established and built in the name of bettering a society all over the world. The American and Canadian governments must have known this when they set up their residential schools program which removed First Nations people in America from their families and into cruel, strict, value laden schools. In Australia the governments removed children from their families and sent them to religious run 'homes', large institutions that trained young men and women for manual labouring and domestic jobs and manual labouring jobs.

I'm not arguing here that children don't need schooling or that First Nations children should be exempt from compulsory schooling. Rather that school and schooling should be used to strengthen communities and culture but as the article 'Schooling and Tribal children' highlights:

It is frequently used as a tool to separate indigenous children from their families, traditions and languages and helps the state to gain control over tribal peoples and their lands.

<http://www.survivalinternational.org/about/schooling> accessed

December 2012

The underlying intent of such schooling is assimilation and destruction of culture, language and tradition. There is also an overt cultural superiority present in this type of schooling; it is justified and promoted as moving from a primitive place to a more enlightened one. The process of schooling then becomes about bettering yourself by moving away from your community's knowledge. This is felt most keenly when children are removed from communities, family and country.

The bind in this type of education is that, while the standards are set outside of one's own cultural norms, the chances of succeeding within it are limited. So school can be a medium for control at the same time as it individually denigrates and renders inferior anyone outside of its 'normal' parameters.

The literature surrounding Australian Indigenous knowledges and education has until recently been centred on a set of theories written by non-Aboriginal people who argue racialised differences in learning. These theories were a welcome relief in the 1980s because they replaced the then popular notion that Aboriginal people were incapable

of learning beyond the concrete thinking levels identified by psychologists as common in prepubescent Europeans (Kearins 1976) (Kearins 1978) (Davidson 1979).

The breakthrough theories seemed to start with Stephen Harris's work *Culture and Learning: Tradition and Education in North East Arnhem Land* (Harris 1980). His theories on Aboriginal learning styles came after the overt assimilation period and were an attempt to debunk myths around Aboriginal incompetence, based on the idea instead that Aboriginal people learned differently to westerners. Harris's work paved the way for discussions on Indigenous education that recognised Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Though fraught with the potential to maintain lower standards for the teaching of Aboriginal children and adults in western classrooms, the argument for difference was later taken up and redefined by Aboriginal educators in terms that advanced a much more expanded understanding of Aboriginal cognition within a cultural and human context untrammelled by imposed western 'standards'. Although Aboriginal learning styles theory changed the way we talked about Indigenous education it did so outside of any real commentary about context. However Harris paved the way for a myriad of academics to theorise on the nature of Indigenous education.

Twenty five years on we need to go further than a difference model that theorises within strict binary opposites with little movement mired still in a construction of us as educible but at a different level. These theories have emerged with the subtle coded subtext that posits Aboriginal people as different (deficit), unable to learn like white people, all the while reduceing the effect of any socio political problems surrounding education. This approach has created a series of binaries that are ranked and hierarchised with a polarized position of one privileged, the other negated. At the time

the difference model was refreshing, however now with hindsight the gap between difference and deficit models is less clear. This form of theorising also creates two supposedly homogenous groups that are diametrically opposed.

While I will be arguing that more than one way of knowing exists I will be avoiding the creation of a strict set of dichotomies that are fixed, polar opposites with little room for movement or genuine exchange. There are inherent dangers in all of this as none of us can see around corners. The liberatory goal of Aboriginal learning styles may be subverted into ideologically-driven dichotomies such as those that construct Aboriginal people as non-materialistic but spiritually rich vs the materialistic non-spiritual white man, a dichotomy that re-paves the way for material dispossession. An idealized romantic notion of the Indigenous learner as the spiritual antithesis of the white materialist may lead to disparagement of the Aboriginal person as incapable of intellectual achievement. More dangerously these dichotomies can set up classrooms wherein teachers believe that Aboriginal children cannot learn in the same way as non-Aboriginal children or that Aboriginal children all learn the same way. This then creates a justification for slackness, streaming into basic low classes and lower expectations; the setting up of supportive special classes where Aboriginality and low self-esteem are combined outcomes taught by non-Indigenous teachers, where academic achievement is off the syllabus.

When a learning styles approach is taken without any acknowledgement of history, context, colonialism and its many effects on structure and individuals we can create a situation where less is enough. (Gillespie) citing Nicholls, goes further and writes, “the idea of Aboriginal learning styles being used to justify some alarming

pedagogical practices, is one example of this practice of essentialising difference” (Gillespie, 1998, p. 21).

All this is just as insidious in its intent as having a set monocultural approach to education, because at least you can position yourself outside of that as an Aboriginal person. This dichotomous positioning systematically denies students access to western knowledge that invokes understanding of the world that leads to real change. It is designed to maintain the status quo and gives the illusion of a western education without providing one.

A further development from Aboriginal learning styles theorising has been the theory of ‘two ways schooling’ or ‘both ways education’. This theory emerged in the Northern Territory during the 1980’s and the concept has found root in Batchelor Institute in theory if not in practice. The Institute’s website has the following definition:

Both ways is a philosophy of education that brings together
Indigenous Australian traditions of knowledge and Western
academic disciplinary positions and cultural contexts, and
embraces values of respect, tolerance and diversity
(www.batchelor.edu.au/home page).

Ralph Folds (1993) and his studies in Walunguru goes even further arguing that ‘two ways education’ and the introduction of Indigenous knowledge and learning in the western school system is assimilationist, out-of-context and demeaning.

Such is the attractiveness of two ways and the enthusiasm of
the majority society in promoting it that these limitations and

the future costs they will incur are not necessarily apparent to Aboriginal people themselves. But two ways education is merely part of the packaging that presents assimilation in such a way that Aboriginal people will choose it for themselves ... Aboriginal people have been offered many false hopes and two way development is merely the latest (Folds, 1993, p. 35).

These theories form part of the historical context in which discussions around Indigenous education and Indigenous pedagogies take place. In the context of theories surrounding how Aboriginal people learn differently and with the absence of a huge component of the information not being counted as literature because it is not written, there have been advances in the last twenty years. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics who have been working within the western system actively dispel the myth surrounding the incompetence of Aboriginal people and the inability of Aboriginal people to learn and participate in western education at the highest levels. They also have been working towards re-positioning Indigenous knowledges. Karen Martin (2003) claims her position positively. "I actively use the strength of my Aboriginal heritage..... I research from the strength and position of being Aboriginal and viewing anything western as other" (p. 4).

It is this re-positioning of Indigenous knowledges that is important and central to this movement of Indigenous academics into Indigenous education. Professor Marie Battiste (2002,) a Mi'kmaq educator from the Potlo'tek First Nations in Canada, says that:

Through this act of intellectual self determination, Indigenous academics are developing new analyses and methodologies to decolonize themselves, their communities and their institutions (p. 4).

I hope through the process of doing this doctoral study that I will be able to participate in a process that helps to decolonize the way that Indigenous education happens in a western setting.

Internationally Indigenous academics have been arguing that whilst cultural differences do exist in the classroom, those classrooms that recognise and include students' knowledge have greater educational outcomes (Bartolome. 2008 p. 137). There is also an argument for a democratic pedagogy that includes an analysis of power structures to understand why certain students' knowledges have previously been ignored. Bartolome's location of the political dimensions of culture is useful for understanding difference as a response to subordination. She argues further in regard to cultural inclusion or an essentialist difference model being the only answer:

I use this definition of culture because, without identifying the political dimensions of culture and subsequent unequal status attributed to members of different ethnic groups, the reader may conclude that teaching methods simply need to be ethnically congruent to be effective..... all differences are treated as ethnic cultural differences and not as responses of subordinated students to teachers from dominant groups, and vice versa (Bartolome, 2008 P. 137).

So recognition of cultural difference is one step. Another step is the re-positioning of Indigenous ontology to the fore of classroom practice, to change the binaries so that

Indigenous ways of being and knowing are privileged within the curriculum and within the classroom and have a critical power-based analysis running through every course. Acknowledging the lived realities of the students, the ongoing effects of colonialism and the damaging effects of racism from the outset and imbedding this knowledge within all classroom and service delivery is an imperative. Sue Stanton (July 2013) in her paper ‘Talking both ways – acting one way: looking to find the right balance’ says:

Any number of publications on “Indigenous education” point out and explain the way for western educators to reflect on practice, on ethics and epistemology, educational practice, sometimes transformative thinking. What most western educators need to read and think about is more on teaching as activism, more volumes on colonialism and capitalism (and its effects on Aboriginal peoples), variations on assisting Aboriginal peoples with strategies on how to combat domination and oppression, especially in education and the workplace, added to that some colonial histories, and especially Marie Battiste’s work on post-colonial remedies (p. 7).

For these steps to be implemented, for example, in Batchelor Institute, the only Indigenous dual sector tertiary institute in the country, then the problematic for the institution is not only about one group being ‘different’ to another. It is about a complex history of denial and subjugation that doesn’t sit only at the site of the student’s body in the classroom (deficit model) but is being played out at a bigger

broader national and cultural level that, in turn, returns the students' critical gaze onto the institution of education itself.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1998), a Maori academic and trailblazer, says that it is only through an understanding of the institutional context that we can change our lived realities, that change can be effected. Wendy Brady (1992), speaking at an Aboriginal Studies Association conference, cites Smith:

We cannot begin to describe the dilemma which faces us in our practice without first recognizing that we exist in institutions which are founded on the collective denial of our existence ... and which not only actively continue to assimilate us, but more importantly perhaps actively compete with us and the world views we represent (p. 314).

It is through an understanding of the historical contexts around Aboriginal education that we can then struggle to change Aboriginal education as well as the institutional contexts within which we practice as educators. The parameters for this change involve removing any site of deficit or difference from the student body and placing the students' struggles within a larger colonial construct. Further to this is the need for the privileging of students' knowledge within an informed and thoughtful place.

It is this that we must focus on now. This call for education that achieves real results manifested as self determination has been around within Indigenous nations as long as colonization, since the invasion of this country. This has been the call from Indigenous people for a long time. For example, an old man speaking at a Deakin Batchelor Aboriginal Teacher Education (DBATE) graduation ceremony at Batchelor College in 1987, a Yolngu MP from East Arnhemland said:

The dilemma arises from the recognition that our communities need young people trained in the Balanda way for the employment positions now available in Aboriginal communities and to fulfill our aspiration of self determination (Lanhupuy, 2002, p. 41).

He went on further to say that:

The challenge for tertiary institutions enrolling Aboriginal students... is not to repeat the assimilationist practices of the primary and secondary schools. The issues are the same. Tertiary institutions in Australia derive their meaning from the traditions and culture of Europe. Exposure to tertiary study for Aborigines could mean that one's Aboriginality is weakened and devalued (Lanhupuy, 2002, p. 42).

Lanhupuy expressed the challenge for all of us engaged in tertiary Aboriginal Education.

Tertiary Aboriginal Education and the Promise of Batchelor Institute

John Henry in an address he gave to a conference in British Columbia, Canada, 'Summer gathering to decolonise post secondary education' in 2010 said that:

The first moves to include Aboriginal Australians in post secondary education occurred in the 1970s.... the majority pattern of inclusion for Indigenous Australians in Tertiary Education is based on the 'enclave model (P. 8).

The enclave model grew to be the dominant model in Australian Tertiary Institutions with an aim of increasing First Nations' students' success within mainstream classrooms. The model was situated generally outside of any of the academic

processes and sat in the administrative functions of Australian universities. The focus was on enabling courses and support provided for understanding mainstream content. The focus was still very much on changing the Aboriginal student body so as to meet a western standard. Inclusion into universities was based around righting the wrongs of your thinking or correcting the deficits. And still any alternative worldview or way of thinking and being was automatically looked on as deficit, lesser than and in need of fixing or altering. Unless you had perfect uninterrupted access to western schooling in primary and secondary schools you were deemed to need fixing. You could be a holder of centuries of cultural knowledge – no; you may have been working for thirty years as a community worker, an activist, a health worker, a liaison officer, an office worker. You may have a lifetime of lived knowledge and experience – no; you may have raised six children, have ten grandchildren and five great grandchildren. Still – no. We have the enabling pre-tertiary course for you!

As the number of First Nations academics increased within universities through the creation of a dedicated First Nations space, so the enclaves grew. Gradually there was a move to include Indigenous knowledges within the walls of universities.

Unfortunately this did not include cultural shifts within mainstream curriculums or implementation. Rather what emerged were isolated courses, units, lectures that dealt with Indigenous knowledges generally or included an Aboriginal perspective. So courses were developed that centred on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lecturers within a very western structure. I applaud the development of these courses but they are not necessarily what First Nations students need in order to be recognised within these structures. They became great vehicles for non-Aboriginal people to learn about Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander culture, to see for a second from a different perspective, to get an alternative (honest) picture of Australian history.

So we then have a situation where the Federal government funds programs to increase First Nations peoples' participation within post secondary education. This happens through an enclave model that has support structures, (what prior knowledge you have doesn't count) or Indigenous knowledge courses where what you know then is to be circulated as knowledge to be shared to educate non-Aboriginal people. The limiting option of having a specifically designed Indigenous knowledges course is that First Nations worldviews are then contained within a silo within the enclave and not across faculties and discipline areas.

Payi Linda Ford (2010) in her book explains the enclave model as having:

... become primarily sites of compensatory education for Tyikim students at sub degree level enabling courses while offering undergraduate and post graduate courses to mainly Padakoot students under the banner of cross cultural studies. The ideological framing of Indigenous participation in higher education under Commonwealth Government funding and university institutional thinking and practice has been principally mediated by the Western ontology resulting in a colonisation (or re-colonisation) of these enclaves and faculties of Aboriginal Studies (pp. 84 – 85).

Ford argues that the process is actually a recolonising tool and that whilst universities are stuck within a deficit model we will be stuck in this colonising/re colonising process.

Veronica Arbon (2008) when reflecting back on the design and creation of the enclave model sees the intent behind such a structure and the actual outcomes attached to it, intended or not.

we will continue to drown in good and caring intentions
written into the first enclave model and continued into the
Indigenous centres and faculties. To break this numbing
support, controlling destructive benevolence and the
capturing intent that has seen transformed Aboriginal studies
and effort into teaching ‘them ‘ about ‘us’, a radical re
awakening is needed (p. 63).

Access to education that does not negate your knowledge and worldview doesn’t seem to be an extreme request. Access to western knowledge and jobs that do not involve you having to re-invent yourself to fit through such a tight filtered sieve of western norms doesn’t seem that unreasonable either. To have your perspective privileged or your reality presented within the Academy in a non-contested, non-controversial and un-conflicted atmosphere also doesn’t seem to be that much to expect. I understand that part of the educational journey is to question your beliefs, to push your mind and open your thinking to an amazing expanse of information. I understand and love that about ‘education’ and the educational process. There is a difference though between having your beliefs questioned and your whole history denied. I encourage active classroom debates, but when one side is backed by an

undisclosed history of violence, brutal oppression, dominance, subjugation and systematic dehumanization, and the debate is being explored for the first time in a classroom of otherwise unknowing, or not wanting to know, participants, in this I think the odds are a little stacked.

This is because these ideological forces, often implicitly expressed, emerge or lunged out in the higher education context to construct Tyikim people as ‘primitive others’, as primarily objects of Western researchers, and as deficit learners judged according to western epistemological standards. (Ford, 2010 p. 85).

The fundamental problem underlying this model of education is what Arbon calls Assimilitative Intent. Access to education has to come at a traumatic cost. I am a product of the enclave model and my critique comes with recognition of the achievements of the model. Rather than demeaning enclave models and what they have achieved, rather I am trying to create a picture of the dominant models and flaws within it, to show and highlight the real alternative that Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education could have become. I am trying to picture the possibilities that could have eventuated out of a First Nations Institution that privileged and began with our knowledge, what we know and then moved out from there. This is not to say that Western Knowledge is not desired or needed. The whole point of education is to expand your mind and acquire new and different knowledge, just that the road to it shouldn’t be littered with so many casualties.

As Sue Stanton (July 2013) says in her paper on Both Ways:

One way of expressing this which is common with Dr Yunupingu's interpretation is the idea of salt and fresh water meeting in the stream – they do not destroy each other, instead they complement each other, and sustain or promote one another. This is how I was taught to understand the melding of Aboriginal knowledge with western knowledge. However, mostly learning in the western environment has been contested ground because it has been a “one-way” experience – both in the classroom or academy and outside of it. The dominant paradigm has, and still does, reign supreme (p. 5).

Batchelor Institute, as a stand-alone Indigenous institution, stood on the cusp of creating the complimentary and sustaining system called for by Arbon, Ford and Stanton. A break from the enclave model could have emerged as a viable alternative to banging your head against the behemoth of western traditions and structures. A new paradigm in Aboriginal tertiary education was in the offering. As I will explore in Chapter six of this thesis, the Institute stood positioned under the leadership of Veronica Arbon and Gatjil Djerrkura to abandon restrictive and exclusionary western standards and embrace knowledge through a First Nations worldview first. Mr Djerrkura said it begins with us, our knowledge.

Sue Stanton (July 2013) gives us a vision of how this could have been achieved in her Both Ways presentation:

The “both-ways” or “two-ways” concept is not meant to be only used in a classroom setting, but is to be part of everyday living, a big part of relationships, of mutual respect, of finding common

ground. One way of doing, knowing, learning and teaching should not be dominated by another – “both-ways” should be the place where all knowledge is valid, and valued. “Both-ways” is not just about how we teach or how we learn, it is also about how we communicate – how we respect – how we honour – how we might learn to trust (p. 5).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided, through an overview of Australia’s Aboriginal policy history, an essential grounding for my doctoral research. For me to gain a deeper understanding of the interactions that occurred around me at an Indigenous tertiary institute in the recent past, I needed to interrogate the policy environment presented in this chapter.

The policies that followed from the shifting positions of colonial governments, from protectionism to integration, to assimilation to self determination/self management, in fact have cascaded through to the present with echoes that influence current relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. My point is that we are not somehow freed from these influences. Honest interactions will only come as we critically examine the way this political history still shapes our thinking and behaviours, and our organisations to this day. A robust form of ideological critique based on actual portrayals of the contestations that arise when Aboriginal Australians attempt to introduce new forms of being and knowing within western-derived institutions is a way forward.

A brief account of Aboriginal education drawing on developments in the NT followed in the chapter from the overview of Aboriginal policies. This account is set against the

backdrop of the policy trajectory overviewed earlier in the chapter. The intent here was to place the shifts in Aboriginal education policy as a parallel movement to the shifts occurring in the broader policy domain.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of how these same policies were played out in Aboriginal tertiary education in Australia over the past forty years. Through this analysis I brought the focus back to Batchelor Institute, to the site of contestation central to my research.

In the next chapter I provide the details of the theoretical framework that has further informed my research.

Chapter Three: Theories and Concepts: returning the coloniser's gaze.

In this chapter I introduce the theoretical underpinnings of my research study. The theories that I have drawn upon are those that I return to in the later detailed analyses of my experiences working at Batchelor Institute from 1999 to 2010. These experiences are narrated in Chapters five to nine of this thesis and are referred to as the 'Data Chapters'. The theoretical framework will then be applied to these data chapters in Chapter ten.

The theoretical framework that I will be using draws upon theories and concepts of whiteness and privilege, ignorance, subjection, abjection, subordination and subjugation. I will look at assimilative mimicry. A succinct account of these theories and concepts follows in this chapter. My meta-analysis developed in Chapter ten is informed and supported by this theoretical framework.

Aboriginal Education as a Partial Transformation in the Face of Whiteness

The consistent failure of western educational institutions to recognise Indigenous people and their knowledges has resulted in consistent poor results when it comes to educational measurements of success according to the established 'standards'. The failure that is attributed to Aboriginal people according to western definitions of success is really a failure of western institutions to acknowledge their bias, their need for subjugation in order to maintain their own position. The history of this country, of all policies, of all states, of all institutions up until now has been premised on Indigenous incapacity (Norris, 2010). The move to include Indigenous ways of knowing and being and having these ways equitably recognised within a colonial-derived education system would collapse the system, because the system needs Aboriginal people to be lesser (McConaghy, 2000).

Because the colonial system and its educational institutions rely on an unequal power relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, subjection is required in order for the system to exist in its current form. Or to put this point in a more colloquial form – if you don't have dumb, drunk, violent, needy Aboriginal people then you can't have white experts. Arbon (2008) called these experts the 'anointed' whose power could be readily asserted the 'anointed' were:

those colonial warriors who as self proclaimed 'experts' on us
knew what was 'best' for our 'advancement' in the modern world
of western society and science (p. 142).

It does however go deeper than just the non-Indigenous experts that exist within Indigenous education who, often contrary to their own self-belief, work to hold onto their received power but with none of the responsibility of maintaining or staying true to a marginalised culture. Any authentic analysis of Indigenous educational structures in Australia would need to include an analysis of power and privilege, an analysis of who has benefitted from the subjugation of Aboriginal peoples, who benefits from the continued disempowerment of Indigenous peoples and who by their positions of privilege continue to have control of Indigenous education. Because truly increasing First Nations success would involve a true analysis of power relations in this country. There has to be an understanding and an honest appraisal of the world that our students live in, the world that their lecturers live in and the context that we teach in. There has to be culturally relevant curricula facilitated by lecturers that reflect the students' lives.

Theoretical underpinnings for a deeper understanding of the world Aboriginal students live in are provided through a consideration of whiteness theories. These theories explore the mechanisms of white-privileging, mechanisms that rely for their normalising effect on the devaluation of non-whites.

Whiteness

Whiteness as referred to here is the structural and social advantages that are given to people with white skin. This is different to class or sexual privilege. It is the way that society shapes its operations to preference white people. White superiority is premised on the underlying assumption that white culture and white people are

superior to non-whites. It manifests itself in all institutions within western capitalism, in education, in the law and judiciary and in the banking sector, It is at the same time all pervasive while being mostly invisible. Whiteness and its alleged superiority is reinforced through the media, popular television, films and our politicians. It has been constructed through racially marked binaries and it is believed and enacted upon daily in today's society. Moreton-Robinson and Nicoll (2006) argue that:

As a regime of powerful patriarchal white sovereignty operates ideologically, materially and discursively to reproduce and maintain its investment in the nation as a white possession (p. 150).

There is a tendency to focus on individual acts of overt racism and then, as a good person, distance oneself from those acts. This happens outside of any real understanding that racism only exists when you have structural support. George Yancy in his book "Look, a White!" (Yancy 2012) describes this phenomenon of focusing on obvious overt racist behaviours to distance yourself from the privileges that are awarded to you via a racist system:

the discourse on habits as they relate to whiteness should not evade the deeper ethical implications of whiteness and how it is inextricably linked to broader issues of injustice, oppression, and suffering when it comes to those who are not white. The importance of whiteness as a *structural evil* should not be reduced to a set of troublesome habits (p. 29).

Today 'racist' is a dirty word that most non-Aboriginal Australians try to avoid without ever analysing the way that they as individuals benefit from white privilege, the way that society is structured to ensure that they receive white privilege or the way that they interact with Aboriginal people, Asian people, Middle Eastern people, people from Africa.

Some of the thinking around whiteness and its privileges include Olivia Khoo (2002) and her use of Asian and Indigenous Australian literature to highlight ways to destabilize whiteness through making it visible. The need to make visible whiteness and its operations is a core theme in whiteness studies. Dyer (1997) argues that whiteness gains its power from being both visible (it is known and felt) and invisible (it is never acknowledged). White race privilege then requires both an individual participation and a collective denial.

In Australia though, whiteness, and its power and privileges, mostly need Aboriginal people as its ultimate reference point. White Australians have always targeted new arrivals to this country. Jokes about wogs now are not so funny as we have moved onto Asians after the Vietnam war, now Aussies are hating on Lebanese Australians and African Australians, letting them know who is actually in charge. But underlying all of these racist trends the hatred of Aboriginal people has remained. Perera Suvendrini (2006) refers to a blackening strategy to locate migrant communities in terms of their "proximity to Indigenous peoples in a hierarchy of race" (p. 156).

The need to position white people above Aboriginal people is one enduring outcome of white resentment. It is enduring because it is needed to maintain white privilege and all the structural and economic advantages that have come from stealing this land. White privilege brings advantages like being able to define the norm so that you can name and isolate difference, and define the other as being that which is not you.

I am often told that I am lucky because I have culture. This statement only exists because the people who said it can't see their culture, can't see that whiteness exists. It is so pervasive that it is invisible. It is simply normal, the blank white sheet that any difference then can be marked against.

It is about being normal. Being normal, that is 'white', gives you access to the whole world. It is your teacher's positive expectations of you before you've opened your mouth; it is the judge looking at you sympathetically before he or she looks at your record, it is seeing yourself on television every night. It is having the world laid at your feet and never being told you can't go there. It is a right to go and do and be whatever, wherever, whenever you want. Why? Because you are entitled and you are empowered as a white person.

On a side note I often wondered why journalists and others were so invested in getting the permit system repealed as part of the NTER. This system put remote NT Aboriginal communities and traditional lands over which Native Title had been recognised off limits to non-community members. Entry required the granting of a permit by the relevant Land Council. I often wondered why this was a clause that was not negotiable and strictly enforced as part of the intervention. Then I realised, white

people don't like being told there is a place they can't go, that no, actually they can't access this community with their cameras and recorders. There was before 2007 a system in place that actually said no, you have to ask us to come here. This is our place and you don't have automatic right of entry. This was a disruption to white authority, a denial of white privilege, that there could possibly be a space that was not open to them. This affront to whiteness needs to be rectified. We can see this time and again as people climb Uluru ignoring the wishes of the Anangu. Women have run around on top of this deeply sacred site naked without a care in the world for the fact that maybe that space is not open to them, that they actually don't control the whole world, because unfortunately in most western places they honestly believe that they do.

Richard Dyer (1997) argues that:

white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular. As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations (p. 369).

Lipsitz (1995) talks about white privilege and how it is hidden and protected:

Whiteness is everywhere ... but it is very hard to see. The unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organising principle in social and cultural relations (p. 369).

It is this felt and known yet unknown phenomenon attached to whiteness that makes it so dangerous.

Lipsitz (2002) further explains:

Because they are ignorant of even the recent history of the possessive investment in whiteness ... Americans produce largely cultural explanations for structural social problems (p. 75).

While Lipsitz refers to whiteness among Americans, these cultural explanations are very relevant to Australia. They are demonstrated through the use of western standards in this study. Any conversations around rights and sovereignty have become conversations about community incapacity, alcoholism, poor health, sexual abuse and neglect. The white gaze is firmly fixed on First Nations peoples' social problems rather than structural inequity.

But most importantly for this argument, Lipsitz goes on to say that whilst white privilege and ignorance of that privilege accords advantages for white people, it does so at the expense of everyone else. The advantage doesn't happen without a similar disadvantage being inflicted on others. Lipsitz's (2002) primary argument is that white people are "part of the problem - not because of our race, but because of our possessive investment in it" (p. 79).

It is the possessive need to maintain the privileges attached to white culture that happens at the expense of non-white cultures that is the problem. White culture(s) in and of itself is not inherently bad though in its interest terrible atrocities have been committed. It is the need to maintain the power and control that comes with being white that is being problematised here. This is whiteness as white supremacy. Bell

Hooks (2002) in her paper *Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination* says that white privilege:

perpetuates the fantasy that the other who is subjugated who is sub human, lacks the ability to comprehend, to understand, to see the working of the powerful in white supremacist society. White people can safely imagine they are invisible to black people since they have historically asserted the right to control the black gaze (p. 21).

Naomi Zack in the preface to George Yancy's (2012) book, 'Look, a White!' says, "Yancy explains to whites that they are more dangerous and frightening to blacks than some (many? all?) whites take blacks to be" (p. x).

So while it may be difficult to believe that Aboriginal people fear white people more than white people fear us, I can point to a couple of reasons why it's true.

One it is a fear of difference so integral to whiteness. It's an abstracted fear of difference, culturally, aesthetically and linguistically different to you, so you fear and mistrust. You have been fed a narrative around violence, frontier and otherwise. You have been told through institutional outlets, schools, media and the courts, how savage and wild Aboriginal people are, savage and wild meaning uncivilized and not like you so you fear, you mistrust and then you hate. Historically however you have no basis for this fear.

In contrast, who has the history of prolonged violence and aggression? Who has to cope on a daily basis with the unpredictability that accompanies the randomness of

the power asymmetry between us? So your fear has no rational basis to it. It is based on mis-truths that have been constructed to make you fearful and determinedly possessive of your white privilege lest it slips into the wrong hands. Indigenous Australians fear of whiteness has a historical basis lived, embodied and remembered through to the present in our everyday experience of being uncertain as to when a fresh scar will be inflicted.

Steyn (2012) writes that, “This exclusive world of white privilege exists in a parallel universe to the degradation it creates”(p. 14). This is the power of ignorance and the role it has to play in maintaining white privilege. At the same time as white privilege exists as an unproblematised norm, it creates a highly problematic world for those who are not its recipients. I now turn to an examination of the power of ignorance as an essential partner to white privilege.

Ignorance

The authority of whiteness, and white privilege and whites’ investment in their privilege, goes beyond their ignorance of the other, their cultivated ignorance in Aboriginality for example. Bruce Pascoe (2007) highlights this first level of ignorance, that is the ignorance of the other:

White people’s ignorance of Aboriginal people is so pervasive, so profound, that it exhausts the Indigenous who are forced to argue every point: well, yes we did live here before you came, no, we didn’t eat our children, yes, my grandfather was murdered by your grandfather, yes, my father went to both world wars alongside yours, no he didn’t get a soldier settlers’ farm like yours, no, we

didn't invent the wheel...or the jail, or the rack, boiling oil, or instruments to pluck out fingernails, white collar crime; there were a lot of things we didn't invent (p. 217).

The second level of ignorance is a more complex form of not knowing. It is more attuned to 'un-knowing'.

Steyn (2012) when referring to South African peoples, writes of an apartheid project that is about peoples' reflections on race. This project produced an ignorance of a different dimension to lack of information about an ethnic or racial group. She speaks of how this form of ignorance is produced and fostered.

Racialization, one could say ignoratization, at close quarters is recounted in stories of early childhood, especially in relation to a black nanny or maid (Steyn, 2012, p.13)

Here she is talking about whites' recollections of the black workers that they had in their houses growing up. She notes how there was no reflection on the fact that they had black workers but rather that there was a tacit agreement that this was normal and not questioned. The speaker in Steyn's interview recollects first names but never last, remembers their presence but not ever that it was racist or problematized. This is the "ignoratisation process", the making of ignorance.

The same can be said of this country, the investment in ignorance is fostered from a young age and is across the board. I will argue that the possessive investment in whiteness for which Lipsitz argues is manifest in this country through a possessive

investment in ignorance. That ignorance is taught and structured throughout our society, that ignorance is the fundamental backbone that allows the truth about Australia's invasion and colonization to remain unacknowledged. Applebaum (2008) believes it to be a reciprocal arrangement, the system remains uninterrogated as the people that it benefits remain in power with a certain arrogance and moral imperative that sees them complicit in its construction and maintenance. The question is asked, who has the most to gain from remaining ignorant, for ignoring the systemic injustice and their complicity in it? (Mills, 2007, p. 297) talks about this as an agreement to misinterpret the world. This active individual ignoring then becomes the backbone for structural systemic ignorance. The investment in not seeing and not knowing is actually a personal individual investment in maintaining the structures that benefit white individuals and their society.

Ignorance is the handmaiden of whiteness. There is an 'ignorance contract' (Steyn, 2012) within the social structuring of whiteness:

The tacit agreement to entertain ignorance lies at the heart
of a society structured in racial hierarchy (p. 8).

Within the contract of ignorance, the state of 'not-knowing', is "a social achievement with strategic value" (Steyn, 2012, p. 8). Here ignorance is not only about the lack of knowledge acquisition by individual whites but also, and more so, about the social accomplishment achievable within whiteness.

The dual dimensions of ignorance and the different realities that are created through the strategic use of ignorance as a weapon to maintain the privileges that accompany whiteness are evidenced in the data chapters of this research study. Here it is the individual and collective investment in ignorance that becomes evident.

Mills (2007) refers to a mis-seeing and an almost delusional state that is needed for whiteness and its privileges to exist. He claims that ignorance is actively produced for the purposes of domination and exploitation. But ignorance, to achieve these purposes, must be expressed by individuals during both their routine lives and more assiduously at the points of challenge or resistance to whiteness. These are the sites of contestation referred to in my thesis. My question is, how can ignorance be maintained, how can self-mis-seeing and self-delusion be maintained by whites at these moments of potential Aboriginal power reclamation?

Charles Mills (2007) explains it in an American context like this:

White ignorance operates within a particular kind of social cognition that distorts reality. For example the lens with which white people perceive the world is shaped by white supremacy, causing them to mis-see whites as civilized superiors and non whites as inferior savages. White ignorance also impacts on social and individual memory, erasing both the achievements of peoples of color and the atrocities of white people (p. 3).

This is the dual strategy that a possessive investment in ignorance applies, a denigration of black people that allows white privilege to exist and thrive as an un-

thought of, unconscious way of reacting in the world. The connections to ideology and hegemony are obvious in this insight. Ideologies define what can be thought of, thought about. To think about something not 'ideologically inclusive' is beyond one's existence as constructed and defined by one's deep-seated, normative, unquestioned, even unconsciously impacting ideology, a shared ideology with others: in this case, the social world of whiteness shared with others of the dominant society. To think otherwise, as beyond that 'allowed' by this ideologically determined social world, is 'unthinkable'! – but not impossible.

But they have to know! Surely on some level there is a consciousness of the active racism that is going on around them.

Aileen Moreton Robinson (2009) echoes this exclamation:

Knowledge of the impoverished conditions under which Indigenous people lived was shared by those who controlled their lives. They acted disingenuously and their silence about Indigenous poverty operated repressively as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of non existence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, nothing to know (p. 62).

There is nothing to see, nothing to know, therefore no reason to act. What this means is I don't want to see, I don't want to know because I don't want to act. Everything is OK here. The "constitutional racism brought about by federation" (Moreton-Robinson, 2009), that openly racist, constant and ongoing legislative process allowed and fed both the ignorance and the intent of white Australians. It required an

ignorance in order for their intent not to be seen and for the enacting of that intent not to be noticed.

Ignorance in this sense is not as simple as not knowing or non-exposure to information. It is the structured, tacitly agreed upon, systematically enforced ignorance that lies in any society that is racially hierarchized. It is the deliberate not knowing and not seeing that allows lies about white supremacy and Aboriginal inferiority to be continued so that white privilege is never questioned, never undermined. It is mis-seeing injustice and turning your head and heart onto other matters, other explanations, therefore not seeing, not knowing, not caring.

Subjection, Subordination, Abjection and Subjugation

Drawing from the work of Judith Butler (1997), I use the concept of subjection and later subjugation as a lens through which to investigate the challenges and barriers that Batchelor Institute has faced, fought and will continue to do battle with. Butler (1997) describes subjection as being inescapable, that it is the process of becoming a subject of power (a subject) and that as long as we are defined by that which subjects us we cannot escape the dimensions of its power. We are all born into subjection as power discourses are all around us. However, the movement from subjection to subordination and eventually to subjugation, through our reliance and dependence on a power system that posits us as less, is central to my theoretical framework.

Subjection, as Butler (1997) posits, does carry with it, in the relationship to power, an asymmetrical relationship between the powerful and the subject. This relationship is

tinged with the ever present construction of the subject as having a ‘pathology’ (Moreton Robinson 2009) that needs to be addressed, as having incapacities that reflect as deficits the full capacities of the powerful.

Further to subjection is the condition of subordination. This relationship to power is expressed through an acceptance in the public domain of social and economic life, that one’s ontology is of less importance to the dominant discourse. One’s culture (objectified Aboriginality) is assigned by the power elite to an exotic and interesting but less important position to the main business of the society, of the nation state. Being culturally exotic means however, that you, the subordinate, are worthy of study, of being researched.

In this thesis I am proposing a further state, that of subjugation. Subjugation occurs when the institutions of power in a society have fully dominated all expressions of ontology possible in that society to the extent that only one form of being, knowing and acting is allowed in the public discourse. This equates to power that represses difference and is conquest-oriented.

Further to this is abjection, the gaze that is given to the horrid, the unspeakable. Abjection brings with it a level of hatred, disgust and distrust. The abject gaze is reserved for those who are subjugated.

My analysis of the Batchelor Institute-based narratives presented in Chapters five to nine and in Chapter ten, will explore how subjection and subjugation of First Nations people can be multifaceted and many faced. I will analyse how this plays out in an

educational environment, how our subjection lies not only in our dependence on the power structures but also in the insistence of the mainstream to never let us forget that dependence, and to assert its authority over us just as we start to succeed. This then marks the transition from subjection (all of us) to subordination (some of us), to where Aboriginality sits now, subjugated (only us). This shifting dynamic of power and how it is played out within Batchelor Institute is a central plank in the argument developed through this thesis.

Butler (1997) asks the question of whether there is a loss so great that it cannot be overcome. When subjection becomes subjugation, the answer to this question without hope, is yes. There has been the loss of land, stories and culture, the loss of control and agency, the loss of the right to see and reflect yourself in the dominant culture are the most poignant losses. These losses are felt more harshly by the fact that once we had all of this. This disenfranchisement is different from that associated with class or gender.

So whilst we are all subjects of power, developments within Batchelor Institute reached a point during the first decade of this century where its survival could only be maintained by what Butler calls subordination, a response to power beyond merely subjection. As Butler says again

Precisely at the moment in which choice is impossible, the subject pursues subordination as the promise of existence (Butler, 1997, p. 20).

However, the Elder stateswoman, author and activist from Minjerribah, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, in her poem ‘The Aboriginal Charter of Rights’, shows us the transition from subjection to subordination and brings us back again to a point of hope, for a shifting position within the power grid (Noonuccal 1970).

Free us from mean subjection,
From a bureaucrat Protection.
Let's forget the old-time slavers:
Give us fellowship, not favours;
Encouragement, not prohibitions,
Homes, not settlements and missions.
We need love, not overlordship,
Grip of hand, not whip-hand wardship;
Opportunity that places
White and black on equal basis (p. 36).

This thesis while recognising subordination and subjection within Indigenous Australian reality is not without hope, not ephemeral hope, but hope and belief in our capacity to regain our equality for ourselves.

The further dimension to my theoretical framework is that of mimicry. I now introduce this concept.

Mimicry

Our struggle is the struggle to resist subordination as the existential way forward. But in this struggle we must also resist the illusion of colonial-derived expressions of equality. Of relevance to this point, and to the argument presented in this thesis, is the work of (Bhabha 1994). The recent direction taken by Australian tertiary institutions

towards mainstreaming higher education delivery for Aboriginal students could be seen as perpetuating what Bhabha (1994) called a mode of colonial discourse referred to as mimicry. He defined mimicry as stemming from:

the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, 'as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite (p. 122).

For mimicry to be effective it requires a dual desire. It needs Indigenous aspiration for power and the illusory possibility that this aspiration can be met, and the desire on the part of the privileged class to be seen to be giving that power coupled with the fear of the consequences if it were ever truly met. Mimicry has many forms. It is present in the dichotomous, fixed polar opposites of Aboriginal learning style theories and simplistic notions of both-ways education. It is also present in the one size fits all standards approach to education and the surface acculturation approach that includes an Indigenous movie or poem or content. All of these forms of education are an illusion that has a nasty punchline.

And here is the punchline. We will create a set of norms that are coveted; that is, the whiteness-normalised standard sets of behaviour, attitudes, education levels, knowledges and qualifications. We, the powerful, will tell you that they are achievable and desirable because these are our norms; these are the master narratives that underpin mainstream society. We will never make explicit the master narratives. We will never outline the steps to achieving the norms or say exactly what they are but we will give you the opportunity to try and we will do this knowing full well that if you ever do get close enough to understanding we will move the goal post again

and again. We have to do this because western colonial-derived society is built on First Nation incapacity, on the basis that one is only powerful if the 'other' is powerless.

Bhabha's theory of mimicry illuminates the mainstream deficit model of Aboriginal education. Mimicry exists because then the "Indigenous education problem" is a personal and not a political problem. This then reduces or makes untenable the effect of any socio political analysis surrounding Aboriginal education and creates a hierarchy of binaries that become impossible to cross over. The site of difference, of deficit, always lies with the Aboriginal body in the classroom. Any discussion or interaction between lecturer and student always has the lecturer positioned as being the knowledgeable one, according to the hierarchised binaries, and the student always being the one who has to argue or justify their position. This is common amongst all teaching and learning spaces that see the non-Indigenous lecturers being expert and any discussion then from an Indigenous perspective is always coming from a different and automatically negated position. As long as white ways of being are normalised and dominant in the contested site of learning, the 'problem' always lies in the articulation of different ways of seeing the world, different ways of knowing about things. This interface, as lived by the non-Aboriginal lecturer and his/her Aboriginal students, constructs any cultural difference and its articulation as being the problem, the problem always lies with the Aboriginal person/student/body because they sit outside of what is normal and natural according to the whiteness-privileging processes at play.

The contested site then is only obvious when difference is critiqued and articulated. The struggle against subordination and its mimical offerings becomes a struggle to just get heard, to be listened to, to engage with the flow of meaning being developed within the pedagogical context, to be taken seriously let alone understood. This struggle involves the affirmation of cultural power away from its normalized positioning with the non-Indigenous expert and onto the Aboriginal student.

But power is never handed over to the Indigenous ‘other’, nor is success achieved according to white standards, because of what Bhaba calls the “process of disavowal” upon which colonial mimicry is predicated. This disavowal sees the negation of self in the attempt to become the transformed identity. This transformation requires a disavowal of self, of cultural heritage, of one’s very own ontology. But at what cost and for what end - to become a not quite true facsimile of the colonizing other, almost there but not quite, still deficient, still with character uncertainties, a risk. The authority of this mode of colonial discourse is therefore “stricken by indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 318).

The power of present colonial processes never allows the Aboriginal person to be equal without becoming the same, but, according to Bhabha, sameness is a mirage always receding never to be grasped. The power of whiteness-privileging mechanisms never allows any room for Indigenous knowledge to be recognized without it fitting comfortably within the colonial frame of knowledge-making and knowledge-meaning, a frame from which whiteness remains the paramount social and cultural construction. From within this worldview and associated ways of operating, there is

no real intent to recognise or share power with Indigenous people. This creates a profound dilemma for Indigenous students, as they struggle to prove they have capability and competency in a classroom using a set of dictated norms that are outside of their social referents and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996)

The way out of this mimical dilemma for colonized peoples was proposed by Thiong'o (1986) with his concept of 'decolonising the mind' in reference to valuing African literature as equal to that imposed on Africans during their pre-independence history; that is, English literature.

If we are to achieve a process of education that creates more than "mimic men" then a process of decolonising the mind and the education system needs to occur. This begins with an honest appraisal and reflection of where we are at and what the possibilities for the future are. These next five chapters explore where we were at a few short years ago and what we can take from this exploration with a view of moving into a process of decolonizing for the future. Bhaba says that "what emerges between mimesis and mimicry is writing, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 320). This mocking process removes the power of history to inform the present, it takes history and makes it something that is able to be copied, parodied, reproduced and repeated so that eventually it is so watered down it has no power. I hope that by using Thiong'o and Bhabha that we can, through honesty and stripping bare the ideologies that bind us, break free from this mimetic and imitable process. By writing an historical account of my experiences at BIITE, even though this will be contested, it will hopefully not be

reproduced or re-written to the point of extinction of its power to inform a new way forward in Aboriginal education. All this begins by telling hard truths.

“almost the same but not white: The visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction. It is a form of colonial discourse that is uttered inter dicta: a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them (Bhabha, 1994, p. 128).

This is the intent of this doctoral research to write “that which though known must be concealed”. This knowledge sits in your body as the mimicry around you is being played out. This knowledge exists and is known only as a memory or a shadow of some former being. Whilst in the mimetic process you celebrate the changes that come yet the quiet mourning of the losses is never spoken about. I hope to speak about them, knowing that it is against the rules, knowing that it is between the lines, knowing that this knowledge exists outside of mimicry, the desire to be the same. I am hoping that knowing that it is contested knowledge, knowing that it is outside of the lines and rules, we will be able to break the process that sees our history and identities diminished and removed in this attempt to become something else, something supposedly better, but never us.

Interdiction

Following Bhabha’s observation that “the visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction”, I am claiming that this observation also applies to Batchelor Institute and its history. Interdiction can be applied in many ways. Interdiction is also

used in this thesis as an analytical concept informing my theoretical analysis in Chapter ten.

Here I conceptualise the site of interdiction, drawing on definitions and contexts from the realm of what might be described as the sacred institution and the military realm in an attempt to make visible the process of mimicry within Aboriginal tertiary education. Along with the privileging through whiteness and its accompanying condition of ignorance, the interdictory site will be explored as an exclusionary process in the ecclesiastical sense, with the sacred ground of higher education and the academy being protected from encroaching Indigenous knowledges, the knowledges of the 'native' to be excluded as heretical to the mainstream dogma. Beyond prohibition as in denying permission, itself an expression of power and dominance, interdiction is also a military term, interpreted to mean blocking the 'enemy' from an area through the cutting off, in a pre-emptive strike, the lines of communication and supply of resources needed for the enemy's chance of success. Interdiction in this second sense describes the experience of the forces being applied against Aboriginal leadership and authority in this country to re-establish lost ground in cultural, social economic and political domains.

These dual definitions of interdiction, one pertaining to the contestation over the sacred sites of acceptable knowledge to be taught in educational institutions whether schools or tertiary institutes, the other pertaining to the denial of communications and materials necessary for sustained effort leading to successful beachheads, are particularly relevant in struggles over Aboriginal education. Both the slow strangling

and diminishing of supplies and the power of denial will be witnessed within the narratives in the data chapters to follow.

Conclusion

The theoretical framework I use in this thesis has antecedents in the neo-Marxist theories of ideology and hegemony. While these still relevant ideas percolate through the selected theoretical and conceptual content of my chosen framework, I have treated these underlying theories as a given.

My theoretical framework arises out of critiques of colonialism and the response choices available to the colonized other. The primary pillar of my framework is based on whiteness theory and the role enacted by ignorance to sustain the whiteness phenomenon.

The secondary pillar is that of mimicry, a phenomenon that arises under the seduction of First Nations Peoples' experience whilst living under the sharp power asymmetry that is experienced by the colonized under circumstances of subjection leading to subjugation.

The non-sanctioning of rights movements holding the promise of emancipation is added to my framework with the inclusion of the concept of interdiction, including the application of this concept in the realm of the institutionalised sacred and in the realm of the military. Both realms are highly relevant to the Aboriginal struggle for knowledge recognition for epistemological freedom.

This chapter complements the history of Australian colonialism as presented in Chapter two through my overview of Aboriginal-oriented legislation and policy. These two chapters provide both a context for my doctoral research study and the essential content through which the meta-analysis of my data chapter narratives will emerge.

I now turn to an account of the methodology I developed for this study. This methodology and my justification for this approach to Aboriginal research are detailed in Chapter four that follows.

Chapter Four: Exploring the Right to Write

Between the twin chasms of navel gazing and navel erasing.
The ground is narrow and slippery. None of us can pride
ourselves on being sure footed there (Trinh, 1989, p. 67).

The context and rationale of this chapter

A colleague of mine in the spirit of generosity and good will that often surrounds these interactions had left a whole heap of articles in my small cell that I call an office. I found these articles on my return to the Alice Springs campus of Batchelor Institute from the Top End of Australia after a very successful workshop in 2009 where the students told their stories and we looked at Indigenous resistance histories. We were privileged enough to immerse ourselves in two weeks of pride in ourselves and our culture, to tell our stories, to acknowledge our leaders past and present and to celebrate our survival (more detail of this in Chapter five).

So on my return I found these articles, which was a very kind gesture on her part. The top one was on identity, written by an American Greek woman, and I thought it looked interesting. Knowing that I need to read more and expand on the sort of material I'm reading, so I browsed through them.

Then something happened. I came across all these linguistics articles, then across all these articles about language use in schools in Alice Springs and studies of the “full bloods” and “their” use of English.

Then I came across all these articles about First Nations people, sort of understanding Aborigines articles and books, the Luritja or the Arrente or kinship structures of the Australian Aborigine. There was one entitled things that are interesting about Aborigines or something like that, and I started to feel a bit sick in my stomach. They had photos and pictures and flicking through them I started to realise and really understand how white people know about Aboriginal people, what their understandings are based on. I started to really understand Marcia Langton’s (1993) point that these are the non-Aboriginal people that define what Aboriginality is.

‘Aboriginality’, therefore, is a field of intersubjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people create ‘Aboriginalities’ (p.33-34).

These writings create the moments of inter-subjectivity because these books and articles and their readers and their imaginations create definitive accounts of a people. They create the perceptions that are discussed at dinner parties in Sydney or New York, or around the table in white homes everywhere. I started to get why the missionary type exists, what the fascination is, what the removed attraction is.

I also started to realise that my exposure to these types of papers is limited. I deliberately don't go to them. I knew that they were out there, but Batchelor Institute, I believed, was a wonderful buffer from these sorts of papers, ideas, thoughts, people. I had been arguing about Eurocentrism, white dominance and institutionalised racism in mainstream academia and education, but when faced with the hard evidence of it I choked, I backed away. If expanding my reading and getting more academic in my doctoral study means that I have to get sick to my stomach then I'm not sure that I want that, or that I'm prepared to sift through this level of objectification in order to gain insight.

However I did learn a few things.

I learnt that the versions of Aboriginality that we feed back to our students at Batchelor Institute (Ober 2007) are based around these books and that the dialogue that underpins 'both ways' or culturally appropriate education comes from these articles. The articles themselves weren't even that bad, the little bit that I read. They were not overtly critical of Aboriginal people and culture. They were positioned as positive and praising and searching for understanding, so that good, thinking and compassionate white people could read them and identify with their starting point and feel good about what they were reading and what they could do. They might empathise so much with these people represented in these books that, god darn it, they were going to do something about it, something to help them. I'm not even sure where this leads or that I'm angry about these people, it was just that something in these articles and books made me sick. And why don't they make everyone sick, what is the audience, what is the need to know?

I learnt that there were things in these articles that I didn't know. They were very informative, very detailed, outlining familial structures, kinship, songlines. The anthropologists had done their work. Again I just had a flick through but there was probably stuff in them that I didn't know. Part of the issue however was that they were presented as concrete facts, as definitive truths. So I probably could have learned something, about myself, about Aboriginal society. I know that I don't know everything or very much at all in fact. But I know exactly what I need to know, that my understandings and my knowledge are based around who I am, and that my life and who I am within it dictates my knowledge. I know that I have been taught what I need to know for me in this place right now. Maybe I haven't learnt it all, maybe I missed some of the more important lessons, but I have received the right education to make me, me. Whole and sentient, that it is this knowledge that runs through my veins, that is my blood, that makes me whole. This is why I don't want to read this kind of information about Aboriginal people in an article. I don't want to read someone else's view, what they think about finding water or making necklaces or catching goanna or the quaintness of digging for yerrampe (honey ants) or anaty (bush Poatato) These are things that I do not want to read about, I do them and in doing them I know something different to what is recorded in these articles. Bruce Chatwin's "Songlines" (Chatwin 1987) doesn't interest me but it does interest so many. It's a famous book, sold as fact. There are many that are sold as fact but are complete fiction. Then there is Marlo Morgan (1991), I can go on but don't want to.

So what I learnt is that I am not writing about Batchelor Institute and her students in a distanced, cold, factual way. I cannot be removed from this process. However if I contribute in any way to that store of knowledge that romanticises and trivialises

Aboriginal knowledge and supposedly makes it accessible to deliberately ignorant white people who know everything then I am just as guilty as them. I have to be vigilant in my approach and in my understandings that I never ever objectify anyone.

I learnt that I am not paranoid, that the world that I speak of exists and that I shock easily. And yet on some issues of integrity I am not prepared to move. I also learnt that I have sheltered myself and my reading.

I do not agree that Aboriginal people should be told what their research should include, but I do believe that the lived reality of First Nations peoples in this country necessitates a resistant stance. I believe that in a climate of colonialism and continued subjugation of Indigenous peoples any Indigenous researcher who is concerned with community, people and distorted power relations, with making change for our children and honouring the struggles of our ancestors will write, scream and argue to try and understand what is going on in this place. It is from this place that Indigenous research is different from most established western research and why by its nature Indigenous research in its many forms tends to include the elements Linda Tuhiwai Smith outlines in her Indigenous research agenda. Smith (1998) points out how our research agenda differs greatly from the research agendas of scientific organizations or mainstream research programs. According to Smith:

elements that are different can be found in key words such as healing, decolonization, spiritual, recovery. These terms seem at odds with the research terminology of western science,

much too politically interested rather than neutral and objective
(p. 117).

I would argue that not by definition, but by nature and contextual consequences, Indigenous research includes these elements. Whether it be a play, an autobiographical story, a passionate program to save country or analysis of government policy, these elements are present. When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people speak their truths it is political, it is against the status quo and it helps to shatter the collective amnesia that Australia suffers from. When First Nations stories are told and heard, it is healing. It is part of the recovery process. And when those stories are heard in the broader Australian culture they form part of a decolonization movement. As shown in the work of Indigenous scholars such as Smith (1998) and Battiste (2000), Indigenous research agendas are openly political and emotive. Our research works toward the continuing survival of First Nations peoples, their languages, lands and cultures.

It is for this reason that this thesis is highly emotional, that I say loudly and proudly that, yes, my writing is subjective, yes, my language casual in parts. It may be emotive but I will argue my right to speak what is my truth, to say that all writing is either for or against the status quo and the status quo is so weighted towards a western scientific model. Indigenous research by its nature should be told from our perspectives because as we speak our truths we become part of the decolonization process.

The way that I will construct this thesis is through writing my own story, telling my own truth. It is not the definitive truth (is there such a truth?) but it will be the truth as I see it, from my perspective. It is a recount of pivotal moments in Batchelor Institute's history as seen through my gaze, perspective, worldview, way of seeing and being in the world. I am aware that this breaks with most but not all standard conventions in doctoral research. However, I do this in the belief that there is no such thing as value neutral research, there is no such thing as the learned objective observer functioning from a removed position. We all gather and interpret data in all aspects of our lives through our own mind's eye, our world view or ontological positionings. No one can create thought without it being influenced by who they are in the world, where they grew up, how they were treated, their birth order, their social responsibilities.

Therefore, my methods will be to write my truth, from my perspective, from what I have seen and know in the knowledge that all research and thinking is value laden. Mine will be laid on the table for all to see, nothing up my sleeve, no duplicitous attempts to be the outside neutral observer. This thesis is who I am and what I have seen.

My Methodology

Although this thesis is written about bigger broader political issues, it is also me writing about things that I know. I know because I was there, because I experienced them, because I lived it. This is my lived experience. I have decided to go down to the detail, to write about those interactions and moments that I believe changed the landscape of autonomous First Nation education at Batchelor Institute. I have not

gone into as much minutiae as I would have liked. I have skipped over the snarls and sneers, the comments said under the breath, the many looks that go with the power of imperialism to make you feel inferior.

The decision to write about what I know through experience was not an easy one.

There was a pull to prove myself equal to the most complicated theory writers, better than the average thesis writer, to shed myself of this poor cousin syndrome and say, “see I’m as good as you”. There was a pull to truly claim an Aboriginal space within this academy. Ignoring that pull was difficult. I downplayed my experiences, relegated my knowledge to the personal, the unimportant. This I realised though was a trap. It is my hope that by writing these five moments in the institute’s history, that a counter narrative may emerge. By laying myself open, by telling my truths in an open and honest way then maybe when people speak of this time in the Institute’s history it won’t all be about Indigenous incapacity. I hope to expose the counter narrative of imperialism, hegemony and the absolute power of whiteness to destroy any resistance that stands in its path. The dominant narrative makes us believe that we are inferior, that we should be ashamed, that we should deny and run from our history and stories because they are dirty and shameful; that our history holds nothing but degradation and loss and that resistance is not only futile but that it is counter intuitive to the main goal which is for us to become more like the coloniser. This is the power of imperialism, the lie that implies we should be grateful for interventions that take away our power and self-respect is one of the greatest tools of the coloniser.

Steve Biko, the leader of the black consciousness movement in South Africa, was a great advocate of the idea that the most effective way to colonise a people was to

control the way they thought about themselves, that the greatest tool of the coloniser is the colonised mind (Gerhardt 1979).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Thiong'o 1986) goes further to explain the power of imperialism in his book "Decolonizing the Mind: The politics of language in African Literature".

But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of the cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland (p. 3).

So now I will claim my space. I want to stop this conspiracy of silence that sees my reflections and understandings as unimportant.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Maggie Walter (2009) write about the commonality of experience that is shared by Aboriginal women.

Although individual experiences differ, the worldview and reality of being an Indigenous woman is intertwined with lived

experience. The intersecting oppressions of race and gender and the subsequent power relations that flow from these into the social, political, historical and material conditions of our lives is shared, consciously or unconsciously. These conditions and relations discursively constitute us in the everyday (p. 5).

We learn about ourselves by the way people behave towards us and others. We are constituted by these discursive interactions and we naturally identify, or don't identify, with people who have similar stories, shared experiences, a discursive familiarity.

I am hoping that by sharing my experiences like this, a discursive familiarity and a larger dialogue can emerge. We all form our collective identities by the way that others react to us, this journey of highs and lows, of small interactions, of gut feelings and hateful stares, of shared consciousness and mutual understandings, of invisible barriers that cannot be crossed; this story is my mud map. It is my mud map to how the Institute ended up at the end of the first decade of this century, where we are today. These moments are not unique to me. This kind of relationality is not unique to Batchelor Institute. Aboriginal organisations around the country share similar stories of being undermined and over ruled by “assimilative intent” and “ambivalence”.

So I will look at the history of one Indigenous Institute to see how we came about, what it was that made Batchelor Institute important, worthwhile, why Batchelor has

been so important in the lives of Aboriginal Territorians and then later, for Indigenous Australia.

While my approach to this thesis will not be a traditional narrative enquiry approach, or auto-ethnography or autobiography, my first person account could fall within all of these categories and probably borrows from all of them. I will look at moments, stories of my time at Batchelor Institute. The use of stories or a narrative approach is not a new or innovative research methodology. In fact Petra Munro Hendry in her paper 'Narrative as Enquiry' (Hendry 2010) opens her paper with the statement:

It could be argued that narrative research is the first and oldest form of enquiry. If this is the case, then all research traditions originate from narrative. *Narrative* means “to account” and is derived from the term *gno*, meaning to know (p. 72).

Oral storytelling traditions form the foundations of the oldest continuing educational system in the world, so in spite of my aforementioned reservations the decision to write this thesis through story is an obvious one. We have managed to account for the world and its creation, how we be and know in the world through stories. So I am hoping that I can account in a case study of sorts of one Indigenous Tertiary Institution through stories as well, or rather through me writing significant but selected stories about moments that happened at Batchelor Institute. They are not allegorical stories in the traditional sense. While this is where the auto-ethnography component of this study becomes evident, this is not however a thesis about me. I am not the subject; Batchelor Institute is, autonomous inclusive First Nations education

is. So I am writing this as an Aboriginal person, as an educator, as a researcher, as all the component parts that form my identity. Richardson (1994) in Denzin and Lincoln's handbook of qualitative research argues that :

Writing from our Selves should strengthen the community of qualitative researchers and the individuals within it, because we will be more fully present in our work, more honest, more engaged (p. 516).

I don't write with any sense of entitlement or self importance. I am trying to break down some small interactions so that the concrete can be looked at. It is too easy to keep theory at an abstracted level that is removed from any one person or body, I am hoping through this form of writing that the reader can see themselves in these interactions.

So an intrinsic part of the process is checking and re-checking myself and the content, Nothing written here will be uncensored, in fact the censorship process will be extensive. Elders, community leaders, community members and any Aboriginal person involved in the content or writing of this has been consulted, content checked, intent checked.

However, while the speaking position may be mine, the voice is certainly not mine alone. The desire to write this project came from hundreds of conversations about the direction the Institute was going in, or the way that things had changed, or the sadness and loss that so many people felt over changes. Generally speaking there is a huge

sense of ownership from within the Aboriginal communities of the Northern Territory and more recently around Australia about their Institute; the one place that was supposed to be Aboriginal and proud. So, many have informed my voice and my opinion and many voices have informed this thesis. Also, chapters discussing events like the Desert Peoples Centre (DPC) opening and graduation were not my experiences alone, so I have included the voices of the key players in those events. For example, in the chapter on the DPC opening I have included the voice of the cultural convenor of the day and traditional owner, Marie Elena Ellis, and the Batchelor Institute Central Australian campus Manager, Barbara Richards.

Disclaimer and Conclusion

The intended outcome of this thesis is to arrive at a place of reflection and growth. The thesis is written out of love for the Institute and the many amazing things that happen within it. My compulsion for writing grows from a deep belief that autonomous First Nations education is important, that Batchelor Institute is an amazing place, a place full of contradictions, as the body of this work will show, but a place and space worth fighting for. Within this admiration and love for the place is an admiration and deeply abiding respect for the people that helped create it, shape it and dreamt it into what it is; all the hard working, tireless and selfless people that have staffed the Institute, attended the Institute, given of themselves to the construction of the Institute. I felt that this needs to be said. So as a preface to the data chapters which contain some hard truths (my version anyway) and some often critical positions, I say thank you to all the hard working men and women who made Batchelor Institute what has been, what it is today and can be tomorrow.

I also know that portrayals and analyses around racism, structural racism, white privilege, racial hierarchies, deliberate ignorance and assimilatory mimicry can be hard topics for some people to swallow. These theories and how they are applied to moments in Batchelor Institute's history won't please everyone, I know this. There is then a thin divide between being compelled to tell your truth, to create a counter narrative and to not overly offend. I have spent a lot of time in the past worrying about how not to be offensive to defensive people. I am stopping that now. There are confronting subject matters in the coming chapters. I have deliberately written these chapters so as to not let the content be abstracted by theory in the first instance. I want a first person reaction, which is why I wrote them in a first person narrative. I want you, the reader, to come on this journey with me, to see it through my eyes. In his web based article, 'Practical Ways We Can Stop Centering Everything Around White People's Feelings', (Tran Myhre 2013) offers some tips for facilitation of discussions. I thought these two points particularly relevant for this section of my thesis:

As an educator, you want to get your point across and cultivate understanding, but when all of the energy in the room goes into making a handful of defensive white students feel better, that's not healthy or productive for the larger group (p. 1). Accessed Dec 2013

And,

When all of the energy in an educational campaign or organization is poured into making sure the people who already carry the most

privilege aren't getting their feelings hurt, that hurts movements.

We can do better (p. 1).

So that leads to my point. If I had spent too much time worrying about how my content was going to be received I would then be perpetuating the same white privilege position that I am critiquing in this thesis. How do we ever move forward if we get stuck in the same place? How do we destroy the oppressive structures if we are too fearful to name them, to own them collaboratively, to deal with them whether rationally, emotionally, logically or fearfully, or a mix of all the above? The aim is to deal with them and, in so doing, change them.

To those who I refer to directly I am hoping this can be the start of an academic discussion in the public arena that is mutually beneficial to all of us. The narratives that follow in my thesis are deeply personal, some would claim deeply subjective. But these are my truths.

I make a genuine acknowledgement to the many people of varied races that made Batchelor Institute what it is, the highs that you all contributed too, the lows that we all have experienced. This is my journey through these peaks and troughs.

I am aware of the potential dangers of my approach to this research study. These dangers have been described so eloquently by (Trinh, 1989) when she wrote

How do you inscribe difference without bursting into a series of
euphoric narcissistic accounts of yourself and your own kind?

Without indulging in a marketable romanticism or a naïve whining
about your own condition (p 28)?

I trust that in what follows I have avoided these traps of narcissism and romanticism.

Chapter 5: Race-based Fear, Power (lack of) and Privilege experienced up close and personal

Introduction

This chapter provides insights into and an analysis of some of the tensions and intentions that were peculiar to Batchelor Institute in the first decade of this century. Places like the Institute that have a mandate for Indigenous advancement often attract people who, paradoxically, have a deep seated fear of Aboriginal advancement and culture. It is not an imperative for them that culture be maintained or strengthened, rather there seems to be an underlying assimilative intent (Arbon 2007) at play.

My intent with this chapter is to re-tell some of my experiences with a view to having a discussion later in the chapter, and further in Chapter ten, about hidden, coded racism as I experienced it at Batchelor Institute. While the other data chapters of this thesis have been written from my perspective on more collective events, this chapter is different; this is not my take on what was happening around me but rather I am putting myself front and centre narrating incidents centred on me. I then take up these highly personal incidents as the examples that I want to analyse in the final section of this chapter. This is perhaps as close to auto ethnography as I hope to get. I am reluctant to write of my own experiences, those moments when it was me who was being laughed at, when it was my genealogy that was being persecuted and diminished, when it was me who was the butt of peoples jokes, when they used my

body to teach me a lesson about feeling proud of my heritage. So for me I will tell you a story about what happened slowly over a couple of years that resulted in me being depersonalised, dehumanised, shamed and broken as a result of practising and celebrating my culture while being a staff member of Batchelor Institute.

I'm opening this now closed wound to show the theories of racism in action. I don't actually ever want to speak of the shame that accompanies these stories but I will for one moment show you what happens when an educated, fair skinned Aboriginal person enters an Aboriginal organization that was specifically established for the tertiary education of the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory.

I hope to explore some of the tensions around ownership and knowledge of the Aboriginal body as well as the deep-seated ingrained hatred and fear that surrounds Aboriginal culture. What is the driver of this assimilative intent? Why is the Aboriginal body in the Northern Territory both a subject of power and abjection? What drives this abjection and how is it taught, transmitted. Why, when looking at Aboriginal people, do some white people only see poverty and misery? Why is their goal to change a culture that has kept this country healthy and happy since the beginning of time? Why do they see lack and not strength and how is this taught down through the generations of non-Aboriginal white Australians? What is the fear in the minds of these people, that surrounds a person of both bloods, who has known both cultures, being included within Australia's Indigenous cultures? Big questions that I propose to only partially answer in this chapter and from a later analysis of the story I will now tell. I will return to this story and my initial analysis in the final chapters of this thesis.

Serendipity and the advantages of Aboriginal management

At the beginning of 1999 I was living in Katherine in the Northern Territory. I had just finished my teaching qualification the year before and was seeking confirmation of my acceptance by the Teachers Registration Board in Adelaide. Opportunities felt abundant as a newly trained teacher. Amongst other potential opportunities for employment was an academic position at Batchelor Institute. I applied.

I had considered doing part of my teaching qualification through Batchelor, and had a few conversations about entry requirements with the then teacher education course co-ordinator. However I think it is telling that Adelaide University appeared to be an easier course, less demanding and an easier delivery model. I could get a teaching qualification in one year on the back of my existing drama degree, something that would not be possible with Batchelor's rigorous processes.

The first time I drove into the Batchelor campus of the Institute I liked it; it was beautiful, and had a positive feel about it. I asked directions, everyone was really friendly, I even had a few conversations on the way to my interview. I felt comfortable, but once I got to the room I was asked to wait outside. What was probably ten minutes felt like hours and my nerves increased, my palms started to sweat; I told myself it was the humidity. I'm not a naturally sweaty person, but my nerves were going from frayed and onto fried. I was 27 and I had lived a full life before this but I was nervous. I really wanted this job. My inexperience at formal interviews also was a worry, and just when I decided that I was going to leave a woman stuck her head around the interview room's doorway. She had her hair frizzed out and a big broad smile. She looked at me. "Kathryn?", she reckons, "Come this

way. Then she said to me, “Don’t worry, you’ll be fine”. I asked her “really” with my eyes and she said, “Yeah I’ll be here the whole time”, and then she winked and in the lines in her face, in the tone of her voice, in the ease and grace that this strong black woman Meg walked in this space, I knew she owned it. I knew her presence there mattered to me and I knew that I would be alright.

The interview went well enough; I was qualified and I had a four year undergraduate degree, and a graduate diploma in education making it five years, a year or two more than most other lecturers there. I had answered all the questions and I felt fairly confident. I had experienced some hostility from the two people on the interview panel, who were on the phone from Alice Springs, when I was asked if I had any questions. Empowered and probably stupidly I said that I would like to work at Utopia, a remote community to the northeast of Central Australia. Although the other positions on offer were for longer I had personal family reasons for wanting to work at Utopia. My request might have been a huge mistake; the voice on the other end of the teleconference phone bristled and informed me that it wasn’t my call, that if I won a position it would be her prerogative where I would be placed. Chastised and chastened I left the interview but I felt okay. I liked this place, I liked the feel of it, I liked the ideology of it as expressed in its promotional materials. I waited with anticipation.

I was offered the Utopia position for six months. I was very happy, two other women had been offered the three year contract positions, but I was over the moon going right where I wanted to be.

Welcome to the Institute

I went to Alice Springs for training on delivering a newly accredited certificate course, the Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE). The training package had been developed in Melbourne for newly arrived migrants to assist them with assimilating into mainstream Australian society. This was the Certificate's explicit intent and purpose – assimilative intent with a mission statement!

There was a woman from Melbourne conducting the training on how to deliver this training package and it was at this training session that I met my future colleagues for the first time. Unlike my interview, in this room on the Alice Springs campus of Batchelor Institute with about fifteen people present, there were no other Aboriginal people in the room.

This was an interesting and exciting time for me; I was embarking on a new journey, starting a new job, meeting new friends and colleagues and I was quietly excited to be going back to my grandmother's country at Utopia. I never spoke of this excitement to these people; it seemed like it would be inappropriate and after my indiscretion at the interview I didn't want to anger my new boss or fellow workers.

Everyone was lovely and friendly and we were all very polite, saying, "How do you do, and after you, why thank you".

On my first day there the woman from Melbourne was moving the whiteboard from the front of the class to the middle. While she was walking behind me the whiteboard fell off of its brackets and bounced off my head. There I was just sitting quietly and

looking forward when I felt an enormous wack in the back of my head. I jumped to my feet and spun around to protect myself. The woman apologised profusely and everyone ran over. So all of a sudden I was in the middle of a circle of anxious strange faces. The debate ensued about whether I should be taken to hospital or not. The lady from Melbourne was almost in tears and all my new colleagues were very animated. I told them, "I'm fine, it's ok". I was embarrassed because of the way I had jumped up for her. I said, "Really thick skull, it's alright really". They kept arguing about the hospital and what action to take. Their reaction caused my face to flush, which just made them more adamant. I did have a headache coming but it was more about their shrill voices.

The reason I mention this is that the end result of the whiteboard falling on my head was that they would check my pupils every twenty minutes for any sign of concussion. So at intervals of about ten minutes, for the whole session after lunch, one of them would walk over lean down in front of me put their hands either side of my face and stare into my eyes and at my face for a couple of minutes, seemingly oblivious to my protests.

This didn't ever give me the option of taking it slow, finding my feet, being quiet and observing and sussing out the situation. The boundaries between me and them had been violated from day one and the slow time I had hoped would allow me to get to know someone and some place was removed when they all proceeded to violate my space in this exaggerated demonstration of 'caring'.

This 'caring' phenomenon has been repeated again and again with older white women at the Institute invading my personal space and grabbing and touching me, taking my arm or trying to give me hugs. The interpersonal boundary, the time space continuum, gets violated, maybe in an effort to demonstrate how open they are to me and my difference from them.

I left that day proud of my thick skull but I wasn't to know my battles hadn't even begun. It was a bad start to my induction to the Institute, but over the next two weeks I was conscious of odd phenomena at play – people were a bit nervous about me, there was an uncertainty in their manner. I now wonder whether this behaviour was about me being alone on the community of Utopia or about me failing in my academic duties out there or, and I think this is the most likely explanation, it was about me succeeding.

I was often told by several members of the team that I had a baby face, that I was too young for this job, too inexperienced, too naïve and too idealistic. They knew how old I was, they had my CV. There were two or three people who were literally trying to talk me out of taking the job. They offered me a longer contract position in town, in Alice Springs, that was, they said, "More suited to my skills".

Then one day another academic staff member (I'll call her Blue), who was only about five years older than me but who looked like she had been around a bit, asked me a series of questions and made a number of statements that I remember to this day. It is not that they were insightful or particularly meaningful comments, because they

weren't, but because at the time I was flummoxed by her directness, purpose and ignorance of national Aboriginal politics and sensitivities.

She said to me the following:

“They don't like half castes you know, full blood people prefer to have white people working in community than mixed blood people, and they (Community people) think mixed blood people cause too much trouble for them”.

Ok, I was not really sure how to respond to this. How do you respond? She then went on;

“You're fair enough to probably get away with it anyway, if I was you I'd just say I was white, too much bad blood between town mob and bush mob, especially if you're from down south”.

Ok, again I really had no civil response to this and what followed next.

“And you'll have to get a skirt, you can't wear shorts and jeans, they'll think you're a man or want to be a man. You can't wear shorts, they will think you're a slut and all the men will think you're available”.

Again I had nothing but OH!! and an incredulous look. She laughed maniacally like it's the biggest joke in the world and I realised that really I'm the joke. So I say calmly and without malice,

“What seriously do you think I've never met an Aboriginal person before, who do you think I am and who do you think you are, talking for and about people like that”.

She stopped laughing,

“No, didn’t I tell you I used to work in the school out there. I’ve worked at Utopia, you’ll find that highway a bit bumpy, the old Sandover, nothing like my drive along the Tanami though.”

So now we were back in her territory again, where she knows more than me and is magnanimously sharing this information about bush roads in Central Australia.

So I say, “No seriously why did you say that”?

Then this,

“I didn’t mean any offence, you look cross, it was all for your own benefit, you’ll see and be thanking me when you get back into town after being out there for a bit, c’mon mate let’s go have a beer.”

I walked away from her.

So in my first week at Batchelor Institute I have been assaulted and insulted. These sorts of questions and insinuations happened over and over although none as brazen as Blue had been. People kept feeding me platitudes like, if it doesn’t work out, don’t worry, or, we should plan an exit strategy for you. Everyone kept predicting my failing, it was odd. I was even told by my manager that I wouldn’t have to pay anything back if I wanted to leave before the contract had finished. There was nothing subtle about these messages. All this got me thinking, but did not deter me.

Then something weird happened. I met the Institute's Director, Veronica Arbon. She was visiting the Alice Springs campus and she sought me out and introduced herself. She said, "I heard we had a new Aboriginal staff member starting this week, we are happy to have you on board".

So this was very different to the lukewarm response I had received from my colleagues who had nothing but suggestions of impending doom in my future and a real discomfort at my presence. This is only weird in hindsight, that the Director would introduce herself to me. I was new, I didn't know then that this was not standard practice, I only learnt that later. And I was really grateful and welcomed the conversation.

She said to me, "If you have any worries or concerns you can come to me. So are you looking forward to it (going to Utopia)"?

I said, "Yes I am, I really am actually, it is a wonderful opportunity". And then I told her what I had not told any of my colleagues. I said, "My grannies are from Utopia, from Amplitiwatja actually. I'm very much looking forward to going back to country and teaching".

She smiled and she said, "Yes".

Then I said, "There is one thing on my mind though, someone said that the people out there don't like mixed blood people going back so I am a bit nervous now". Then I

smiled and didn't say what I thought, what they had made me think, "What if no one likes me, what if I'm a freak, What if, What if, What if."

I saw a look cross her face and she said, "That's nonsense, you will be fine. We believe in you."

What she was saying I think on reflection is that we (her, the Institute, Aboriginal people, my family) had just as much of an investment in me succeeding as others had in me failing. Maybe this is my eternal Pollyanna perspective but I do believe that in speaking with her I became empowered with a sense of purpose that was bigger than me. It was not about me making money or gaining some contract or making my mark, it was about feeling motivated and empowered, and it was bigger than my new boss's doubts or Blue's fear or jealousy.

On reflection I can depersonalise it, looking back now as I write this I can smile. However, at the time I was mortified that someone would be invested in me failing as an educator and as a person, and as an Aboriginal person in this Indigenous Institute. Why, I asked in my naiveté would they want me to fail, why would Blue try and scare me out of even trying. Then I got angry and even more determined to succeed. That thick skull of mine was not going to bow down now or then.

The time came for me to venture out to Utopia. One of the long term Alice Springs locals who worked at the Institute came with me to help me set up at Alparra, the central outstation where the Utopia study centre and house was located and to show

me the way. She self-proclaimed, “ I’ve been around the traps, not much I haven’t done or seen in this town I can tell you”.

I told her it wasn’t necessary but I was sort of glad that she was coming there with me.

My name is the secret shame?

I was going to play it cool upon arriving at Alparra; that is my usual way - sit back a bit at first, don’t go in hard, suss the situation out. It felt like the self-proclaimed one was chaperoning me but I was cool with that. I followed her into the driveway and the house that had been allocated to me. There was an outside power point and a long lead ran from the veranda to a caravan parked sort of next door. The woman who had driven out with me, the self-proclaimed one, had the keys to the house, so she got out of her Toyota and walked over to open the door and also pull the plug out of the wall socket.

So I was unpacking and she came up to me in the kitchen and told me her rule, “When dealing with these people always be firm but fair”. She said this then left and started talking with someone in the lounge room. She was explaining what we were doing, that I was the new Batchelor Institute Lecturer filling in for Rodney for six months and she was helping me settle in and showing me around. So I went into the lounge room to join the Alice Springs white lady and an old Aboriginal woman.

So the conversation meandered along with the three of us exchanging pleasantries, the old Aboriginal woman was looking at me and smiling. She had impressed the Alice

Springs white lady who couldn't really work her out and she said, "You speak very good English, you're not from here are you, where did you go to school, in town?" All this spoken from a position of assumed normality causing me to flinch at this backhanded compliment because while it acknowledged the old woman's skill in English it also denigrated the community. It was also a bit disingenuous to ask three questions in one – a bit like an interrogation I thought. The old lady's reaction made me smile. She said, "Yes I'm very good with languages, I speak eight", thereby dismissing her denigration but accepting the compliment. I knew we were going to be great friends, but it turns out we were actually family.

Aunty Lizzy McDonald (the old woman) turns her attention to me. She sees my smile and she says, "So Kathryn have you ever been to an Aboriginal Community before?". I feel the full weight of her gaze. "I was married to a man from South Australia for a while and so went out with him and my grandfather was a Station Manager up here right next to an Aboriginal community so when I was little ...". Aunty Lizzie cut me off right then and there. She had a stern look on her face – I had chosen to go via my white grandfather rather than my black grandmother who was from her community. I think back on that moment - maybe Red had gotten into my head more than I thought or maybe it was the presence of the white woman from Alice Springs and her disapproving looks. I didn't say, "Yeah my Granny comes from a community up the road". No I said, "My white grandfather"!

Then she said before I could finish my sentence, "Which one", with a smile. "What was his name"? "Mace Clanchy", I say, and she says, "I knew it, from the moment I saw you whose kid are you". I say, "Brick", and she bursts out laughing. "I should of

known from that big skull of yours, you're half black yourself", and she says, "I grew up with your father on Lake Nash. I'm your father's cousin, I know who you are".

So with a warm embrace my uncertainties faded and over my Aunty's shoulder I saw the woman from Alice Springs shudder as she turned her back on us and went into the kitchen. Later she said to me, "So I guess that cats out of the bag then", and with a big co-conspiratorial smile she made me, my body, my lineage, my self, part of a 'problem' that, apparently was meant to be kept secret. She was clearly uneasy with the interaction between Aunty Lizzie and me. I was over the moon happy and really content. I was right where I was supposed to be.

Ideological differences or are you serious

I'm not going to go into much more detail but I do want to highlight a couple of other comments and meetings and moments. This time was full of tensions and contradictions, my approach of teaching from the known into the unknown was criticised by my immediate Boss. She categorically stated to me that an immersion approach is the only way to successfully learn language; that we have to push the comfort zone and make people uncomfortable. She would come into my class and say, "English only in this classroom", clapping her hands loudly and giving me angry glares. My approach to teaching English language content was from a known Alyawarr language position, to utilise the similarities in the linguistic functions of the languages to teach concepts, not just rote language learning. She had told me in no uncertain language that this approach was not acceptable and would not be tolerated, that members of her team were in the process of developing standardised resources and I would be teaching and basing all my classes and approach from these mass-

produced resources. They were developed into a saleable package called, *Little bit by little bit, that's the way we learn: An English language and literacy teaching and learning resource for adult Indigenous students* (Batchelor Institute, 2002).

The other pedagogical position that I held that my Senior Lecturer and I disagreed over was around the ideology of the course we were teaching. She would come and randomly select students who I had passed and she would ask them questions. She would often do this to the students who were the shyest around her and looked least like they wanted to speak with her. Sometimes she would take them outside and other times she would question them in front of the class. So even when the students mustered all their goodwill to answer her unnecessary double questioning of me, often times they did it softly.

This was the point at which we argued. I would say, “She said it loudly and audibly to me, she passes the unit”. And my Boss would say, “There is no point her passing it if no one can understand her, if no one can even hear what she is saying”. And I would say, “Actually we are teaching tools that can be used or not used; she knows the information now to use or not use”. And Boss would say, “I’m not having this argument with you again – you are supposed to pull them this way, not go that way. I’m over riding that result and pulling you into town for two weeks to do your results so I can oversee them”. She would smile then leave. This left me speechless, and I always felt the need to apologise for her.

One time after she was in the classroom speaking for an hour and draining all the energy out of the room and then left, I said, “Let’s go for a walk”. But even that didn’t

seem to help – I was teaching banking at the time, heavy on the numeracy, and the feeling in the room was sluggish at best. No one was going to come back after lunch, it felt horrible. I felt like saying let's go home to Utopia so we can feel safe after the hour long barrage of information delivered in that patronising tone so I said, “ So Petyarre and Kemarre are cousins, how come they right skin, can I marry Petyarre my cousin”?

Well then off we go! The room became completely animated again. I was up at the whiteboard writing frantically, they were reading it and correcting me, they would make me rub out lines and write it again till it was right. We ended up working into our lunch break. We revisited it again after lunch and we had turned around the whole energy and feel of the class collectively – we went from all of us not wanting to be there and nobody coming back after lunch to all of us being engaged and involved in the learning process. This was my understanding about what Batchelor Institute stood for. At the very least it was to be a safe place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to study and I was building from the students' own knowledge.

I fulfilled the six months contract and moved away from Utopia and Batchelor Institute, but eighteen months later three of the older women from the Utopia community contacted me to say it was time for me to go back there. They said, “We want you to come back here so we can teach you Alyawarr and you can teach us English, so come back now”. I tried to tell them that I had a job and they said, “ It's ok we will wait, you can come back now”.

So I put in an expression of interest to the Head of School of the Community Training Education Division at the Institute, put in my resignation at the theatre company I was running in Adelaide and returned.

The Head of School was very happy to hear that I was interested in returning. She and I had often had interesting conversations about differing educational approaches and she was, shall I say, on my side in some of these debates. She was supportive and understanding and happy to see me back. However, my old boss, the Senior Lecturer, was not as happy to see me back.

The Head of School offered me a three year contract. I accepted and in the middle of my contract my Head of School offered me permanency. Again I accepted.

Not if but when.

The exchanges with my immediate manager (the Boss) continued. She told me that she didn't know what it was about me, but that I made her feel like she was a headmistress at school, that I wasn't taking enough responsibility. I in turn said, "How ironic because you make me feel like a naughty school kid and I feel completely stifled by your micro management".

This was my one moment of being quietly honest but assertive with her. I usually reverted to sort of 'dumb Myall, say nothing and cop it' when she would speak to me, so I got her point about the head mistress.

One day she came out to Alparra to see me. We argued and I just lost it. She was in my home; she was being rude to me and to my family and it was obvious that she took joy in making me uncomfortable. Goaded, I lost my temper. And I swore at her more than once and demanded she leave my house immediately and not very politely. When I was back in Alice Springs I went to her office and I apologised unreservedly for my behaviour. I said it was unprofessional and unnecessary and I was stressed out. This is the kicker. She said, “ Hmm come in”, and then she said, “Don’t worry about it, I’m used to it, I used to be the deputy headmistress at a high School in Adelaide with a high number of Aboriginal students”, and I said, “Ok”.

I wondered and thought what sort of person lives their life in such a way that they are routinely sworn at, that having someone being that angry at her that they lost their cool wasn’t a moment for reflection, didn’t warrant a ‘how could I have done that differently’ thought. I wondered could it be that she was comfortable with being such an irritant that it didn’t even occur to her that she could live another way. It also struck me that what she was really saying was that she had such a low opinion of Aboriginal people that she was waiting for it, she expected me to do it and, once I had, I had confirmed all her suspicions. I had played right into her hands. She wasn’t surprised that I responded like that, just that it had taken me so long to do it. And then I knew that I had blown it. I had given her what she wanted, I confirmed her suspicions about me and her racist categorisation of all ‘half-caste or mixed blood people’ – her categories, not mine! We were unstable, torn, lacking in restraint, we were trouble and trouble makers, agitators and aggressors who wanted to take their jobs, and disrupt their access to full blood people, disrupting their power and their

power to assimilate, disrupting the effectiveness of their ‘assimilative intent’ (Arbon, 2007)

This was an odd campaign and one that I wasn’t used to. I had worked in heaps of Aboriginal organizations before starting at Batchelor Institute, so I knew how to navigate my way around black politics but this was different and often times it sat and was played out at a point just beyond my consciousness. I had worked in small NGO’s or community run centres. Batchelor Institute was comparatively a huge machine. So I wasn’t always on top of the actual politics but rather responded at the level of how they were making me feel - emotions without the power analysis and critique. So I wasn’t as quick to identify what was really going on, but with hindsight, having twenty twenty vision, I will admit I was slow to get it partly because I felt powerless.

The Boss, Blue and other so-called colleagues (I will refer to these people as ‘they’) set out to create a self fulfilling prophesy and narrative that was to cast/define/mark me as trouble maker and my Senior Lecturer as the rational, detached, removed logical authority. We would have team meetings at the Alice Springs campus that I had to attend and I sat quietly, attentive, trying so hard. In these meetings they would say things like, “Oh the poor dears didn’t even know how to hold a pencil til I got there”, or “It was so funny because she was talking to me and I couldn’t understand a word then she threw her arms down and said clear as day, ‘I’m speaking in English’, that was the only words I could understand, poor love”, or, “My students go through pencils so quickly they keep holding them like paint brushes”. All of these comments were met with uproarious laughter. They all thought this racist drivel was so funny. I

would sit and I would try to let their comments wash over me. Blue would talk of the senior law men in the community that she was working in as if they were all drunken children and the insult to me was often too great. I would leave and go sit in the toilet and then they would say I was fidgety, had no attention span. Sometimes, occasionally, I would just leave the meeting and not go back. When my body had had enough of their venom I would go and sit outside or talk with other Aboriginal staff and again there was a narrative around my inability to sit through a meeting, or of my non-participation in team building activities or planning meetings. I hated these meetings and distrusted these people and all that they represented. But I believed in my own strength to be able to weather them and their vitriol, so I sat in the meetings. I smiled and was polite.

My Senior Lecturer was quite open about how she hadn't wanted me back. She had told me that it wasn't her decision and I believe to this day that she was against me getting the job in the first place and had therefore been over ridden twice in my selection, the first time by Meg and the Director at my beginning with the Institute and the second time by my Head of School on my return.

Amidst all of this tension my program in the community at Utopia was running really well. My program had acquitted four times our team's allocated ASCH (the Australian vocational education and training institutional funding measure for student participation) so the Utopia program was able to cover up for the ASCH shortfall in three other community programs. Our enrolments had gone from fifteen women to over one hundred and twenty students from Utopia enrolled in Batchelor Institute courses and we were working on setting up a young men's program with thirty names

interested - all we had to do was process them. The success of the program was undeniable; we were getting young students in and I had introduced film making as a tool to literacy. We would create a storyboard, film it and then do voice over narration in Anmatyere, Alyawarr and English. We created a hunting video that took hours of hunting time across vast tracts of country to get the footage. That we edited, viewed, added narration and then wrote stories and books based on the video content. All of this annoyed my Boss but I stayed well within the range of curriculum statements of the course document and the success was obvious and undeniable. The video became proof of engagement. How could you say students wouldn't speak when here they were doing narration and speaking loudly on the video?

This successful teaching approach, not surprisingly, backfired on me because the Boss then demanded that I video all my assessments; only me, no one else in the team had to do this, just me. I explained that using video as a tool for learning was one thing but it was unfair to use it as an assessment tool. So in order for anyone to pass a competency unit for this course at Utopia during this period of my teaching they not only had to speak this assimilative curriculum content, they had to do it on camera which was completely restrictive, twenty times harder and fundamentally unfair. Of course you would get embarrassed doing a verbal assessment in a foreign language on camera.

Boss eventually saw the reasoning behind my argument against using video for assessment purposes on seeing some painful footage, but she had ruined the fun we were having exploring film to tell stories and learn to English.

Discipline and punishment

When singling me out in meetings, making me work three times harder than anyone else for less money, making it ridiculously hard for students from Utopia and kyboshing the young men's program that the community had asked for hadn't worked in pushing me out of the Institute, then they (the same 'they') started to attack me more personally.

In 2001 Australia celebrated its Centenary of Federation and as part of that Alice Springs was hosting the biggest coming together of Aboriginal Nations from around the country in a dance and culture festival – the Yeperenye festival. It was a giant corroboree; the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the national ABC, in its Federation Program Guide described the Yeperenye festival as :

This weekend Alice Springs hosts Australia's biggest Corroboree ever, the Centenary of Federation Yeperenye Festival 2001.

Follow it online, courtesy of the ABC's Message Stick, Triple J and Centenary of Federation. Access the Triple J simulcast of The Road Ahead Concert from 7.30pm, Saturday evening and a YepFest special on Artery with Megan Spencer on Sunday from 10.00 pm. For more details: <http://www.abc.net.au/yeperenye> (http://www.abc.net.au/federation/pg/FederationDateIndex_Saturday8September2001.htm accessed 6.53pm Saturday 7th July, 2013).

This was a big deal. Aboriginal people from all over the country were coming to Alice Springs to dance and sing and celebrate our culture and survival.

Batchelor Institute's Director had also heard about this festival and made it clear that it was part of our job to participate, that this was in fact Institute business. So we packed up the troopie, me and about ten women from Utopia. Another ten people came in two cars. So Utopia, and the Sandover region were well represented in this festival; Alyawarr and Anmatyere cultures were coming out strong and forever alive – awelye intem-ante law and culture is ongoing forever. We checked in at the showgrounds and we set up our swags in our area. We got our meal tickets and the air was buzzing, the show ground was buzzing, some had tents, some vans, it was a sea of activity and it was very exciting. We sat around and spoke of tomorrow and how it was going to be shown all across the country, live and national but probably all around the world. My old granny was holding my hand and she was saying, "We will show them how strong we are, our culture is strong." Then the talk turned to which dance to do, who was going first, did we have everything we needed. One of the old women asked me about my skirt. This was the first time I knew that I was expected to dance!

I was clear that no, my skirt is home I forgot to bring it. Loud and fast exchanges happened too quickly for me to follow and not in the baby language people spoke when they wanted me to follow. It was worked out that I could borrow a skirt and a dread came over me.

I had been dancing at ceremonies out bush. Sometimes we would dance all night or the dancing would go for hours. I was learning my grannies culture and language and this was part of my education that was happening alongside the formal Batchelor

Institute western education. It was one thing to dance out bush, a whole other thing to dance in town and something entirely different to dance on national television. From my perspective it wasn't going to happen. The issue this reaction raised of course was that it made me seem a hypocrite. Either I value culture or I don't. But it was completely about my shame. So I tried to back out casually. "Oh no, that's alright maybe Pansy should dance instead. I'll go to Kmart and get a skirt tomorrow and dance on Sunday".

After breakfast we got the coloured ochre to make the paint ready. We got the oil ready. The women started to sing and I went into the toilet and hid. Cowardly, yes I know. I knew that there was a process to getting ready and that it took time to get painted up properly. I heard my name being called. I heard people looking for me, conversations about the Toyota still being there, and I heard the singing and still I waited and sat. When I came out I gave the skirt back to Sarah, one of the ladies, and promised to go to K-Mart and get another skirt and made myself busy making tea, doing the general runner's job, wanting to participate, wanting to show that I wanted to participate.



Figure 1 The Yeperenye Festival Grounds

The festival was amazing it started on the Saturday morning with the kids from Yeperenye School in Alice Springs. There is much documentation of the festival so I won't go into it here.

Blue came with me to Kmart and we were talking as I bought the skirt. She asked me why I was buying a skirt and I told her. I trusted her as my colleague to not betray this trust, I thought we had a camaraderie as women, as lecturers who worked out bush. I underestimated her.

Sunday at the festival was very quiet, most of the interstate acts had gone, there was no cameras, no TV. The dancers were finishing up the ceremony and it was mainly local Central Australian people that were still there. So with hardly anyone left watching, and I mean virtually no one, this was finish up dancing that's all. I put my

skirt on, I sat down and got prepared for dancing. I was rubbed with oil and then they started to paint the Antarraringya design on me. I got to our circle of sand, took my shirt off which I had draped over my shoulders and was completely dismayed to see, half of the Batchelor Institute CSWE team and my Senior Lecturer, the Boss, standing around our circle waiting for us to dance. I could have died right there on the spot. It was way too late for me to back out, so I straightened the feathers on my head, grabbed my bit of wool and danced. I copied the light shuffling dance steps and ignored them and hoped that my attempt at graceful dignity could make up for my discomfort at being exposed to the cynical and mocking gaze of my non-Aboriginal pseudo-colleagues.

Then I saw Blue and her camera.

The next time I was in town from Utopia I noticed people looking at me and smiling. I went out the back at the campus to sit with my two Aboriginal mates and they told me Blue had photos of me dancing and was showing them to people. Outraged I went over to her office and asked for the photos. She said, “No”. I said at least let me see them and I took them, thinking it was over. But it was not over. Blue, instead, went to the photo shop, got the negatives, reprinted them and then she scanned them so she would have digital copies that she could email people and post on the web.

We had a staff meeting up at the Batchelor campus of the Institute some time later. At this time I had my twelve year old niece living with me and she had accompanied me up to Batchelor from Alice Springs. We went down to the tavern together for dinner, and one of the Institute staff who was there had colluded with Blue to play a prank on

me. He said, "Have you seen the new Batchelor Calendar Miss March". I didn't know what he and Blue were talking about and said as such, and then they said that there was a photo in the Batchelor Calendar of a white woman dancing topless in a corroboree and that the woman looked like me.

I can't explain the feeling that came over me. I was gutted. I had my niece with me and she got really worried asking if I was alright, so I smiled and said sure. I waited for our food, ate, then went back to our room and I didn't sleep at all. I was sick. I had thought I had made the right decision by choosing to celebrate culture as an Aboriginal woman with close relatives. I had been reluctant to dance. I certainly didn't want to dance in front of them, and now I felt I was being punished for daring to express my Aboriginality as a woman. They had succeeded in ridiculing my Aboriginality; in their minds, ridiculing my claim to be Aboriginal.

I was quite prepared there and then to resign and leave for the shame, to go and hide out in remote Territory or in Queensland until the burning sensation had departed from me. I wanted to go run amok on them. I wanted to die but my niece has never seen me weak or defeated. Her presence carried me through this night and the next morning. If I ran or got psycho angry what am I teaching her about conflict resolution? All said and told, family is more important than any of this racist garbage. This shame and my sense of injustice would pass and my family would still be there, still love me unconditionally. At this time I questioned my judgement and myself. How had I got it so wrong? How had I made such a monumental error of judgement that I was being punished like this?

In the morning I went to an office at the Institute and asked for the calendar. They said it hasn't been distributed yet so I went to the printery and asked to look at a copy. The woman at the printery was going to say no, but then she looked at my face. "What's wrong"? So I told her and she was outraged saying, "What"? So she let me look at the early version of the calendar. She gave me a couple and my heart dropped back down to its natural place because I was not in the calendar. It had been a prank but for a good twelve hours I was sick with worry and shame. Had my niece not been with me I'm not sure I would have acted responsibly to any of them. When someone feeds into your own monologue of identity, body image and self-doubt for their own sport and power play, it's hard not to be angry.

So I went back to the room where we were having our team meeting. My niece had been drawing and writing a story on my laptop while I was gone for those minutes to chase up the calendar. I was actually relieved on a deep level that I don't need to go into hiding for the next five years but still angry on this immediate level.

Blue walked in before me, did a lap of the room and walked out the front exit of the double conference room. I walked in, sat next to my niece (technically in Aboriginal kinship ways she is actually my daughter but anyways) and Blue came in and ruffled my hair. "Hey mate". I stood up looked her straight in the face and said to her quietly but forcefully, "Don't fucking touch me ever, don't speak to me, I have nothing to say to you".

End of story you would think; she took the photos, she showed the photos to anyone that would look, she pranked me about publishing them in the Institute's calendar, so

yeah you got me, gee that was a good one, in three hundred years time I will look back and laugh. I was quietly assertive, dismissing her protestations about it being funny, just a joke, c'mon mate you know me.

These platitudes could have come out of her mouth ad infinitum, so I stood again and I told her to kindly vacate the area around my person, that I had no desire to speak or engage with her and if she didn't move I would.

This was it for me, it was not a funny joke. I'm not so serious I can't take a joke, I love a good laugh. If she had photos of me dancing topless on a table at a nightclub, fair game, I would of laughed too. However these photos were not evidence of my carelessness or drunkenness or stupidity; they were the result of a hard decision, which really shouldn't have even been a hard decision at all. It was literally only my shame at my body that was the issue. I wear shorts and t-shirt to swim, my general aversion to nudity has been there my whole life. I have issues around my body image and who I am in that world, so when I decided to value my culture over my neurotic fears around body shape and image, I had no idea this would happen. End of the story you would think.

A year later in Alice Springs, my friend, Fiona, said to me, "Come tonight, we will have a few beers". I said, "Nah, work night, I'm battling this flu. She looked at me and she said, "Nah come sis I want to talk to you".

So we had a few beers. We were in a completely non-work space, very neutral. She was from Queensland as well and we went out all the time on weekends, we knew

each other well. She and I used to make up these gammon scenarios and laugh about them – she was the administrative assistant to my Boss. So she was the person I was supposed to go to for admin support but we were mates. Lots of times she would help me out with my results and the calculating of ASCH hours based on what best practice she had seen. But generally we didn't talk work when we went out, so when she said, "Sit down", I sat and listened. Then she told me.

My punishment was not enough

Blue had approached her after almost a year of whingeing that I was over reacting by not speaking to her. She walked in casually and with a manner full of gall asked the only Aboriginal person in the corridor, and a known friend of mine if she, "Wanted to see half naked photos of Gilbey". Fiona told her that no she didn't and Blue said, "You sure? I'll just email them to you".

This woman had gone with the negatives to reprint them, then scanned them so she had electronic copies. She had been circulating these for who knew how long as a general sport for her. I have no way of knowing how widespread the image of me dancing topless with ground up ochre stone stuck to oil on my body in one of the oldest designs in the world that exists today from one of the oldest cultures in the world, and I'm supposed to feel shame. This culture is long-lived and its old but my fear about non-Aboriginal people laughing at my white wullatyes, my white belly, you know, is new, that hatred of our bodies is new, that control around representation is new, but that dance and that design that was painted on my body that wasn't new. This design is one of the oldest in the world. It is why this country is strong because people still keep singing and dancing its strength, and I had been part of that singing

and dancing for country, and she hadn't. She was the expert but she wasn't invited to dance.

I don't know when Blue scanned her photos of me to have electronic copies. I don't know why she took the negatives in again to get them reprinted apparently three times so I don't know where she even circulated hard copies. I really don't know anything much about her motivations except that they buy immediately into a bigger portrait of modern Australia finding unfettered expression in an Indigenous educational organisation – Batchelor Institute.

So when I went to work the next morning I went straight to our Elder on campus, Evelyn. She was the equivalent of my immediate boss in the academic hierarchy, a Senior Lecturer, but with high level Aboriginal women's knowledge to boot.

Shaking with rage, myself and Evelyn went to the Boss and told her what had happened. The Boss looked at me and said it was a public event and technically Blue can have the photos as they are hers. Evelyn threatened that this was crossing the line, that she had advised me to make a formal sexual harassment complaint. I said that I was reluctant to enter into this Jerry Springer-like charade. I told her we wanted all copies destroyed. It was only the threat of a formal sexual harassment complaint that caused her to finally agree to go to Blue and ask her to remove the photos from her computer and to get rid of the hard copies. Then she told me, "Blue is really upset about this, about you not talking to her, she misses you".

We can't both be right.

I have a belief that when you are doing the right thing that you feel good about it, the universe tells you that you are on your right path. I also believe that I have spirit guides that don't let me stray too far away from the right path. Call it intuition, trusting your gut or sometimes just knowing, there are checks and balances put into place to keep us focused and following our right path; we may veer off course but can gently be guided back. The flip side of this then is when we are doing the wrong thing we get sick, when we are doing harm in the world there has to be repercussions, and I take no joy in the fact that there were repercussions.

What I want to try and understand is why. Batchelor Institute has smart, savvy educated and classy people working there, attracted to helping out, doing their bit in the only dual sector Indigenous-only tertiary Institute. Surely they go in with an honest heart and good intentions. It is too much for my brain to bear that they are deliberately assimilationist, that they set out to eradicate the oldest living culture in the world. What I mean by this is I don't believe they set out consciously to cause harm. I also don't believe that they had conversations like, "Let's eradicate and ridicule all that is Aboriginal so we can turn them into good white people". Or do they, in conversations that are coded in terms like 'maintaining literacy and numeracy standards', 'western knowledge means employment and economic independence', 'understanding western science is necessary in the modern world'.

There is a whole history of racist rhetoric that posits Aboriginal people as the lowest rung on the misinformed ladder. In fact many of the apparent great minds of the Western knowledge covenant - Darwin, Freud, Durkheim - and many of the

sociological texts in the past attest to these ideas and values. These are the thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth century and the fundamental tenets that underpin white culture and European ontologies into the present.

So if these attitudes underpin both the formal education to which you are exposed and the environment in which this same education is promulgated, it will become part of your worldview, what you know instinctively to be true. Couple this with the invisibility of whiteness as a racial distinction and blackness and brownness as a form of departure from the racial norm, you have what Naomi Klein (Klein Feb 2012) calls “intellectual antibodies”, entrenched learning that seeps into one’s DNA by absorption or osmosis (p. 116).

So maybe in my best case scenario these behaviours that I encountered from my CSWE team members were manifestations of unconscious racism, racism fed to them by their own education, the media, by master narratives. In this sense racism may have been ‘fed’ to these Batchelor Institute academics by a range of avenues, but in their behaviours towards me they had become the embodied ‘carriers’ of a powerful form of institutionalised racism.

The behaviours described in this chapter were brutal; they constituted assault in its very form and for me there can be little or no redemption, but in the broader scheme of things, are these behaviours understandable, able to be analysed at a deeper theoretical level beyond surface explanations relying on personality differences, workplace conflict, hypersensitivity and unsatisfactory staff management? All of us at times are exposed to situations that confront our worldview. If we feel uncomfortable

do we examine why? I offer a first level examination, a first level analysis, of the experiences I endured while working within the CSWE team under my Senior Lecturer based at the Alice Springs campus of Batchelor Institute.

Why? A first level explanation

Gadamer (1989) perhaps provided a way into a deeper examination of the behaviours of my Boss, Blue and others ('they') when he wrote:

[A]s long as our mind is influenced by a prejudice, we do not consider it a judgement. How then can we foreground it? It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked. The encounter with a traditionary text can provide this provocation (p. 299).

Maybe my very presence provoked feelings of discomfort amongst my CSWE team but I saw scant evidence that this discomfort led to awareness of prejudice. Perhaps such provocation can either reinforce one's righteous position based on an underlying prejudice or challenge your perspective of how you interpret what is happening around you.

Aileen Moreton Robinson (2002) in the introduction to her book "talkin' up to the white woman" says: "Whiteness remains the invisible omnipresent norm. As long as whiteness remains invisible in analyses "race" is the prison reserved for the 'other'" (p. xix).

I believe this is the crux of the issues I experienced. This was an all-white team who were working predominantly with traditional Aboriginal people from remote communities. They were teaching a 'how-to' course in speaking and writing English. Whilst this remained an all-white team whiteness and its power and privilege need never be examined. Whilst it remained an all-white team there was never any need to question the legitimacy of what they were doing; all that could remain un-interrogated because the norm and power within this dynamic had been established. We had powerful white people, teaching English language and customs to, in their eyes, non-powerful black people who were, in the minds of their lecturers, empty vessels and sponges waiting for their wisdom. There was no interrogation of race because none was needed, the knowledge transference was one way and it was just as much about teaching western values and norms as teaching the English language and the act of writing. There was no questioning or analyses of race because from their perspective white domination and white race privilege were both, not only, where it was supposed to be but was also magnanimously being shared albeit with an assimilative intent. And so 'they' believed they were honestly doing good in the world.

My presence in this comfortable white space, in the team meetings, in the classroom and in the community then disrupted their mutually formed equilibrium. Here I was outwardly a white (like them) person who had family in the community I was teaching in, who had family ties to the students, who had a blood connection to the culture that they were slowly eradicating and undermining. Contrary to their intent of cultural eradication I was intent on cultural affirmation. My mere presence without knowing any of my politics made them uneasy, so when I made the decision to dance

in front of them I was quite clearly making a statement about whose side I was on, and in their mind needed to be punished.

Underlying this even further are the notions of legitimacy; were they legitimate in operating this way? What about rightful ownership? I remember saying one day as they were doing their playful banter at the expense of traditional and rightful owners, “Do you know they feel a bit sorry for you as well, because you’re lost and got no place where you belong”. Maybe I was embellishing a little but I couldn’t stand the constant us-and-them conversations, the powerful and the powerless. So when I said this, the meeting was closed down. I was reprimanded for speaking inappropriately and power was restored. But I had hoped that just for a second that they saw the strength of Aboriginal culture as something powerful beyond their understanding and that they were the gnats that were annoying a far more powerful being.

I return to the narrative of this chapter in Chapter ten in combination with the narratives of the next four chapters. The narrative in Chapter six now awaits.

Chapter Six: The Arc and the Curve; the Rise and the Fall of Indigenous Knowledge Representation within BIITE: 2003-2005

Introduction

This chapter begins with an account of the planned implementation of cultural standards, and the movement that saw whiteness re-centralise itself. The chapter focuses on a two year period in the Institute's history, mid 2003 to mid 2005. Of interest within this timeframe are the introduction to BIITE academic staff by the Director and the Assistant Direct (Academic) of new ways to conceptualise and include Indigenous knowledges at BIITE and the impact of these developments on the academic staff. Of further interest are the different ways academic staff and members of the Institute's Council responded, ways that with hindsight had significant longer term implications for the Institute as a place of Indigenous tertiary education. My recollections of this period are of an exciting time where the Institute had the potential to be world class in terms of an authentic form of Indigenous tertiary education.

The mid 2003 to mid 2005 period at BIITE was a particular time when the Indigenous leadership of the Institute strived to move the Institute forward to a point of being as competitive in western knowledge as any mainstream university but grounded in Indigenous knowledges. The leadership vision was of a truly Indigenous University that had at its core Indigenous knowledges. Aunty Rose Kunoth-Monks in her paper 'A Tribute to the late Chairman of Batchelor Institute Council' (2004) recalls this

time and the discussions that were happening within Council about the vision for the Institute.

And then he introduced us to the idea of this Institute becoming a university. And we all thought of what quite a few of us have experienced, that is universities in the main stream. And gently he brought us back saying: "No, this is not going to be the same. We have to jump some hoops and follow some processes, but this university must stand alone. It must be clearly defined by an Australian Indigenous mentality. "We weren't even quite sure then, because we couldn't bring a university and the Indigenous Australian together, but he talked us through, especially myself, and said it must reflect the black person of Australia, not anywhere else, in Australia, it must reflect us black people and I believe we will develop and reach where we want to go through that system. So the learning system or the learning institution has to be black philosophy and ideology as well. It's a hard one but by the time he'd finished with us, we all knew exactly what he was talking about. And that fire which he had, within himself, was imparted, I believe, to each member of the Council (p. 7).

This was revolutionary for Australia. Although other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary centres existed, none of them had an Indigenous epistemology at their foundation or as their starting point. This vision, held by Council and Indigenous

communities in the Northern Territory of Australia, was however never to be implemented. In this chapter I will chart selected key events relevant to the rise and fall of this vision. I have selected key events which I participated in and therefore have first-hand knowledge of.

I write my recollections of these key events from my perspective and in my voice. Later in the chapter I undertake a first level analysis of experiences arising from these events, including both my direct experiences and my observations of others' experiences. I then conclude the chapter with theory-supported insights and themes reflecting the re-centring of the power of whiteness.

An All Staff Meeting – mid 2003

I remember an all staff meeting at Batchelor campus of the Institute in mid 2003 called by the Director, Veronica Arbon. Veronica and the Assistant Director (Academic), Berice Anning, talked of the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) and the development of Indigenous cultural standards in education. Both had just returned from the WINHEC Conference in Canada where the concept of Indigenous cultural standards had been debated. These two Aboriginal women, senior members of the Institute's Executive, spoke to the staff about how it would be great if First Nations cultural competence was as relevant at the Institute as westernised industry and academic knowledge competencies. Veronica's and Berice's address floated the idea that, if Indigenous cultural standards were to be adopted by the Institute through its Council and Executive, then an understanding of these cultural standards would become an important component of each staff member's job description; that is, these standards would be embedded

within the description of every staffing position within BIITE, not dissimilar to what the Maori have on all their ethics committees and within their educational institutions in Aotearoa.

After floating this idea, Veronica went on to say that if we all as individuals went and examined our own worldviews then we could come back together and share this information and look at where we all sit. Veronica and Berice then drew two circles on the board, telling us that there is more than one way of seeing the world represented by the two circles. They went on to say that if we have these two categories that we will call Indigenous and Non Indigenous worldviews, and if we can all explore our own perceptions of the world, then we can better understand that of another. Through knowledge of our own selves we can learn about the other or another, or even each other. Then Veronica and Berice drew the two circles intersecting and, pointing to the area of intersection, they said that this area represents ‘us’, the staff of the Institute. This is where the two worldviews intersect. This, they said, is what we really want you to explore together, this intersection, this point at which we are both the same and different. If we can explore this point (this third space) then we can really move towards becoming both more culturally safe and engaging but also towards becoming a truly Indigenous Institution that recognises both worldviews.

I remember Veronica being really clear about the important role that *all* played within this process, that it can’t happen in isolation. In fact, Veronica stated that non-Aboriginal people are crucial to the success of this process towards the introduction of Indigenous cultural standards, that all we have to do is to look at ourselves, that

through an exploration of our similarities and differences we will all come out more enlightened.

Veronica and Berice spoke for maybe an hour but to some of us, me in particular, we felt as if time had slowed down a little; that what she was saying was exactly what we had all been feeling needed to be addressed, the missing piece of the puzzle. I turned to look at the person next to me, a sister from Alice Springs, and we beamed at each other then scanned the room. I felt like Violet in the chocolate factory, that everything was wonderful and finally the issues that had remained elusively beyond my consciousness had just been given a voice and a face and a name that had been spoken. I looked up into the face of these two women and saw leadership and drive and strong Indigenous philosophies that had survived the test of time and colonialism and were daring to come out of hiding and speak their name with power, pride and passion; three easy words to write but power is always contested, pride never encouraged and passion can easily be misread.

Immediately after the joint session of this All Staff Meeting we broke into large groups, with academic staff from each of the three Schools of the Institute largely grouped together. My group was from my School, the School of Education. We were supposed to go around the room and say what we thought. Selena Sullivan, the newly appointed head of media, one of the few Aboriginal Academic C's, and I walked in together and both of us were buzzing. She was saying how happy she was to be working at Batchelor Institute, to have such strong leaders, and I saw that she had felt like I did. I said, "I know, how amazing was that session!" We both walked smiling into the next session like fat lawyers full on rich food and good wine, content and

sated but buzzing and excited at the same time. At that point it seemed that the world was full of possibilities of things that could happen; I was young and hopeful and at that moment quietly content in this odd way, which even now I can't understand fully. I too was confronted by what these two women were saying. There was fear in me about this process, about my own insecurities; that any scrutiny of me would come up lacking, that I somehow wasn't fit to sit at this table. But for that moment the monologue of negativity that can often be present was dulled, because I could see greatness, a way forward, and I literally was full of hope, full of possibilities. I was genuinely excited and a little scared but I had a sense of contentedness, like I was on the right path and doing the right thing.

We sat in a big circle. There must have been 30 to 40 of us in the room – or maybe that's my imagination too. I don't know exactly.

We all had to say what we thought of that presentation, if we thought it was a good session or not, and what we thought about the proposed process. I looked around the room and saw smiling faces. It wasn't until later that I realised that not everyone was grinning and half of those that I had taken for grins were in fact grimaces. I was maybe the sixth or seventh person to speak. I was very positive. I talked about how excited I was to be a part of the process, that I thought the process sounded great and that we should all explore ourselves then explore together our similarities and differences. I tried at that moment, in that large circle, to tell them how I had just heard years of doubt and difference being articulated, that I felt on top of the world and that anything was possible. I smiled broadly and tried to explain why my soul was happy at that moment. I said 'wonderful', 'amazing', 'inspiring' and other words that

couldn't really articulate how I felt, but I tried. Selena was sitting next to me or two down and she smiled and nodded and reiterated much of what I said. We talked about how individually we were excited to be part of this collective movement and how proud we were of the Institute and of its leaders.

Then the cracks started to appear. A couple of people deterred perhaps by our optimism, others gave vague critiques about the delivery of the future plan, then more talked of feeling a bit sad about being left out of the process. Odd, given that the process had just been presented as an all-inclusive one. Halfway around the circle one man recent to the Institute spoke up in a strong English accent. He was really angry. He was saying, "They don't know where I'm from. I'm from Birmingham (or wherever) and it's tough, let me tell you. Any suggestion that I have had it easy is bollocks". His anger chilled me. I knew this behaviour and I knew the limited options for any response on my part. You had to match it or back down from it, he was not to be assuaged. I remember being genuinely shocked that someone had taken such offence from what was in my mind a completely positive and uplifting presentation. The facilitator let him vent and we moved round the circle. And then I saw what silenced me in the debate; the nodding heads, the slight smiles of assent, the expressions of relief that other people had on their faces. Someone had lifted the lid off Pandora's box for them, vented their anger for them, and once lifted it gave authority and permission for everyone else to speak and spew their collective venom.

The veil of respect and politeness had been lifted and now the circle had turned into a forum to voice and air all the pent up frustrations at the Institute, at the Executive and maybe even at Council. So now people felt braver about articulating their personal

feelings. What people wanted to talk about no longer became about what Veronica and Berice had just presented, the meeting no longer became about Batchelor Institute and its next steps. The meeting became a self-help group for the self-identified weary, disillusioned and hard-done-by. Instead of embracing the invitation to address one's own positioning with either an Indigenous or a non-Indigenous worldview as a cultural identifier of self, we heard sad story after sob story. "My dad left me parked outside Hobart Casino with my cousins in the back of the station wagon and do they really think I can't identify". "We are all here working because we care, why are they preaching to the converted". The circle had been hijacked and I was left speechless. To have gone from such a proud high to such incredulity in so short a time was extremely disconcerting.

But I did leave this meeting (quickly, because they were scary now that the veil of "false generosity" (Freire 2006) had been lifted to expose a reality I suspected but up until then not seen) with a genuine curiosity as to how these colleagues of Selena and I could have heard things so differently from Veronica's and Berice's presentation. People were also saying things like, "We are no longer needed" and "They will get rid of all non-Aboriginal people". How could they have heard this and I missed it?

Two of my colleagues from Alice Springs couldn't attend this meeting. I had just bought a new mini-disk recorder and promised to record the major sessions for them. So whilst I was pondering the emotional differences or mental differences or interpretive differences that influenced what people heard or thought they heard, I was glad that I had a recording of the presentation for me to go back over. But maybe it was not the words Veronica and Berice had spoken that were the crucial issue for my

non-Indigenous colleagues. Maybe it was an imagined portent that had spooked these teachers of First Nations students, teachers paradoxically suspicious of First Nations leadership.

So I left that day having felt both elated and confused, but I left that meeting a little bit angry too. I was angry that our circle session, set up as the beginning of a search for cross-cultural meaning and understandings, had been hijacked, that our circle of talking about how to proceed with exploring ways to adopt Indigenous cultural standards had been deflected onto other agendas. But on the whole, I felt excited about the future. I had a faith in our leaders and I had a sense of something brewing around the corner. I just didn't know what it was.

Follow-up Meetings

The Executive of the Institute, the Director, the Deputy Director and the Assistant Director (Academic), held follow-up meetings across the various campuses of BIITE as the next step in the process to advance discussions about the concept of Indigenous cultural standards. As I was based on the Alice Springs campus my account of this process is based on my experiences of meetings held at Alice Springs campus.

Meeting with the Deputy Director in Alice Springs

The next meeting I remember well was when Trevor Cook, the Institute's newly appointed Deputy Director, came down to the Alice Springs campus of the Institute and wanted to speak to both the Aboriginal staff and non-Aboriginal staff separately. These were the first of the follow-up Indigenous cultural standards meetings after the initial presentation by Veronica and Berice at the Batchelor campus of the Institute.

The intent was to explore different worldviews from the personal perspectives of those present. It was to be a ‘journey in’ – to start from the personal before moving to the more theoretical. We talked about how we got to be at the Institute, what our journey was until that point, who we were and where we were from. I remember saying, “I’ll be brief”, but then going into detail and that was okay. Everyone was nodding and smiling and it was a pleasant environment. I learnt heaps about my workmates and the layers and details about who we were slowly became unveiled. We shared the ‘pull back to country’, the loss and sadness in our lives and the joys of working at the Institute amongst our own people. It was nice and it was gentle, a slow unveiling of new information, and it was personal and enlightening, and everyone spoke and contributed as we went around the room. And we all spoke of it afterwards saying, “Oh, I didn’t know that about you” or “I agree with what you were saying, I felt the same”.

Trevor had a similar meeting with the campus’s non-Aboriginal staff. I heard that the non-Indigenous session hadn’t gone as well as ours and that people had argued and fought for air time; that it was contentious and fractious.

Something was happening within the body of the Institute. There was a deep seismic shift at this core level. In 2004 I reported directly to my Head of School; I no longer answered to the earlier mentioned Senior Lecturer of the Chapter five narrative.

Maybe some of my feelings of liberation were around this. My Head of School was certainly more supportive of me personally and of Indigenous knowledges generally. I’m not sure what to attribute my feelings to but there was a feeling of hope that pervaded the air I breathed. I said earlier in this chapter that I was full of optimism

and as 2004 progressed this became more so. I also felt a feeling that was strange to me. The gratification that I had felt and the sense of being on the right path had increased, and I felt proud. I have always been proud of who I am, this fusion of cultures that comprise me. I have never denied my Aboriginal or my non-Aboriginal heritage, but I had certainly been made to feel less-than because of my Aboriginality. I had put up with the slights, the comments, the looks, the low expectations of me. It was this; it was this that was being removed through the process commenced by the Institute's Indigenous leaders. I didn't feel more proud because I was always proud but I felt less like I had to hide. Something happened, the power shifted and the oppressive regime was ending and a new day was dawning, or so I thought. It's hard to articulate. All of a sudden the things that I intrinsically knew weren't the things that were bad, or stupid or wrong; they were, for this short period at Batchelor Institute, the things that were okay, wanted and valued.

Having theoretically shifted from the mainstream Western way of thinking in terms of 'Aboriginal as deficit', now we were seeing our own people in positions of power and the culture of the place starting to change. There had always been tensions about so-called 'black' and 'white' ways of working. There had always been racial demarcations but now, more than ever before, Indigenous ways of learning, teaching and being were being acknowledged, named and credited. Where previously Indigenous lecturers would have had to argue for their way of operating in the classroom, to argue for the privileging of Indigenous pedagogical methods, there was a new perception of support from upper management. First Nations knowledges were now being celebrated and our 'cultural capital' as blackfellas was being valued.

The Director had asked in that first meeting that we look outside of ourselves. She had asked us to work with Elders, the keepers of our knowledge. She had talked about encouraging the young ones with strong English language to work in the broader system so that they can take control, but to do so without risk to themselves and their identities. She said we have to identify a deeper language that is not written but felt. In order to do that the majority of the Institute's staff would have to identify with our students and to have an understanding that crossed cultures.

I can see now that it was a catch twenty two. The differences between the cultures had been highlighted time and again within the Institute, and through various domain separation theories and binaries, so what was the problem? Maybe it was the search for similarities as understandings that crossed cultures that really was sparking the fear amongst my non-Indigenous colleagues.

I'm not sure what it was, but the task of exploring and sharing one's own culture and laying it alongside another culture became very confrontational for people. Now I am not for a second trying to imply that all white cultures are the same or that all black cultures are the same. I don't recall Veronica or Berice saying they were either. These were two general large encompassing terms for worldviews, not designed for cultural nuance but rather for an exploration eventually at a theoretical and more nuanced level. These were about two broad spectrum categories that represented different ideologies that when explored may reveal certain similarities amongst the differences, similarities that could bring us together and from which we could explore further into Indigenous cultural standards.

All Staff Email from the Director

I want to talk about the general feeling that had started to surround these discussions around Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews. I was conscious of murmurings of a vague feeling of discontent surrounding the process. Veronica had sent out an email to all staff that contained a set of binaries that had broad based Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews represented as two lists. There is a context here that is relevant to this narrative. The binaries were more-or-less based on the domain separation theories of Stephen Harris's work in the 1980's. This is important to acknowledge because Harris's domain separation theories had been widely accepted in the mainstream education field associated with Indigenous education, including Batchelor Institute, as broadly representative of both cultures. These were a set of binaries that were written by a non-Indigenous person as representative of Western and Indigenous cultures and worldviews in his "two way" learning style theories.

So these binaries had been accepted on the whole by white mainstream education as having validity when they represented white evaluation of black. However, when the situation was reversed, as when Veronica and Berice sent out the email with these binaries, it sparked the biggest uproar amongst certain BIITE staff. The traffic was going the other way and the non-Indigenous staff were not coping. Comments such as, "How dare they tell me what I think or how I feel!" captured the feeling of outrage. The outrage was consistent and constant. To these Institute staff, the content of this email had crossed the line and people started to feel what? Boxed in, categorised on the basis of race, generalised? Were they offended because it was true or because it didn't feel nice to have who you are put into a box, categorised?

I don't know because at the beginning of the outrage I tried to engage in genuine meaningful exchanges and conversations. I listened and then I would propose a counter argument. I was shut down immediately. These colleagues point blank refused to listen as I said that these were Harris's definitions; that just for a second could they not see themselves as the centre of the conversation; bring out your way of seeing and you will see the bigger picture; don't look so 'hard', so negative. I was not trying to be a 'know-it-all' or trying to tell them how they should feel. At one point I was accused of denying people the right to feel angry. "This is about how I feel, Kathryn, how could you possibly know how I feel". I wanted to tell them that I knew how they felt at that moment because they had been doing it to me for years, but I didn't. So we stopped having the conversations, the mutual exchanges.

I remember walking out of one set of offices on the Alice Springs campus of BIITE and about seven people were sitting at the table outside. As I walked out there was a shifting of body language within the group. I saw a quick slight headshake from those who could see me and then the whole table stopped dead. The conversation halted because I was walking past. So I sat down and smiled and asked what was going on. They tried to change the subject but that was futile; we all knew what was going on. I smiled again and said, "Really guys, when did this happen?" And they looked at me and said, "It's too hard, I just can't talk to you about it". "You just don't seem to want to get it". And as they started to leave so did I and I wondered what this complete retreat from interaction meant. I was friendly with these people. I had worked alongside them for years; we had our difficulties but now I smelled the aroma of a pack forming. The air was thick with it and I wasn't included. I knew then that all this wasn't going to be easy.

The Second All Staff Meeting

So with a couple of meetings under our belts there was another meeting called, this time for all staff held on the Alice Springs campus of the Institute. There had been widespread condemnation amongst the non-Indigenous staff about being racialised into a category and being excluded. There was an undercurrent that somehow the Aboriginal staff were getting different meeting outcomes or receiving different meeting inputs. I'm not sure if it was that somehow the 'condemning ones' thought we were getting more information, but people felt very aggrieved at "being left out." So in response to this expressed concern, the Executive held an all staff meeting that was supposed to be about exploring worldviews, values and core ideals; that is, to move from the personal to the theoretical, from the specifics to the general.

However, the discussions that eventuated at this meeting were never able to move away from the personal perspectives about 'my cultural standards'. The gathered staff were never allowed to move to a discussion at a higher level about different worldviews held generally by Indigenous peoples and how these compared to those of non-Indigenous peoples. Some of the non-Indigenous staff at this meeting stated that the process offended them. What offended them was the separation of earlier meetings into Indigenous-only and non-Indigenous-only groupings. The email from Veronica and Berice suggested a dichotomy of cultural modes, of being at a general level for Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures and therefore they were being categorised 'racially'. They also expressed suspicion of the intent behind the process.

At the meeting they were saying things like, "I resent being told what I think" and "I love my children too". They would ask of Indigenous colleagues, "Do you own your

own home”? If the answers were in the affirmative, their reply was, “So how am I more materialistic than you”. I must admit that at this meeting I got sick of hearing the same people speak and I stopped listening. I was there, but I didn’t participate, I didn’t speak or contribute. I remember trying to say something at one stage but I would have had to speak too loud and I was a bit shy then.

I do remember that none of the Indigenous people who were in that quiet and respectful meeting we had previously attended with Trevor Cook spoke. The only Aboriginal people who spoke were the Senior Executives and the campus manager and then they were being put into a position that was mainly defensive. I’m not sure I learned anything at this meeting other than how to be in my place. I was being put in my place as an Aboriginal person, as an Aboriginal academic at BIITE.

A couple of non-Indigenous staff were voicing their discontent; they angrily denounced the process. One non-Indigenous woman who had been working closely with a specific remote community in the Northern Territory began to express her offence – then others joined in. These non-Indigenous Batchelor Institute staff blatantly became the proxy spokespersons in this meeting for the Elders of these remote communities, and for all students. Without any sense of irony at the political incongruity of their stance these people said that they were offended on the behalf of the Elders and began speaking for the old men and women in those communities. One of these people said, in reference to a member of the BIITE Executive, “That Council out there (a remote community Council), they would call you a ‘yella fella’, and they would say that you know nothing of culture”. It all degenerated from there and that effectively ended the meeting.

A Proposed Next Meeting at the Alice Springs Campus

The tensions had grown so high. When the next meeting at Alice Springs was called to speak about both-ways and Indigenous cultural standards people responded by saying that they refused to participate, that they point blank would not go. There was a core group of BIITE middle managers and academics in Alice Springs who said they would veto any discussion and try to dissuade their staff from going. This core group was made up of all of the senior positions on the campus. Fortunately we had an Indigenous Campus Manager, Evelyn Schaber, but the power shift that had been growing had met with fierce resistance. Evelyn had been battling these same instances of racism for too long and was weary. She said, “They block me on everything I try to do; I’m tired of arguing with them and I’m sick of them undermining me.”

So part of the strategy of the non-Indigenous malcontents had been to use constant niggling and opposition to undermine Indigenous authority locally, as represented by Evelyn. Their other strategy was to verbally undermine the Indigenous authority of the Institute’s Executive as represented by Veronica and Berice. By refusing to participate, non-Indigenous staff had drawn the line in the sand; they had thumbed their noses and said, “So what; so what that you’re the Director; so what that this comes from Council; what are you going to do about it”? The campus was split along race lines for the first time I had ever experienced.

The meeting was cancelled and re-scheduled, but in the end it was never held.

This discontent didn't happen overnight and it wasn't stand alone. At the same time, cracks started appearing at the top within the Executive. The recently appointed Deputy Director, Trevor Cook, was making some sort of power play for a higher position and this was dominating Council's time. He had also made moves to go and see the Chair of Council to complain about Veronica and Berice and he had met with Northern Land Council (NLC) representatives and decided he wanted to angle for the top job; that is, Veronica's. Cook had been at the organization for a couple of months and hadn't displayed any great brilliance, so on the ground this was never seen as a credible threat to the Institute leadership. I certainly never paid too much attention to the gossip and to me it seemed silly. Cook blew in and out like we all expected. But in hindsight, the fact that this was happening at the same time as the Indigenous cultural standards debate became important. Now much later I think that maybe Cook's power play laid the groundwork for what was to come. His complaining and innuendo about Veronica and Berice maybe gave space for the mini white revolution to happen. Veronica had been a leader who was much loved and respected by Council as well as by staff, which is why she seemed untouchable in my mind.

Since becoming a university necessitated offering even more degrees to a more diverse student group, the problem of both-ways implementation became even more acute. The imperative to rectify the problem became even more of a priority. As (Ober and Bat, 2007) write in their paper on both-ways:

Most recently, over the past five years, there has been a lively debate within the Institute surrounding cultural competence, cultural standards, cultural values and intellectual property and

a call to re-conceptualise what both-ways means today. In a paper proposing the adoption of a Cultural Standards Framework within the Institute, the then-Director suggested this as the way to progress both-ways to a new positioning where Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding are more strongly adopted within all aspects and operations of the Institute. (p.75).

The re-positioning of ‘both-ways’ conceptually as described by Ober and Batt was congruent with the new vision of the Institute’s Council adopted from their late Chairperson’s aspiration for Indigenous Australia.

Kunoth-Monks’ (2004) recollections of the Council’s vision for BIITE, underpinned by a ‘black philosophy and ideology’, and the then Director’s strategy to advance this vision through a re-conceptualisation of both-ways according to a Cultural Standards Framework, succinctly summarise the transformations occurring in 2004; transformations supported by Council’s vision and advanced through democratic organisation reforms by the Director. But could this congruent set of actions result in the desired outcomes?

These transformations were both proposed and resisted – proposed by Veronica and Berice and resisted by a core group of BIITE managers and academics.

Alongside the cracks in the top, Berice, in her role as Assistant Director (Academic), was also demanding a rethinking of the way that we delivered both Vocational

Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education courses. She was evaluating our accreditation programs and was rigorous in her expectations of staff. I can identify with the pain that this was causing as I was running a VET program across three communities and writing the Creative Writing degree course with a double major in Creative Writing and a minor in Cultural Theory. So we were busy but it was an exciting time of change and possibility. I remember almost wanting to pull my hair out when the course advisory committee for the Creative Writing degree course came up with a new objective or when the accreditation committee found a flaw. But when I looked at the big picture of moving the Institute more authentically into becoming an Indigenous University, it was worth it. I worked long days and I worked bloody hard but I was never resentful of this. We were making history, we were part of something huge; these degrees were ground breaking in terms of the world and I was still swept up in the awe of it all. Of course, sometimes I wanted to give up or got angry with the long nights, but I never expected what was to happen. Maybe I was living under a rock or was just naïve, but I didn't see what was coming at all.

A Critical Staff Meeting at the Alice Springs Campus

A meeting was called on the campus by a group of senior non-Indigenous academics and everyone was told to come to it. We were told, "It's where we can have our say". Most academics and senior general staff were there. I remember the impetus for this meeting being about Berice wanting to change the way we delivered VET. Someone else remembers it being about Veronica going outside of process with the financial manager over credit card frauds within BIITE. But generally speaking there was discontent amongst those present and it manifested itself in workload discussions and operational matters. So these were the issues going into the meeting. The VET

delivery concerns were operational issues and the actual issues themselves seemed to me to be resolvable, yet they were held with such venom.

There was a sense of anticipation about this meeting with people milling and waiting and conversations going back and forth. The campus was again united, conversations which before I was shut out of now became open because we had a new enemy, a common enemy, a common complaint about workloads and operational issues so we could all unite and come together. Those other issues to do with Indigenous cultural standards and both-ways teaching and learning; those other ‘things’, were not spoken of again. These ‘things’ had been killed off, but the venom generated in the killing was still targeting Veronica and Berice, with Berice the prime target. The agenda had changed, but the deep intent of the Indigenous cultural standards malcontents was unwavering. I still reflect on the antics of my colleagues at this meeting and how I had little inkling of the implications of all of this.

The Chair and Deputy Chair of the Institute’s Council were at this time both from Central Australia, and they were invited to hear what staff had to say. So for the first time Council members were sitting in on a staff-gripe session. I can’t remember who started it but basically we all went around the room and vented our spleens about everything and anything, from the minutiae of management issues to broad accreditation gripes to last week, “I was told this”. It was a room filled with hate and with venom and excitement. The air felt like the show had come early to town, it was crackling. The Chair was an Alyawarr/ Arrente woman who I call Aunty and she sat and took notes. She looked to me calm and composed and considered. When it came to me I said I had nothing to say. I was one of the last and felt like my energy had

been spent. I said I had nothing to add. She looked at me and asked if I was sure and I said yes, I am sure I have nothing to say. I felt the angry eyes burning on me like knives because I was supposed to participate. What I should have done, those angry eyes said to me, was to grab a pitchfork and join the mob. Just being in the room wasn't enough but I knew deep inside of myself that nothing good was going to come of this. Veronica and Berice had no right of reply. They had no voice or representation at that meeting and the Deputy Chair, was listening hard. I felt sick and I knew that changes were happening. The glee in the room, the sense of elation made me want to vomit and I excused myself.

I later had a smoke with my Aunty and she said, "Why didn't you talk?" and I said, "It's not that bad, they were talking really wrong way, it's not fair what they were saying". She nodded and we changed the subject. I trusted her judgement emphatically. She is wise beyond my reckoning but even she couldn't stop the tidal wave that was about to overwhelm us.

Council was no longer talking about embedding our Indigenous ways, about discussions of cultural standards, about Indigenous strength and pride. Council's job is to make sure the direction of Batchelor Institute stays true to its vision; the Council members constitute a governance body and they appoint the Director to oversee the day-to-day implementation of the Council's vision. They are not responsible for the minutiae of management or operations, but this time, in this place, they were seen to be stepping into this space.

No longer did we speak of doing it “our way” or of having Indigenous cultural standards embedded across the Institute. These had become the ideas and words that dared not be spoke. These were all now masked by a revolt over operational demands by the Assistant Director (Academic) for changes to VET delivery. The frontal assault on “our way” was muted, masked behind the practicalities of workloads. The politics of whiteness were about to claim victory.

Institute-wide Meeting at the Darwin Casino

The final meeting that addressed Cultural Standards and recognition of Indigenous knowledges was an Institute-wide meeting held at Darwin Casino. This was a strategic planning meeting where we were working on the vision for the Institute and strategies for the future. This meeting, to my recollection, went well until Veronica brought up the matter of Indigenous cultural standards and the defining of both-ways teaching and learning and how these could be put into practice. There were heated discussions and then a party led by my former CSWE Boss walked out. They literally turned their backs on Indigenous knowledge and how that was to be represented at the Institute. This was more than thumbing their nose. They were rejecting Veronica and all that she stood for, denying Aboriginal people and the communities of the Northern Territory and Australia wide of their right to Indigenous knowledges at a tertiary institution. They literally were so secure in their whiteness and its power to re-centre itself that they walked out on their Director and dismissed the foundations of what the whole organisation was built on. Then with all the power in the world (literally) they ensured that this empowered, educated and strong black movement never raised its head in Batchelor Institute again.

They used all the power that words spoken out of their mouths had, all the right words to inspire fear, words spoken with all the power and authority of whiteness. They complained about Veronica and Berice, they said the process was flawed (though it was never actually allowed to begin) and they demanded (as they assume is their white right) that something be ‘done’.

Within weeks of this meeting Veronica resigned as Director of the Institute and left. Berice was removed when her position of Assistant Director (Academic) was redesigned as part of an organisational restructure early the next year. The victory of whiteness was complete.

An Initial Analysis of the Indigenous Cultural Standards Narrative

When the power relationships of a workplace question one’s personal worldviews, one’s embodied knowledge, the notion of the ‘abject other’ begins to re-articulate itself in meetings, in conversations in the hall, in angry emails and in Salem-like witch-hunts. When the subject of power (white knower) feels threatened by the sovereign speaker, the re- articulation of academic hierarchies of knowledge, civilization, work ethic and meaning begin to unfold in ways that find expression in acts of aggression and hostility. These acts attempt to silence and dismiss Aboriginal authority and to re-centre white values.

The move by Veronica and Berice to acknowledge First Nations knowledges beyond the rhetorical had created a point of ‘rupture’ in the academic body of the Institute. The tensions inside became so great that speaking a truth about the world was no longer enough. There was an implosion and, in the context of Batchelor Institute, the

rupture was so great that both staff and policy became casualties. It irreparably altered any future direction towards an Aboriginal University and inclusions of First Nations knowledges in the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The shift towards an equal validation of Indigenous knowledge systems within an academic institution was always going to be hard. An institution like Batchelor Institute can exist in order to educate Aboriginal people to a certain level, but only to a level prescribed by white authority. The history of this country, its policies of all states, of all institutions including BIITE up until this point, has been premised on Indigenous incapacity. The white referent has always been held up just outside of the grasp of the black person's hand. This is what mimicry and its ambivalence is, this is where it is held and practiced.

Perhaps the mimicry became too close, and in that instant the ambivalence of the colonisers, saw its own face. For a moment it was their face that was being described, they were being asked to interrogate their own culture and I'm guessing they must have seen a flash of otherness across the white face, culture, power position, and this to them was untenable.

It appears, mimicry being what it is, the Indigenous staff didn't have the cultural capital to be able to play the colonial game to their advantage. When the battle lines were drawn the assimilative tide turned into a whiteness tsunami, destroying all in its wake. Whiteness and its power was pulled magnetically back to the centre. The shift towards recognising Indigenous knowledges had been disrupted and the power and

knowledge lay again with the white experts, paradoxically white experts yet again expert about us.

The task the Indigenous staff had embarked upon was the process of ‘de-colonisation’, which is why the game became so dangerous and threatening. The Director was given the right to speak, but she must speak in the colonial language. She spoke within a western system, even though from a highly educated position. She spoke in ways that allowed everyone to come on this journey. But not everyone could hear, or if they heard, were too fearful to take the offered path towards Indigenous authenticity within the Institute.

The power of mimicry lies in its deception and in the hidden trap of disavowal; if you want to be educated like me you have to give up yourself, you have to disavow yourself (Bhabha 1994). This is the trap. Veronica and Berice stood up as two powerful Aboriginal women, strong in both cultures, sure of their path. They held authority across both domains, but as Bhabha says, “the visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction” (p. 128). Colonial power was inverted briefly at the Institute and, in the year 2004, the Institute became a site of interdiction in the sense that Veronica and Berice, together with their ‘disciples’, were to be actively excluded from the ‘holy sacraments’ of academia, for example, the curriculum and pedagogical domains. This interdictory site is about power, knowledge and exclusion from the sacred rites of academia and thus invoking the ecclesiastical definition of interdiction to mean denial from the rites of the church. They were excluded because of their attempted ‘heresy’ to equally value Indigenous knowledges within the ‘scripture’ of BIITE’s accredited curriculum. The ex-

communication and process of not allowing Veronica and Berice to step within the ‘haloed’ white space, the swiftness of retribution and the zeal of the hunt are all reminiscent of the Catholic Church’s purge and cleansing associated with the Inquisition.

Veronica was given the power to effect change by the Council, by the white law makers an authority arising from the responsibilities and legalities of her position; she had the authority in both an Aboriginal (through Elders on Council) and through the non-Aboriginal bureaucratic management system (her position as Director) to enact this process of change. She also had the authority of her own learning and knowledge as an Arabana woman and as an educational leader. She was mandated to attempt to remove the process of disavowal, to shed the shackles of colonial ambivalence, only to find that it was she that was shackled. The process of mimicry had achieved its task. The system will give you this education which is “*almost the same but not quite*” but it won’t teach you all the rules.

The colonial mimicry that Bhaba spoke of saw Veronica play the colonial game only to find out that they can’t be beaten at that game. The coloniser invents the game, the rules, the language; they let you play but as but as Trinh (2011) says, “You are the battleground”. Quoting Henry Lewis Gates Jr, she further explains:

“They knew they just how to keep us in our place
and the logic was breathtakingly simple: If you win, you lose.”
(Minh-ha 2011) (p. 153).

If you win you lose because the language is theirs; the Director lost in the delivery because she had no language that was mutually communicable. Incommensurability was in play as Veronica did not have the language to make them understand. She never had the language to describe that feeling that every Aboriginal person knows when a white teacher gives you that look, when you're told you're 'no good' or that your 'exceptional', the feeling of sitting in a classroom and having all your knowledge and your stories not ever be recognised, when white Australians don't know what happened in 1967, or the ease at which non-Indigenous people can walk without scars all over their bodies, on their memories, in their culture.

Veronica always had to talk in English. She could never say, 'Yaye kake apetyaye atyenge anwerne akaltyele irreyeng'⁴ because the majority would not have understood her. She had to speak in a white way, to make it nice for them, to help them understand. This interaction had happened in the third space, the intersection of the circles that Veronica was talking about, but there was no recognition of what had already been given and what had been refused. The communication and compromise happened only one way. The cultural boundaries could not seem to be crossed. The groups remained mutually exclusive, with perhaps brief moments of understanding but no recognition or reflection on what was really being asked and why. Conveniently, those moments quickly morphed into moments of misunderstanding.

The debate at Batchelor Institute still exists, hidden but alive and as long as these sites of resistance are maintained the practice of teaching and learning will always be politicised and fraught. The practice of being and knowing from an First Nations

⁴ Alyawarr for Sisters and Brothers come on this learning journey together, as one together

perspective will always cause conflict under these circumstances, and that conflict forms the basis of the next wave forward. With each interaction comes a new knowledge because Aboriginal people, though always being marked and held accountable to the colonial mentality, have their own accumulating understanding for strategic advances on their own terms. So whilst Indigenous authority is scrutinised and Indigenous culture is studied and commoditised, so with all the administrators and anthropologists and carpet baggers and the myriad people that come to watch, whiteness and white cultures still don't understand. But we do.

So in this year of interdiction and while mimicry was used as a tool to subjugate, much was learned. This has happened and it can't be undone. If I knew then what I know now, what would I have changed? Batchelor Institute has never recovered; this period marked the beginning of a radical transformation and the end. This year of interdiction, mimicry and rupture changed the way that the Institute operated but also how it saw itself. It also changed the landscape of autonomous Indigenous education across the country. In this period we stood on the cusp of becoming something truly unique, in line with the late Council Chairman's vision. But that was disrupted, not by Indigenous incapacity as others have tried to say, but by Indigenous strength and white race fear.

The move to include Indigenous ways of knowing and being more authentically within the cultural 'sacred ground' of tertiary education in Australia (VAEAI 1988 & 1990), that is within the teaching and learning domain was at the heart of this transformative aspiration. To be recognised as equals within this education system had to, by its very nature, be difficult and contentious. I had thought that at Batchelor

Institute the process should have been easier and achievable. But, as I have narrated, it was not to be.

Chapter Seven – The Common Units: the power of public performance

Introduction

This chapter will look at two Units of Higher Education undergraduate study delivered at Batchelor Institute over an eleven year period from 2000 – 2011. It begins with an overview of the content of the Units followed by an account of their inception and their subsequent rocky road within the Institute. I also include personal anecdotes of my teaching within these Units. In conclusion I will look at the absolute transformative power of dynamic First Nations-led content and its ability to change the lives of students and staff, as well as the potential to change pedagogy and curriculum within Batchelor Institute.

The Units

The two Units, Public Communication and Telling Histories, were core Common Units to all the undergraduate Higher Education courses within the Institute. Consequently all students entering into Higher Education at the Institute did these Units regardless of whether they were studying Nursing or Creative Writing, Science or Education. This meant that the classes were large, heterogeneous, dynamic and exciting and, for the students, often the first time that they had come together as a large student group rather than in small groups in discrete discipline areas.

In 1999 Batchelor College had emerged as a fully fledged self accrediting independent tertiary institution with the passing in the NT parliament of the Batchelor Institute Act 1999. The College had morphed into the Institute. The then Director, John Ingram, on the day of independence stood down as Director and Veronica Arbon, the new Director, emerged as the first Aboriginal and the first female Director of the newly formed Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. The Council was given accreditation powers that meant that Batchelor Institute was one of the very few self-accrediting Indigenous controlled and run educational organisations in the world.

This time and the importance of these changes cannot be underestimated. The metamorphosis from a small annexe in 1974 to an independent tertiary institution was enormous; the world was Batchelor Institute's oyster. The Institute had emerged as a real force within Indigenous Education, and it was within this heady context that the Common Units were conceived and implemented. These Units were part of the plan of the new Director to ensure the vision statement of strengthening identity whilst achieving educational success. This was part of a larger strategy that envisaged Batchelor Institute as the leading Indigenous educational facility in the country. And it had achieved that status in legislation.

The Common Units were written in 1999 by Dr. Rob McCormack and a team of Indigenous academics at the Institute including but not limited to John Reid, Tom Ober, George Pascoe, Dana Ober, Ochre Doyle, Veronica Arbon, Aunty Mai Katona, Evelyn Schaber and many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics present at the Institute at the time. Over the years they continued to contribute into

these Units. It must be said that these Units were initially conceived in response to student demands to have a say, to have a voice, to be recognised in a fundamental way within their educational experience, as part of a broader plan of inclusive Indigenous education. Veronica Arbon in her book *Arlathirnda Ngurkarnda Ityirnda* (2008) explains why they were developed and explains some of the initial resistance to the Units.

There was no coherent story of the disruptive and oppressive aspects of Australia's colonial history or the important aspects of our knowledge to be carried into tomorrow(Arbon, 2008).

She went on later to say:

Opposition arose as staff argued that the curriculum did not have the space, that Indigenous knowledge was addressed in other ways and that such an approach was not necessary. The most powerful arguments swirled around a belief that the inclusion of the Common Units would undermine and downgrade the professional intent of the awards. Despite these arguments, the Academic Committee of the Institute endorsed these Units in 2000 (p. 122).

These negative arguments would prove to be on going and unrelenting, constantly undermining Indigenous knowledge and practices as expressed through these Units, but I will come back to that later.

The first Common Units team were also the Units Development Team (1 non-Indigenous man, 1 Torres Strait Islander man and 2 Aboriginal men). These men were, respectively, Dr Rob McCormack, Tom Ober, John Reid and George Pascoe.

Before I give an outline of the Units I will introduce their five aims. These were to:

- Encourage students to tell their truths and realities, through speeches, banners, performance, shared public values, public protests, action as communication and through sharing and acknowledging our shared Indigenous histories and commonalities as well as celebrating the uniqueness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians;
- Provide a safe environment that privileges Indigenous ways of being and knowing;
- Explore through critical analysis the construction of History and the development of western education systems;
- Offer experiential learning journeys that are student focused and driven; and
- Provide an environment where amazing and moving workshops are possible and students tell their stories and histories and as a result everyone in the room is in one way or another, changed (Batchelor Institute Common Units Study Guide, 2009).

The Common Units: Some Details

Details of Public Communications are introduced followed by those of Telling Histories.

Public Communication

Public Communication was based on the classical Western educational philosophy of rhetoric. As a team we taught text patterns and building blocks for effective Public Communication. We encouraged students to use the text patterns of rhetoric to tell their stories. The workbook for the Unit (BIITE, 2009) described why rhetoric:

From the beginning people have been emotionally moved by the patterns and rhythm of sounds and language. Deliberately using the patterns of sound creates songs and music; deliberately using the patterns of language creates poetry and rhetoric. From the earliest times people have passed on knowledge of how to create music, songs, poetry and rhetoric from patterns and rhythms. A skill in patterning language has always been very important to community leaders who must touch the deep feelings of their audience so as to motivate them (p. 2).

These text patterns then form the structure for an individual speech to an audience.

The Unit also used multi-literacy forms of communication. Students were expected to create a banner and compile a group speech that expressed a collective public value. They were also expected to take to the streets and as a group express a public value or concern as a student body in a public demonstration.

Public Communication also introduced students to the classical Greek philosophers, Aristotle and Plato, the ancestors of western education. The Unit outlined the two very different western educational traditions that arose from the thinking of these two men. These were the disciplined factual type of schooling of Plato that has at its basis a single truth and the leadership rhetorical style of Aristotle that saw *Doxa* and opinion as more important. Under the tradition of Aristotle, speaking to the people was a focus.

Public Communication aimed to show the two types of schooling arising from ancient Greece and considered how these types are applied in an Australian context. In concert with this aim the Unit aimed to highlight our own Indigenous knowledge systems and teaching and learning strategies. Dr Robin McCormack, one of the original designers of the course, described the approach within Public Communication as:

...one, a positive affirmation and deepening commitment to Indigenous ways of knowing and being, the other, a critically respectful study of non-Indigenous ways of being and knowing (McCormack, 2004, p. 6).

One core component of Public Communication and one of the underlying strengths of the Unit was that the students' own knowledge was not only acknowledged but was crucial to the unfolding of the content and success of the Unit. The Unit provided the building blocks and contexts for strong powerful speeches to be constructed, speeches in which the students provided all the content. There was no wrong content; it was an

opportunity for students to speak powerfully about whatever they wanted to express. Throughout the history of the Units students have relished this moment readily took the chance to speak their truths.

Ruth Van Dyck (2005) in her conference paper ‘Redefined Rhetorics: Academic Discourse and Aboriginal Students’ says:

To Aboriginal peoples, essay writing has symbolized the loss of languages, cultures, and people groups. However, the paradigms of classic Aristotelian rhetoric, as taught in introductory composition courses at university, are being reshaped, especially by theories such as new rhetorical genre theory (Giltrow, 2002, among others) that emphasize the socio-political contexts of knowledge. This shift creates greater opportunity for traditional, Aboriginal discourse conventions to be welcomed as frameworks for new knowledge (p. 36).

It is this new knowledge, built on old and modern stories, that was created and celebrated within every workshop, the form of delivery for these Units.

Telling Histories

Histories are contested terrain in educational practice. Many sites of public education and schooling serve to provide

information on history and represent dominant histories
which subjugate Indigenous peoples (Barnes, 2005, p. 150).

Telling Histories focused less on rhetoric and more within a critical pedagogies
theoretical framework that viewed history as a concept, a discipline and a tool of the
oppressor.

Australian History by its nature, name and definition is not inclusive of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islanders' stories or lived realities. Australian history is based
around settlement and not invasion. It does not represent through public holidays, war
memorials, curricula and the collective psyche the ongoing struggle continuum that is
Aboriginal peoples' realities since invasion. There have been constant and ongoing
sites of resistance, freedom fighters, warriors, wars, activism and resistance to
colonisation. This is rarely represented in the history books taught in schools and
universities. When on the odd occasion it is, it has been hotly contested by non-
Indigenous historians and politicians.

Telling Histories (as I taught it) began with a look at what History is.

Was Herodotus (The father of History) biased when he wrote 'The Histories' to show
the glory of Greece against the Barbarians in the Greco Persian wars? If this is the
foundation upon which the modern 'History' discipline is based upon, then the
question of bias was raised in class discussions and questions were raised about who
benefits from any agreed upon versions of 'History', and what does Australian
History tell us about who wrote it.

In this context, in these Units, I was literally as much on a learning journey as the students. Each class was different. I ran the Units but I was in no way the expert. We spent a lot of time looking at Aboriginal resistance history largely through Bain Attwood's and Andrew Markus's book 'The struggle for Aboriginal rights' (1999). We began with the first written acts of resistance in the late 1830s on Flinders Island in Bass Strait. We would then move through time to the ongoing struggle for land rights, citizenship and recognition up to today. This detailed looking at resistance history was often confronting and eye-opening for students, because students local to the areas included in the written historical accounts knew the histories through their own peoples' oral traditions. But as a whole, as a cross-sectional snapshot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of today, very few knew of the complete, recurring and undying struggle continuum. We started to see how much of our history had been left out of the dominant versions of history.

It was also important that we had the space to tell our stories and histories in an Aboriginal only place as in this way the journey of telling and retelling history could happen without fear; we raged, we cried, we celebrated, we laughed and we shared.

We also looked at the History Wars debate in Australia from the mid-1990s and who was and was not controlling the arguments around Australian history. An analysis of the differing versions of the Mistake Creek Massacre between Peggy Patrick's painting and oral histories and Keith Windshuttle's versions based on written texts and entries from the time was often the basis for a large classroom discussion, looking at the criteria of what made up legitimate history. We also looked at Gary Foley's Koori history website, a great resource for anyone working in this area. We printed

out pages from that site of the heroes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and celebrated them and their lives in the struggle.

We did this as a large group where we all participated in the process of reading about sites of resistance and sharing that back as a group. What we did alongside this process was to provide the building blocks to communicate our own versions of history, a re-telling from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective. It helped us define what was important to us. Then we prepared twenty minute performances in groups of five to ten. The groups chose a moment in history or a story and then conducted an intense character analysis from their physical and emotional depths for their historical roles in the performances. The groups then scripted and performed a story, a show; it may have been one moment, it may have been many. These performances were created for a large and varied audience of community members, staff and students and, when appropriate, we would invite years five- seven from the local Batchelor Area School.

These performances were an act of breaking down some of the barriers that typically exclude First Nations people from succeeding within western Higher Education frameworks. They were both an act, and therefore a site, of empowerment for the participants and a gift to the audience to witness a different perspective, to participate and be drawn on a journey which may be one that they don't know, a journey which may open a door to conversations, to meaningful exchanges.

(Dion 2009) speaks of these moments in terms of “compelling invitations”:

...within Aboriginal traditions the power of the story resides partly in the telling, our approach is to (re) tell the stories in such a way that listeners hear a “compelling invitation” that claims their attention and initiates unsettling questions that require working through.....the hope for accomplishing an alternative way of knowing lies partly in our ability to share with our readers what the stories mean to us (p. 1).

Sharing our histories and stories in a way that was accessible, that can be heard, was one of the aims of Telling Histories. If the moments in history that we find important, moments that shape who we are, are the very moments that white Australia wants to forget, then telling histories from an Indigenous perspective provided forums from which more authentic discussions can begin. Similarly Dion (2009) supports this point from her Canadian perspective:

If justice for Aboriginal people lies in remembering, but forgetting serves the needs of the Canadian nation, where are the possibilities for accomplishing justice found (p. 1)?

Scripts were written and re-written, props and costumes made, the story rehearsed and re-rehearsed, all the formal requirements of creating a performance were done on a large scale with often four or five groups of eight to ten people with at least three or four re- workings and rehearsing. This was a crazy, exciting time and we did it all

within two weeks. The classroom would be left open with students rehearsing into the night, with at least two direction rehearsals with lecturers.

The day before we rehearsed the bumps in and out of all props, cemented the order, practiced all that at least two or three times, rearranged the classroom so it became a makeshift theatre, cordoned off our entrances and exits, got all our sound effects and cues on the laptop and any power point or images to be projected. We practised and then did a complete run through of all the shows. All the time we were aware of the energy growing, the excitement building, people panicking. The electricity in the air was palpable and then just when you felt ready to explode, it all came together with the room packed out and the performances perfect. Then the sense of shared achievement was hard to describe, the crowd going crazy and everyone elated.

We called these workshops transformative and experiential. You come out different at the other end partly because of the powerful experience of listening to a room full of powerful stories. The workshops are transformative also because of the personal journey that each student went on and the collegial support that everyone in the classroom shared.

An About Face: My First Workshop

I had begun working in the Common Units team in 2006. My transition into the team wasn't the smoothest. After the highs of 2004 when I wrote the Creative Writing undergraduate degree with the support of the then Director, Veronica Arbon, to six months study leave in Melbourne and then my return to a chaotic and changed Batchelor Institute, I found myself in a somewhat alien place. So my move to the

Common Units team was rocky, and it was premised on my Aboriginality alone. The Institute had trialled having a non-Indigenous lecturer teach in the Units team and it was disastrous so I was moved into this team for what I thought at the time were tokenistic and race-based reasoning. In hindsight it was right for me. The Institute was completely right to identify that position for me on my return and completely right to transfer me. However my attitude going in was one of trepidation coloured by that old sense of being stereotyped. I wanted to be acknowledged for all the hard work that I had done previously for the Institute and recognition of my accomplishments as a lecturer and as an educator per se. I guess at the time I had wanted kudos and praise and not to be given a job just because of my Aboriginality and because a white person can't do it. This trepidation and mild negativity was short lived and I began what was the most amazing and rewarding teaching journey of my life. I don't think I would be writing this doctoral thesis or be half as passionate about education and higher education if it wasn't for these Units. They changed me in a core fundamental way that is hard to explain. They literally opened my eyes to the absolute transformative power of education that privileges the lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples.

So my entry into the Common Units team was tense. I had been removed from my old position and I was disaffected.

When I first started I didn't know anything about the details of the Common Units. It's not like I didn't know what they were as such; I knew that John Reid taught in them, but they were a very foreign entity to me. I had been focused up until then

mostly on working in remote communities and then writing and teaching in the creative writing degree.

When I first went to the Batchelor campus of the Institute in the Top End of the NT for planning associated with the Common Units, people from the Top End campus who had seen the power of these workshops approached me. They were happy for me to be transferred into this team. I remember being at the library and this kind, older man from Torres Strait came up to me and we began chatting. He said to me, “You will love it in these Units”. But I couldn’t hear him properly, my mind still hanging on to my unrighteous indignation. I was a bit dismissive and he made the point of saying it again, “No, you will really love them”. Still I wasn’t getting it. If I knew then what I know now I would say, “Yes, Dana Ober I do love them, you were right and I was not listening properly”. I never got the chance to tell him that; maybe I will send him a copy of this chapter just to say, “Yes in all your infinite wisdom you saw what I could not at the time, you were correct, I love them, and I went on to have the best job in the world for the next six years”.

At the time I joined the Common Units team they had just trialled a year of having a non -Indigenous lecturer head up the delivery and they had received a lot of complaints from the students. This was from Units that previously had been the most popular and successful units measured by student feedback, attendance and completion rates. This trial had happened because John Reid had taken six months off from the Units.

So when I joined the team John Reid was back based in the Alice Springs campus and Tom Ober was based in Top End Batchelor campus. The Common Units were run quite differently from other units as both Units were offered twice a year once in first and once in second semester. But unlike other units these were core common so we had all students across the disciplines of the Institute's Higher Education undergraduate degrees taking the Units. This meant that when we ran our workshops they could hold anywhere up to a hundred students. One year I had hundred and seven students and we found that our facilities just struggled to cope.

So most other teams had individual lecturers who taught their Units to small classes of students that you get to know. With the Common Units we were all three of us teaching at the same time, team teaching. We were responsible for a quarter of all the Higher education Effective Full Time Student Teaching Load (EFTSL) that the Institute had in first year. So these workshops were intense, energy fuelled and full on. I found coming into the team that the Units were also iconic. I mentioned Dana who came and spoke to me about joining the team. He certainly wasn't the only one supporting me as everyone in Top End was excited for me and knew about these Units and commented. There was a buzz in the air when they were on.

My first step into the Common Units was with Public Communication in 2006. When I started we had workbooks each day and my only real task before going into classes was to familiarise myself with the speech structure. I went in feeling under-prepared. Had I been teaching any other Unit I would have had my plan and my back-up plan and resources. I had also been given the responsibility of reworking the teamwork power point that had been developed the year before. So stepping into this classroom

as very new to the team I was nervous but I trusted my colleagues when they told me it would be fine.

Tom was running around getting everything ready and all the resources we would need as he was the only one of us based in Top End so he knew where to get everything. I waited by the door chatting to a few students but knowing as little as they about what was about to unfold. Here is how this first session unfolded for me.

John goes up to the lectern at the front. He stands there with an imposing presence until the noise in the room quietens. Tom and I had deliberately arranged the room earlier so that the desks were clumped together to accommodate large groups of students. When the students found a seat it was generally around a table with others.

John begins speaking. He is calm and confident and relaxed. I saw him throw the net wide, talking of what we were going to do during this next two weeks. I saw the students shift in their seats expressing body language like, “He can’t be serious”. Then I saw him reel them in slowly with his confidence and his enthusiasm. He told anecdotes of workshops previous, he introduced Tom and I, and he said to the students we are going on a journey. He was tough and decisive, he explained the classroom rules and then he set the first task. He literally held court with the lectern at the front of the class with himself modelling speaking into the microphone. That whole first day was John structuring the two weeks and beginning the tasks.

The students formed groups and began talking about their public values. Within three hours of being in the class there were vigorous discussions about what people held

dear. Structured negotiations within groups about the core that the group would present back had begun. By the end of the first day each group had assigned a leader for the day and subsequent leaders for the rest of the week on a rotational basis. Each group had come up with a core public value for their group, had developed slogans for that public value and had worked individually on slogans for the issues that they cared about individually.

At the end of the first day each group got up and said their group name into the microphone and read their group's slogans as well as individually introducing themselves and then reading their individual slogans. So by the end of day one everyone had spoken at the microphone and had participated in their group's negotiations, as well as learnt the first text pattern.

I, like the students, was on a bit of a high by the end of the day after listening to the carefully constructed words of the slogans, the underlying messages of what was important to these student groups. I was a bit buzzy and excited.

These were the best-scaffolded Units I had ever taught. Rob in his initial writing of them had incorporated the rhetorical text patterns we were teaching into the delivery of them. Literally while we were speaking into the microphone we were role modelling the text patterns in use. John spoke through the workbook word for word as the students read it. He gave meaning and understanding to the words on the page. I was a little in awe the pedagogical art of how much he was a performer in this space, but more than that, how much of it was him. He was literally up there laying bare his self. It was one of the most personalised teaching styles I had ever seen and I could

see how much of the success of the Units depended on the strength of his character, on who he was. He would tell a story, he would cajole and laugh, he would be funny and charismatic. I'm still to this day not sure if that was a deliberate teaching strategy on his part or not.

Wednesday of the first week and it was my turn. I had the lectern and had read through the workbook. Like I have said these were the best scaffolded units I had ever engaged with, complex concepts were navigated with seeming ease. I was reading a Oodgeroo Noonuccal poem called "Aboriginal Charter of Rights". This was as an example of the next text pattern, antithesis, and this poem was full of them. By presenting both sides you strengthen the statement of the positive.

Black advance, not white ascendance:
Make us equals, not dependents.
We need help, not exploitation,
We want freedom, not frustration;
Not control, but self-reliance,
Independence, not compliance,
Not rebuff, but education,
Self-respect, not resignation (Noonuccal, 1970, p. 36).

This is an incredibly powerful poem and as I was reading it I could feel the strength growing in my voice; the words on the page alone did the work for me. We were learning about antithesis and thesis and, if I nailed this delivery of the poem, it would change how the students received the information. So it was a performance poetry

reading but somehow it was infused with more. It was like a raw moment of me being there, but it was bigger than this classroom and bigger than an example of antithesis. This was real. I finished, I paused, I took a breath and I could feel the silent and contemplative energy in the room. The strength of these words had moved from the page into reality. It was palpable and real. This was what we all wanted and suddenly in this room of fifty-plus people we were on a common trajectory. Tom had done his delivery the day before so it seemed like my turn. John was smiling and happy and as I set the antithesis text pattern task he said that the three of us should go and have a cup of tea; the students were right by themselves for a while. So we went and had a cup of tea in the staff room but something had shifted in me and shifted in Tom and John as well I could see. They had done these workshops many times, they were part of the original writing team and, in delivery with Dr Rob, they had seen many people come and go from the position I now occupied. However I was the first permanent appointee to the position and the first permanent woman, but at this stage I felt part of the team. I had held my own and more.

We had also scheduled the group work power point for that Wednesday afternoon as typically that is when the groups start to fracture. So I was giving the prepared power point and, following John's lead, I had put more of me in it. In the previous year this presentation had been very cold and factual. So I started with who we all were and why it was important that we were here. I told a story about myself at Melbourne University and how so much of what we brought to the classroom wasn't acknowledged. We talked about the importance of group work and how we can achieve more working together. I also spoke of synergy and of forming and storming and norming. We played a couple of games that I had incorporated into the

presentation. We played a geographical game that showed how we were from all around the country and the islands but were here working for a common goal. We played a communication game that had the room erupting with laughter. Anyway after I finished that presentation John pulled me aside and he was crying. He was saying that it was the best presentation he had ever seen as the tears rolled down his face. He was smiling with joy and then he just nodded his head, gave me a little hug and walked away from the classroom leaving Tom and I to finish the class for the day. I didn't see him that night or early the next morning, not until start of class. In hindsight, John who had worked in these Units since their beginning left a little that day, he saw an exit plan in me and, after years of bearing the heavy burden of these Units, he was relieved.

That day, though I was hooked, I had felt the heady high of teaching in these Units, the sort of power that comes from transformative education, that power when collectively a room is moved. I feared it but if I'm honest I was just as transfixed. And, like an actor looking for a Stanislavskian moment, this high remained with me over the next six years, the moments came at different times but always it was there. I can't explain how absolutely exhausting and exhilarating teaching these Units was.

Every day the groups would get up and feedback their groups text pattern for that day on their public value and each member of the group would be introduced and share one of their text patterns. By Thursday of the first week the whole class knew each other by first name and what was important to those individuals and to each group. On Friday of the first week John and Tom then gave each group a large banner. They had been given the task of designing the banner on the Thursday night and now they

were feeding back to the larger group what was going to be on it. The group were going to paint the banner with their public value to be ready before the next Thursday's rally around the streets of Batchelor.

Can I just say by the Friday of the first week the act of getting up and speaking at the microphone had become completely normalised, it was demystified and just part of the daily activity. If someone was still nervous or shaky everyone else in the classroom could identify with them. It was such a supportive environment that even those people with a morbid fear of public speaking would get up and attempt it to the cheers and encouragement of the whole group.

The second week went like a blur to me. I looked at drafts of speeches, lots of them. The teaching format was less structured than in the first week. We would get up and outline the tasks for that day but there was less explicit lecturer-out-the-front teaching delivery and more hands on activity getting on with the tasks. We informed the students that after lunch everyone was going to get up and talk about their individual speech topic and three text patterns. So then the panic would be on. By the Wednesday of the second week everyone had a second or third draft of their individual speech, the group speech was very close to being finished with all members having a section to read out but importantly it wasn't just sections but parts of one whole speech. So these three days were busy and frantic for me. I read through and gave suggestions for so many of the speeches. I can see now in hindsight why I was left to do a lot of this because I was new and after a couple of years this can get tedious for the other team members. But I was delighted to gain an insight into what was important to the individual students.

On the Thursday John announced that he, Tom and I were going to leave the room and that the class itself as a whole was going to come up with a collective value; something that this class held dear, that they were going to develop slogans and paint placards about and that we were all going to march around the campus for this collective ideal. We left and returned in an hour and the students had collectively chosen their theme for the rally.

The marches and their themes varied from year to year. Sometimes we marched for student rights or extra lighting and security at night, and we would march to the front office holding our banners and speak to an executive member of the Institute.

Sometimes the marches were for more general human rights or for the importance of Batchelor Institute. One year it was for water rights at Jiggalong. One of the group's speeches was on how the mining companies have diverted water from the small community and we were marching as a public statement in support of those students from this community. "STOP THINK JIGGALONG NEEDS A DRINK" was one of the slogans and our executive at that time actually sent a statement and had discussions with the Western Australian government ministers about the issue.

I don't remember the theme of my first march but I remember the flurry of activity as the whole group assigned themselves roles. With only two hours to prepare some people were painting slogans, others were inside writing up a list of demands; others were working on the chants. It was amazing and as we mobilised each group behind their banners, John initially with the megaphone then handing it over to one of the students. Tom had got some pans and ladles so we could make as much noise as

possible and we set off through the campus shouting our chants in the repeat style of a rally, all of us screaming at the top of our lungs. All of the other students and workers came out of their classes in support, clapping us as we walked past or joining us. We walked through campus to the front of the library and then we walked as a group to the front office where we chanted until someone came out. We then addressed the executive member with what we were asking for, positive and negative. One year we told them we were marching to ensure the future of the Institute, another year to protect Muckaty station from a Uranium dump.

Then we would walk the streets of the town till we reached the other entrance to the campus chanting and laughing and venting and celebrating until we came back to the classroom. All the people that had come out of their classes then knew it was time for speeches. We had the come down of smoko and then the classroom was filled with guests and visitors coming to listen to what the students had to say. We had previously re-arranged the classroom on the Monday into rows of chairs so everyone had a chance to practice in this revised space and then on the Friday after the march the real journey began.

John welcomed everyone to the speeches, acknowledged the Director and other special guests and introduced the first team, and off we went.

It is hard to describe the electricity of those moments when the speeches were being read. This became the transformative part because when you sit and listen to a room full of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders speaking their truths in a five minute speech, utilising really effective text patterns designed to get to your heart, it was

amazing. Every topic you can imagine came up, from the stolen generation to brown rice, from otitis media to sexual abuse and overcoming it. This became a roller coaster of a journey that we all shared. One woman Janie spoke about being removed from her family and put in a home; she spoke about it in the third person and then at the end she said, “I know because I am that little girl”. I had hung my head because I was crying because she had moved me that much and I looked up and around because there was a quiet in the room. She had transported me to another place but I was embarrassed by the tears rolling down my cheeks, then I saw Tom and he was crying then I saw John and he was crying too. The whole room was silent and I didn’t know what to do. John got up and made a joke to break the silence. It was perfect and I was grateful and then the next speech began. By the end of it everyone was utterly exhausted and excited in equal measure, and everyone was changed.

I used to say at the beginning of each workshop that they are transformative and experiential, that by experiencing these workshops you will be transformed. I say this now with a deep knowledge of its truth because I had been transformed. At the end of that first Public Communication workshop I was a different person than when I went in. I knew different things and I was a different kind of educator and this was the start of my most amazing six year journey into the Common Units of Batchelor Institute, as both lecturer and coordinator.

The Common Units and Student Diversity

When the Common Units were first conceived the Institute was just moving into Higher Education delivery as a stand alone tertiary institution and the units were a response to the students wanting to see some of themselves in their education.

Veronica Arbon, the then Director, answered this call with the Common Units and remained a passionate advocate of them while Director.

When they began as transitional units into higher education they were designed to not privilege students with an English-as-first-language background, the student breakdown was 90% students from remote communities and 10% students from urban communities.

By the time I had entered the team in 2006 this demographic had been reversed; the students were from all around the country with 90% being from an urban or rural background and only 10% from remote communities. This shift in students saw a change in delivery styles and the incorporation of new content but the core of the Units remained the same.

The students were both old and young from all over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. We were varied and different but the same. Our commonality was what became celebrated.

This is one of the key defining successes of the Common Units. Students from all over got to meet, share and work together. The student's diversity was the Units' strength as we learnt from each other's strengths and weaknesses, but we did it together. The sense of accomplishment at the end of these Units was enormous and was shared by all students. The nature of the Units was that while one student may have one set of obstacles to overcome, another had a complete other set and together and collectively we could achieve our shared common goals.

So while an older student, and we had some really old ones, may struggle with the computer it was very common to see a younger student typing their speech up for them whilst they told them their stories. These stories often then come back in the form of telling histories stories and the cycle became complete, synergised by the collective work. This often happened with individual speeches for students who had less English language vocabulary as these students often had the strongest cultural traditions and stories, which then in turn strengthened the whole group.

One of the key reasons that the Units were so successful in terms of student results was that students were assessed by how well they worked together not by how much they knew in comparison to each other. Academia is typically so cut throat and competitive but we explained early on that the focus in these Units was cooperative learning and group work. Student evaluations of these Common Units are included as an appendix to this thesis.

The Common Units as a Foreign Entity in the Host Body of BIITE

When I began in the Common Units all three team members wanted to take time off over the school holidays. I thought this was standard practice as there was no teaching during those periods, it was mid semester and we all had school age children to care for. John and Tom were adamant that one of us had to be on board at all times. I thought they were paranoid and a little bit delusional. I said that it was downtime so why would I have to stick around. They both told me that at all times one of the team had to be on-campus and be vigilant, because as soon as we dropped our guard ‘they’

would pass some policy in our absence and we would come back to work to changed conditions and the Common Units as we knew them would be gone.

Now this seemed to me to be quite ridiculous but I was the newest member of the team and so it was my holidays that were postponed as I held the fort. During this particular stand-down time at one of the sub-committees of the Institute's Academic Committee there was a discussion about the third Common Unit in the Institute's undergraduate degree courses. This was a common research unit in third year. The discussion was about the under-preparedness of students for this Unit. There was universal condemnation of all teaching that had gone on in first and second years up until this point. Students couldn't read a chart, didn't know qualitative and quantitative research styles, etc, etc. The outcomes that the lecturers delivering this third year unit wanted to achieve seemed to them unobtainable. But rather than question their own curriculum and teaching styles they blamed the first year Common Units for the students lack of preparedness, and flaws in the third year Common Unit.

They raised such issues as why weren't these Common Units teaching essay writing skills? Why weren't these Units teaching referencing? Why weren't these Units teaching academic skills? Why weren't these apples oranges?

In the two weeks that John and Tom had taken off I was asked to speak to these 'concerns'. I said these Units did teach essay writing skills and listed the text patterns that we taught and how they were applicable to essay writing and many other genres of modern academic writing. I spoke of oracy as a link to literacy, that we absolutely taught standard referencing including referencing community knowledge. I also went

on to suggest that it was ridiculous to look at these two Units as being the cause of this Research Units shortcoming. I went on to explain that our retention and success rates were unequalled at the Institute and that perhaps they misunderstood the intent and nature of these Units. I accepted that this could be a PR issue on behalf of the Common Units team and took responsibility for any ignorance on the part of the Research Unit lecturers.

By giving the sub-committee members an easy way out I found that I had just won round one of many to come. If I thought my presence in the all white team of CSWE was problematic, my presence in this Common Units all black team was going to be seismic. I started to understand some of the history of these Units before I joined the team, some of the paranoia and some of the history of discontent that had surrounded these Units from the outset.

This was to be the first of many seminars, forums, informal discussions, arguments, presentations and justifications that I would do on behalf of and in defence of the Common Units within Batchelor.

The rallies in Public Communication, whilst empowering and exhilarating for the participants, were intimidating and confronting for some non-Indigenous staff members. After Veronica Arbon had left the Institute, and with the revolving door of executive staff members, the fact that these rallies were a student exercise escaped them. Often nobody from the Executive would come out to listen to the rallying students. The Deputy Director did emerge a couple of times but it was suggested that

we remove the rally from the Units. This eventually happened when we moved the delivery of the Units to the Alice Springs campus of the Institute.

When I said earlier that John wore the burden of carrying these Units, I meant it literally. Dr Rob McCormack, the original writer and coordinator of the Units, eventually left the Institute and returned to Melbourne for no other reason than he was sick of fighting and arguing for the Common Units. There was something debilitating about holding workshops that are so successful, that students raved about, that they said that they only wish they had done them years ago, or they felt so proud as a result, and yet were dismissed as trivial or non-academic by influential people on the Institute's staff.

These Units literally had a 98% pass rate and that is with a very strongly enforced caveat that if you miss more than 20% of the sessions you fail on attendance. To see the students achieve so much and get so much out of these Units which was so gratifying and rewarding as a lecturer, the biggest buzz, and then to have to argue for their existence and worth within your own organisation was exhausting. Because they were common core units everyone felt like they had the right to have a say about them. I have literally in the six years that I've worked within these Units been made to fight, argue and justify them. Twice we had an assessment review and independent moderation. Once I had to send around to all teaching staff questionnaires on the Units and hold a seminar series on their worth. The seminar was very well attended by students and staff alike, much to the surprise of my immediate manager. He had told me that the Units were universally despised and would be gone by the end of the year. They were constantly questioned as to why the students did so well in these

Units. Rather than actually listen to the reasons why and celebrate those reasons, even adapt to these reasons in their own curriculum and pedagogical practices, there was an ongoing aura of hostility towards the Units.

Perhaps it was a sign of the changing priorities of the Institute or a fundamental disbelief in the way that the Units were put together, but it seemed for most of the eleven years that they ran they were contentious and despised. This was while they were being lauded and celebrated outside of the Institute. After the Federal Government's Bradley review, which occurred in 2008, universities were being measured against student retention and universities were scrabbling to create introductory undergraduate units that would cement commencing student identities in terms of being higher education scholars. We had been achieving this for eight years by then but I was still having to hold these seminars arguing for the existence of the Units at Batchelor.

The quandary around these Units was that whilst they were embraced and celebrated by the students and Aboriginal staff at the Institute they were also vilified and despised by many non-Indigenous lecturing and executive staff. They were both a source of enormous pride and celebration and of distrust. Perhaps the student's success with these Units was what was intimidating, perhaps the success rate of the Units reflected badly back onto other units and teaching styles, perhaps the fact that these Units were actually successful in terms of student outcomes, retention and successful completion was what made them such a threat. I was constantly astounded by the stubborn refusal of some academic staff to look even a little closer at what these Units could achieve and to take professional learning from them.

The contributors to these successes were not acknowledged by our critics in terms of recognition of our inclusive Aboriginal knowledge, pedagogy and curriculum activities. There was no acknowledgement of the academic rigour required for the long term academic application of the text patterns of the students' work in Public Communication across writing genres, the oracy development applicable across many other units, the analysis of history applicable to all disciplines and theories. It was not that the Common Units were academically lesser than, the truth was that we were equal and so much more.

The Common Units, as expressions of Aboriginal knowledge within higher education courses, were beacons of what could be. By comparison, the other units of higher education study in the Institute were but pale expressions of Aboriginal knowledge, if such expressions at all. All the rhetoric of 'both ways education' could not erase the difference. Instead of embracing these bastions of First Nations education, the Institute allowed them to be marginalised and treated with suspicion and contempt.

From the standpoint of this initial analysis of the reactions of non-Aboriginal Institute staff to the Common Units, I can only surmise that there was so much more that scared everyone. But more of that later.

A Postscript

The Common Units no longer exist. They were extinguished with Batchelor Institute's undergraduate Higher Education courses transition into ACIKE and CDU accreditation. If Batchelor was a reluctant host to these Units then CDU academics

wanted nothing to do with them, they couldn't even conceive of them. Ironically, in the move of Batchelor's undergraduate courses to ACIKE from 2011 it was Batchelor's Academic Board that belatedly saw the worth of these Units. The Board argued for their inclusion within ACIKE as being representative of the Institute, as our best example of 'both ways' in practice. This had also been noted as well by the numerous Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) audits of Batchelor Institute over the past years. The Common Units had finally got their recognition and support at the executive level of the Institute just as it was too late. But then perhaps this recognition was somewhat disingenuous as this was the time of enforced cross-institutionalised partnership negotiations over the integration of course units from both institutions into single degree courses. The Common Units presented as the most unique curricula offerings at Batchelor and therefore the most difficult to merge into CDU's undergraduate courses. Perhaps the late recognition and 2011 advocacy for the Common Units was a political ploy aimed at flying the 'both ways' banner at a time of fears of full institutional annihilation.

I feel destroyed that the Common Units were lost on my watch. Dr Rob said to me, "I'm sure you fought as hard as you could", which is indicative of the struggles that the Units' team faced, but the forces against me in 2011 were bigger than the internal resistance I had successfully thwarted within the Institute itself. So as I write fondly of them, these Units that changed my perspective on teaching, that opened my eyes to new possibilities and taught me so much about Aboriginal strength, pride and humility, but most of all, every workshop taught me about the resilience of our people. So whilst the loss of the Units is still felt amongst many, the strength of them

for eleven years celebrating all that is strong about ourselves is certainly worth remembering.

Conclusion

The Common Units were sites of freedom for First Nations lecturers and students to negotiate Indigenous knowledge and western knowledge into a lived First Nations teaching/learning experience. Premised and informed by First Nations values, customs, languages and histories, the Common Units represent for me a high point in the arc of the Institute's struggle to embrace Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and acting in the world of learning. These same Units also followed the trajectory of the other Aboriginal celebratory moments, events and broader initiatives within Batchelor Institute.

But the Common Units became contested entities. Instead of being embraced as powerful examples of inclusive, productive and successful Aboriginal higher education and exemplars for expanding Aboriginal knowledge into unit content elsewhere in the Institute, they became isolates to be distrusted and devalued. This is an uncomfortable observation for a tertiary institute with a mission to be respectful and inclusive of Indigenous Australian knowledge systems. This narrative is a further example of Batchelor Institute as a site of interdiction where Indigenous knowledges meets internal distrust, resistance and disparagement; where sustained attacks must be quelled; where energy must be, paradoxically, expended to protect the 'foreign body' from institutional rejection. ,

All this is discussed further in Chapter ten.

Chapter 8: Batchelor Institute’s Graduation Ceremonies: a Barometer of Institutional Indigenous Cultural Inclusiveness

Introduction

Whilst writing this chapter I looked at lot of old video footage of early Batchelor College and the later Batchelor Institute graduation ceremonies and the thing that struck me most was the pride and optimism that traditionally accompanied such a ceremony. I am a believer in graduations and graduation days are one of my favourite days of the year. I love the excitement, I love the build up and I love the recognition that is given to students’ achievements.

Graduation ceremonies of tertiary education institutions are the institutions’ public celebration of their students’ achievements. But these ceremonies are also public celebrations of the institutions’ own successes. As such graduation ceremonies become a ritualistic opportunity for colleges, institutes and universities to make public claims about their current and emerging status as tertiary education providers and to identify their positional niche in the tertiary education space of the country.

In the case of Batchelor College/Institute, its graduation ceremonies were and are celebrations of its First Nations students’ achievements as well as public moments for proclaiming its status as an Indigenous tertiary education provider unique to Australia.

In this chapter, while acknowledging my pride in the achievements of Batchelor students since the Institute's beginnings at Kormilda and then as Batchelor College and later as Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, I am focussing primarily on this second aspect of the Institute's graduation ceremonies; that is, the ways Batchelor has proclaimed itself to the world over the past years through the forms, the performances, the formal displays, the managed rituals of its graduation ceremonies. Here, I want to look beyond the overt to discern the 'hidden agenda' conveyed through the ritual of the ceremonies.

I am interested in exploring the messages these ceremonies communicate back to the Institute's staff and students, but also to the world external to the Institute; that is, the world comprising the students' communities, the education sector of the Northern Territory and of Australia more generally, and the cultural, economic and political forces initially within the Northern Territory but also more widely within Australia. As can be expected, Batchelor's graduation ceremonies have changed over time as the Institute has evolved as a tertiary education provider. My interest is to explore how these ceremonial changes reflect trends in the deep messages conveyed to the public about the core meaning of this Indigenous tertiary education provider.

In order to be able to explore all this, I have settled on the following approach. I maintain a first person account of my direct experience of and participation in Batchelor's graduation ceremonies over the period of my employment at the Institute. Here I will include selected moments from ceremonies that are significant to me. I will also select from the Institute's archives, graduation ceremonial moments that

illustrate to me the trends in proclaiming messages from graduations prior to my employment; that is, up to the late 1990s.

Ceremonial Acknowledgements of First Nations Student Academic Achievements

But before embarking on a consideration of the ways Batchelor College/Institute has proclaimed itself publicly, I begin with an overview of the messages communicated by Batchelor's graduation ceremonies as public acknowledgements of student pride and achievement.

Here the overwhelming consistency in these public messages has been the theme of the importance and significance of each band of graduates as skilled and knowledgeable contributors to their own communities. There is also the enduring role modelling theme expressed not as a directive but as an enticement to others.

Michael Jampijimpa Jones in his student response at a 1993 graduation ceremony summed it all up when he addressed the packed crowd:

We find it hard to study, sometimes because it is hard and we struggle not for ourselves but for our community, to help our community to keep our language and culture strong (Jones, 1993).

Stanley Tipuara the MLA for Arafura, spoke at the 1987 graduation ceremony and he said:

Years of work and effort to ensure that you'll be here prepared to work for your community, for the youngsters of your community and for Batchelor College as well. In fact many of you graduating here tonight will be working with youngsters among whom I hope will be the future graduates of Batchelor. I say that to emphasise the importance of what you have done and the importance of Batchelor College (Tipuara,1987).

In Stanley Tipuara's words back in 1987 we can justifiably be proud of ourselves and our College, not only because it is the only one, but because our path and the path of the College had intertwined and become one. Batchelor's business was community business and community business should inform Batchelor's business. Batchelor Institute when operating at its peak, and as it was supposed to do, was present and accountable to all communities that it operated in.

Evelyn Schaber, a long term Aboriginal Lecturer, Council member and leader within the Institute, conveyed at the 2001 graduation ceremony a 'role modelling' message expressed in the form of an invitation when she said:

Graduation ceremonies are really really important. They say,
"Look I've done it and you can too" (Schaber, 2001).

Here Evelyn speaks to graduands as role models and that this ceremony is bigger than any individual. The graduand as a role model is connected in the graduation speeches to a commitment to the future and to the next generation of Indigenous students. This is a recurring theme throughout all Batchelor graduation ceremonies expressed in terms of the importance of paving the way for future generations and for working hard at studying for the whole community's benefit. The bigger picture in these messages is of students participating in education for change in their communities, for empowerment of their communities, for participating in a bigger picture of Indigenous self-determination. Aboriginal education for the betterment of all, is linked to the role modelling theme.

Finally on this point, I include the words of Sharon Ah Chee who gave the student address at the Institute's graduation in 2012:

Encourage your family, cousins and friends, the empowerment
you have and the message it sends,
They too may discover they're built to lead, to take that step and
plant that first seed.
So from all of us here graduating today, we say a warm thank
you before going away,
The staff we include in our final goodbye, without you we
wouldn't be leaving on such a high (Ah Chee 2012).

The Hidden Curriculum of Batchelor Institute's Graduation Ceremonies

I now turn to an exploration of the 'hidden curriculum' of Batchelor's graduation ceremonies as proclamations of the core principles of the Institute. In this section I look at how graduation ceremonies can begin with an Aboriginal worldview as the primary expression of identity and the inclusion of white culture comes second, so that the sought after merging of two forms of knowledge begins and ends with Aboriginal knowledges. This then becomes an Aboriginal ceremony that includes or appropriates aspects of white culture in the conferring of awards. This is not just a surface acknowledgment of culture or an expression of difference but is grounded knowledges, one being incorporated into the other. A respectful acknowledgement of the importance of western traditions and how they can be applied into an First Nations context, underlies the ceremony but does not dominate.

At different times in the Institute's history some of Batchelor's graduation ceremonies have been grounded within an Aboriginal worldview borrowing aspects of the Western ritualistic tradition. At other times these ceremonies have been within a western worldview borrowing from the Aboriginal ritualistic tradition and occasionally within the nether world of 'both ways'.

First Example

In 2001 at the Top End graduation ceremony all the dignitaries and academics were led in by dancers, that the beginning of the ceremony began with Aboriginal knowledges but it was as an introduction, literally a sort of beginning of the parade. Although the ceremony began with Aboriginal knowledges and culture it did so as an addendum. When the academics and guests were on the stage the dancers were gone

and the real ceremony began according to Western graduation rituals. Some would claim this example of a Batchelor graduation ceremony is an expression of the Institute's both ways philosophy. My inclination is to call this ceremony a Western ritual with a surface expression of or nod towards Aboriginal cultural customs.

Second Example

Counter this to the 1985 graduation ceremony where a large group of young men are at front left of the audience, a group of girls front right, a line of women at the back and three or four men are singing and playing instruments. They are all painted up.

The men start the dancing through their song selection. They begin singing and providing musical back beat and the women begin to dance. They move forward and take centre stage, the young men come round the back and enter from the side. In the next stage of the dance the young men lead and they move quickly and deftly towards the audience. This all happens outside on the lawns, just outside of the hall. The women and young men and young women dance for a long time, they dance a couple of songs or maybe several sections of one dance and song.

We have heard nothing of the Master of Ceremonies up to this point and then his voice interjects – he knows what's about to happen, and then he shares with the audience. Just before the young fellas dance down, he introduces them. He says the dancers come from Milingimbi, that they are school students. This is the first example of cross-cultural communication that he shares with the audience, but this interaction is deeply grounded in Indigenous knowledges. He goes further to explain:

Ladies and gentlemen this dance represents the dilly bag. A long time ago our people used to work. A long time ago our people used to travel out through the rocky hillsides and once they get to the place they used to make dilly bags, and that's part of this dance that you are now seeing with this group of dancers from Milingimbi.

Ladies and gentlemen this represents the crow dance.

The ceremony then continues imbued from this Aboriginal knowledge perspective with its layers of meaning for the Aboriginal graduates and their community members present.

This is how the sharing of knowledge and understanding it is a gentle walk through information known and unknown; it is the sharing of knowledge so that everyone has an understanding. The Master of Ceremonies is the lecturer teaching the audience about things that they do not know. It is unashamedly culturally located but importantly it doesn't pretend to be culturally neutral as Western graduation ceremonies are presented to be or perceived to be by many non-Aboriginal Australians.

Third Example

There is a third Batchelor graduation experience I want to share.

This is the ceremony that is dominated by western values and mindsets. In 2011 a decision was made that the non-Indigenous students the Institute had recently enrolled would be allowed to graduate on-campus. This was a contentious decision as it had gone against previous Council directives that the campus was to remain a culturally safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. So whilst the Institute had been enrolling non-Indigenous students for the last couple of years, the delivery had almost always happened off campus. A letter of invitation to the graduation had been ‘accidentally’ sent to the non-Indigenous graduands of the educational support certificates. Importantly at this time it is worth noting that Council had more or less collapsed, that the Institute had been two years into receivership and KordaMentha, as an external administrator, had effectively taken over the running of the Institute. A skeleton Council of three people were left in place to authorise decisions. The governance of the Institute had changed radically and the Council was in limbo awaiting the passing of the new Batchelor Institute Act 2012 by the Northern Territory Government.

The decision to allow non-Indigenous students to graduate on-campus was circulated in an email to all staff declaring that it would be discriminatory of the Institute to not allow it. This was contrary to a decision made by an Aboriginal all-staff meeting in which the issue was discussed.

Also at this time the running of graduations at Alice Springs had been taken away from our DPC campus manager, a local woman in touch with the local community, and the control of the ceremony had been centralised to Top End student operations of the Institute. So what had previously been run completely by a graduations committee in Alice Springs for the Centralian graduations was now dictated to by the Top End campus operations group under the direction of a newly arrived non-Indigenous administration officer.

Small decisions made by the Top End group had grated on DPC staff, decisions like removing reference to where the community-based graduands were from in the graduation booklet and as part of the announcement of their name in the ceremony itself. Top End had argued that it was a breach of confidentiality and that it had nothing to do with the receiving of an award. A collective sigh would go around the DPC campus and through the graduation committee, again an order from up on high as a non-Indigenous Batchelor-based bureaucrat was misinterpreting our cultural and locational pride and turning this ceremonial occasion into something else, something that followed her experience and protocols not ours. Members of the Graduation Committee and Alice Springs staff would say, “Don’t they understand we are proud of our communities”. “Don’t they understand it makes the community proud to see its graduates”. “Why do they want to make us unknown, to take away our identity”. “I don’t understand her motivation”.

Now this is a small issue but one that I am using to highlight the slow erosion of all that are key identifiers of Aboriginality or Indigeneity. Suddenly the proud and passionate moments that graduation had always been had a dampener put on them.

The ceremony was a little disjointed, ran behind time, it was joyous but at the same time sad. Communities were not acknowledged and about one third of the graduands were non-Indigenous students.

The non-Indigenous students filled the front rows, apart from the seven Indigenous graduates from our degree programs who had been allocated these seats. Thus the front rows were mostly filled by the non-Indigenous students as they moved without any specific allocation to the front.

There were no community dancers participating in the ceremony. A drum band comprising Aboriginal students from a local school ushered in the dignitaries. The ceremony had defaulted to a western form of award giving. There were no links to community, swamped by a non-Indigenous presence.

But even so, we celebrated the achievements of the Indigenous students who graduated that day. We had, amongst the proud First Nations students, three linguists, two teachers and a health science graduate. While we were committed to celebrating with them, there was a different feel to the day, like it was the end of an era. Everything had changed.

A Very Different Recollection

One of the most significant graduations that comes to my mind would have been in 2001 at the Alice Springs campus. I had been working in the Utopia program and we had three completions of Certificates 1 and 2 in Spoken and Written English and about seven statements of attainments, where students had passed a considerable amount of

the course but not finished. Alison Ross was graduating with her degree in teacher education, becoming the first qualified teacher to come out of Utopia as far as I know. I had set her up with a study room in my house and talked over a couple of the essay questions for her, but I think we all felt like we had some sort of investment in her achievement; we were just so proud.

I had scheduled an on-campus workshop to run on this week so all the students enrolled in Certificate 1 had been travelled in to Alice Springs via the student travel route. We numbered about forty so we took up a large section of the residential campus. I drove in the troopy ahead of the centre bush bus carrying the students and I had all the resources we would need plus I brought in about five old ladies, who had places to stay in town. Batchelor was quite strict about non-students staying on campus so we had to be careful. Because ours was one of the larger programs there was always a feeling of us flooding the place so we used that to our advantage.

On the Thursday morning of graduation I gave Sarah, one of the women I had signed up to be a registered driver of the Batchelor vehicle, the keys and she drove out and picked up the mothers, aunties and any interested parties of those graduating. She left at about six and returned a little after one with a troopy full of old women keen to come and watch the graduation. Alison Ross lived at an outstation called Apungalindum which had a small area school in which Ali had been a teacher assistant and was now going to be a full teacher. So the teachers from the school had organised an excursion to also come in for the graduation. So we had about forty students, twelve or fifteen old ladies representing the community and a bus full of

primary school children from Apungalindum all in the audience as the testamurs of certificates were awarded.

Batchelor's system is that level of academic regalia you wear is dependent on the level of award you are receiving, so with a degree you got the whole gown and stole, with a diploma just the gown and with a certificate a sash. So on the afternoon of graduation there was organised chaos. I had arrived at seven to blow up balloons, set the confetti, organise cameras, set up displays and construct the archways of flags. So there had been a lot of hustle and bustle all morning but after lunch it got crazy. Everyone had to gown up, pose for photos, official and unofficial, sign their name in register on site. There was a lot of activity so no one noticed that we had smuggled in some extras. When they arrived I showed them to the rooms they would be sharing with their daughters and they showered. This was the first time a lot of these old ladies had been on to Batchelor Institute campus and it was important to me that we get it right. It was kind of exciting and they were excited, and we were somehow legitimating the program and the studying journey. Later we would do community graduations but this seemed like the next best thing. We had brought the community to the graduation. It was an Alyawarr and Anmatyere and Kayteyt "black out" in the audience. Education was privileged as being important and community was privileged as being important in the educational process. It was a great day.

Batchelor Graduations: an Initial Analysis

Graduation as a reflection of the health and strength of the Institute with respect to its inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge, ways of being and acting is evidenced by the strength of these same Aboriginal cultural determinants in the ceremonies. Maurie

Ryan, now the Chairman of the Central Lands Council, in his address to graduation ceremony in the 1970s as the student representative urged the then College to fly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags at the College and by implication at its graduation ceremonies. This was seen as a political act and there was concern that such an overt statement would bring repercussions to the College from the power elite of the NT. Perhaps such a conservative force is still prevalent and may explain in part the fragility of strong Aboriginal cultural expressions within the Institute's graduation ceremonies over the last thirty years. Batchelor College and later Batchelor Institute has had a tense relationship with the NT government. Previous Directors have been aware of the conservative undercurrent running through the external relationships of the Institute and of the governmental gaze scrutinising the organisation. All this has impacted on how well or how poorly the Institute responds to communities and to the overt expressions of Indigenous cultural strength and advocacy.

The question then is why in these three different examples of graduation ceremonies do we have such big discrepancies in Indigenous expression and ownership over the graduation ceremonies, from strong to weak? No longer do we hear from the students except in a single graduand address. No longer do we have the choir or the teacher education students doing a power point or a student Master of Ceremonies. In fact, as time ticked on we became more mainstream, more sterile, less political, less Aboriginal.

We had been mainstreamed. A subtle diluting over the years had occurred, changes so small they weren't at first noticeable. But then in 2013 I look back to 1985 and ask what happened to us? And why?

Perhaps there are many explanations for this change. Perhaps it really was a question of money, time, confidentiality. Perhaps students stopped caring about cultural representations. Perhaps for the good of the students and the welfare of the audience reducing the length of the ceremonies was paramount so something had to go. There can be many reasons posited for this shift and I'm sure there were at the time a multitude of seemingly reasonable reasons but I argue the underlying motivation is one that Batchelor Institute knows well - unease with Aboriginality expressed too strongly for NT public consumption.

This argument connects with the broader explanation for the arc (the rise and fall) of strong expressions of Aboriginal knowledge within Batchelor Institute's teaching and learning over time. The change in the graduation ceremonies perhaps reflect a deeper shift within the Institute itself. The earlier narratives illustrate the 'uneasiness' of non-Indigenous staff of the Institute with transformative moments leading to practical recognition of Indigenous knowledge's within the Institute's pedagogies and curricula. Similarly, the changes in the Institute's graduation ceremonies over time can be understood as a public expression attributed to non-Indigenous staff, both academic and administrative, being increasingly uneasy. That is, uneasy with the form of the ceremony as Aboriginal ways of being and acting became more prevalent, more to the fore in the ceremonies themselves. Perhaps the uneasiness lies in them not knowing intrinsically the rules of the ceremony as the difference to their western norms grew over time. Perhaps it is all about power and control. Perhaps it's about whiteness centralising itself, neutralising the threat and doing it with a magnanimous and generous smile; these changes are all in *your* best interests. I am positing these

questions because I want the reader to think about what they think the answer could be. What is the most likely answer for such an incredible change in the way that graduation ceremonies have been conducted? Why were the high points of Aboriginal knowledge expression as performance not secured in organisational practice?

Conclusion

The rise and fall of Batchelor Institute's graduation ceremonies as public expressions of inclusive Aboriginal education is also a public expression of the Institute's struggle to emerge from an assimilative paradigm to become more inclusive of First Nations ways of being, knowing and doing. These ceremonies were our most public statements of our tertiary institutional self and they reflected the ideological strength of the Institute. When we have strong Indigenous leadership our ceremonies were reflective of this. When the Institute focused on community and included student values and voice, this was in turn reflected within the graduation ceremony. When the Institute drifted from its community focus and from the strong Indigenous cultural standards debates, so the graduation ceremony reflected this shift.

I argue that the slow watering down of Indigenous knowledge proclamations to a more tokenistic expression of Aboriginality within the rituals of the ceremony is an expression of non-Indigenous comfort and fear of difference. This has happened slowly and surely till we barely recognise ourselves at all in the ceremonial form.

Is the struggle one against the technicalities of organising ceremonies (getting dancers, money, confidentiality, duration) or one against something more deep-seated.

Is this how whiteness asserts itself? Over and over again with decreased inclusion driven by the fear around difference; with the structured destabilising of Indigenous acts of autonomy. Why the need to slowly, methodically but surely undermine First Nations representation?

Chapter Nine: Desert People Centre opening

Warning this chapter contains names and photos of Arelhe mape from Central Australia who performed at the Desert People Centre, if you have lost someone recently maybe you should get someone to take photos out or to check the following pages. I have tried to not use close up photos of Arelhe mape but this wasn't always possible.

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the positives and when we get it right. It celebrates the uniqueness of Batchelor Institute and the strength and endurance of First Nations culture and its capacity to re-tell its dominant narratives. The chapter concludes with an analysis of public performances of Indigenous culture and how it can change the negative dialogue of Indigenous incapacity as well as the inner monologue of Aboriginal people that can so often buy into the racist diatribe of 'lesser than'.

The Desert Peoples Centre opening was held at the newly erected joint site between Batchelor Institute and the Centre for Appropriate Technology at the newly created Desert Knowledge Precinct, in Alice Springs, Central Australia.

In this chapter I will be joined in my voice by the cultural advisor for the day, Marie Elena Ellis, and by the campus manager, the woman who knew of the importance of

opening the DPC properly and worked almost against the white administration to make her dream happen, Barbara Richards. This will be done by an interview I conducted with Barbara Richards and through Marie's speech which she shared with me. Both women have read their sections of this chapter. I am conscious that I won't speak for them, they can speak for themselves, so large sections of this chapter will be carried by our three voices.

I also use photos and images that speak for themselves about the event much clearer than I could write about it.

In strength, pride and love for Batchelor Institute and DPC and my Alyawarre culture and my family and myself and my community and the Arrente community I will proceed to tell you the story of the DPC opening.

Desert Peoples Centre (DPC) Opening Day ceremony

The opening was the culmination of twelve years of work and was primarily about housing the two organisations, Batchelor Institute and the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) in the one precinct. The precinct was custom built to meet the needs of both organisations. This was undeveloped land and a lot of negotiations happened with Traditional Owners to approve the site, to walk the site to make sure that there were no sacred sites and no dangers in terms of country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to come from around Australia to study safely. At the turning of the first piece of soil two senior Aboriginal women representing both organisations oversaw the process. An Arrente man was the Chairperson of the DPC

Board. There was a strong emphasis on getting this right in both Aboriginal and Australian worldviews. Arrente Elders were absolutely consulted in terms of location and strength of country.

The campus is nestled in the southern side of the Central McDonald Ranges. The views are spectacular, the country vibrant, lizards, kangaroos and birds all share the space with students, staff and visitors.



Figure 2 DPC classrooms and environs

So the opening to celebrate this new campus and precinct needed to be different and reflective of both organisations and both cultures. A committee was set up to coordinate the opening and a budget allocated from both organisations.

The opening was designed as an invitation to all people to study on Arrente land, Keith Castle, the DPC Manager, said:

The DPC then becomes like the UN building in New York. It's a safe place for all nations, once you enter its not New York anymore it's a neutral space, and everyone can feel safe to express themselves equally (Castle, Tuesday 7th Nov 2012, personal communication).

How the ceremony proceeded was also very important. Keith Castle again said that:

It was very important that it had an Aboriginal focus, after the dancing in the welcome courtyard people came through the gap in the two buildings, this was an architectural interpretation of Heavitree Gap and everyone walking through this gap in the ceremony was designed to mimic a welcome to Alice Springs and this place. This was the fulfilment of the vision of the DPC (Castle, Tuesday 7th November 2012, personal communication).

This was also the fulfilment of the vision of Aboriginal people within the organisation to show culture in a strong way, to have ourselves be represented in a positive light. Barbara Richards, the Batchelor Institute Campus Manager, described the event, its design and its intention like this.

I asked her, “How did the DPC opening come about – generally an opening is a bottle of champagne smashed against a boat or a wall with wine and cheese?”

Barbara replied:

We had this committee for the DPC opening and we all sat down and said we need to have DPC opening show how Aboriginal people do it, what we can do – my thought that when we do things like this and we celebrate we celebrate a lot of things language, culture, dance and song.

My thoughts and we all should know this, Aboriginal people we aren't squares, we're circles, when you go to Inma, coroboree dancing we're always in a semi circle, we're never in a square, it reflects the cycle of life. So we came up with a design initially, it had to go round and it had to encompass the buildings. We had to think how old people would think when they organise coroboree, it was done properly, women had to stay this side, that's how it is, they know what to do and they know the songs, it was like the setting of the scenes, that seven sisters dreaming goes right through and the story line goes right through. It was done appropriately and created respect and admiration. All the different groups coming through and dancing, not just Arrente, all the groups from around Alice Springs and Central Australia. Marie was the emcee, Margaret Kemmare Turner and Amelia Turner did the smoking and it worked. When we do something like that I always feel proud. We are showcasing that we haven't

lost our culture. Every time I always feel proud (Richards July 2012, personal communication).

So local dignitaries, politicians and town folk, school students and the whole community was invited to the opening of the DPC. This marked the occasion of these buildings being built as well as the continuation of Aboriginal culture, the resistance of Aboriginal people and the pride and deep emotions felt by us being able to stage such a momentous event.

On the southern side of the café, reception and the main teaching space was scrubland. Here red dirt and sand was brought in to create a large red central circle for dancing with seven circles that come off from the central circle made of white sand. These outside circles had temporary shelters built at the end of them so the performers can get ready, each representing a tribal group, and each of them arranged in an ancient order of distance, relationship to Mbantua and the Arrente people.

The ceremony began with the cultural advisor Marie Elena Ellis who was also the Master of Ceremonies. Marie seamlessly navigated the line between white and black, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. She introduced the traditional owners for welcome to country and she introduced each dance troupe. To have a speaker introducing each group is not a customary practice when all the participants know the rules intrinsically. This was something different. Marie, having the knowledge of both worlds, wove a tapestry bridge between both knowledge systems. The order, the significance, the flow, the understanding was interpreted through her. She was the

conduit through which these two worldviews could find mutual understanding; she made it all make sense.

Through her words and actions Marie guided everyone on this shared journey. She showed us the significance, she highlighted the importance of having a space like DPC and Batchelor and, most importantly, she showed us the strength of our culture. Through her words, her presence and her composure, she showed all of us that it is possible, that both ways, that shared understandings and the soft, quietly spoken possibility of respect between these worlds, was possible. The doors were open for people to come, to share to appreciate and that maybe by participating in this shared journey the blinkers could be lifted and the warmth and strength of cultures could meet without anger or retribution, without right or wrong, just seeing and knowing.

The ceremony

First Marie introduced the event and gave a general overview to herself and to the process and the event. Similar to the introduction of a speech, essay or paper, she orientated everyone to what was happening. Marie said good morning to us all and stressed the importance of the day as a cultural day to celebrate the opening of the Desert Peoples Centre.

“My name is Marie Elena Ellis. I am an Arrernte/Warlpiri woman. My mother belonging to this country we stand upon. My father is from the Western desert region of Pikilyi, and Nyirripi area.

I am blessed with culture and language, my grandparents from both language groups taught me about my cultural heritage, and from their teaching I am a strong woman today with strong cultural education.

We live in a world of change, we need to adapt in this world in order to keep our language and culture strong for our future generations. Education is the key to our children's children future.

Desert Peoples Centre is the place to guide our people into the future for their both way academic knowledge into the future.

The six language groups gathered here today, long ago gathered before for the trading of their tools and weapons, plant medicine, plant food and ceremonial celebration between tribal alliances”.



Figure 3 DPC Marie Elena Ellis speaking at DPC Open Day

Marie Ellis, the cultural broker who navigated the passage between her cultural knowledge and the dominant culture, welcomed us to country and then introduced the program of the day, particularly mentioning when the Honourable Julia Gillard, then Australia's Deputy Prime Minister and the Education Minister, was arriving later that afternoon. She appropriately thanked all the local politicians and dignitaries. Then she addressed the performers, the Aboriginal people in the audience, the staff of Batchelor Institute and CAT and the DPC Board members, before acknowledging all the local people in attendance. She said:

“We the Antulye people are happy to see our desert families
here today that have travelled from near and far.”

And by doing this she made everyone feel comfortable. She epitomised and
role modelled the vision of the DPC Committee to welcome everyone onto
this place. Then she shared a poem or piece of text that her ancestors had
inspired her to write and that she thought appropriately prefaced the
ceremony we were about to see.

Ancient stories told by the form of singing, and storytelling to
pass on the important cultural history of our ancestors of this
beautiful, ancient, desert land.... we all call home.

Ancient languages, spoken today.

Ancient songs, sang today

Ancient dance, danced today

Ancient ancestors here, celebrating with us today.

Then the DPC Opening Ceremony became strongly embedded in Indigenous culture
and knowledges presented through performance, through dance. This celebration began
appropriately with the first and last dancers being the Yeperenye Men’s Dance Group.
The order of these performances is not random, rather it follows protocols that have
existed on this place, Mbantua, for millennia. The Yeperenye Men’s Group began the

ceremony with the opening dance, as local men, representing this place that we were standing on.



Figure 4 Yeperenye Men's Dance Group

Next Marie introduced the Untulye Women's Dancers. She introduced and thanked each group as they sang, danced and performed ancient stories from their countries. The designs that they painted on their bodies were as old as the land itself, some of the oldest designs in the world. Yeperenye men and Antulye women are the custodians of this place, the place on which the DPC now stood.

For the ease of narrating this chapter I will quickly introduce each group's name and language and include photos which can convey much more information than I could write in the whole thesis about each performance. Each group different, each design different, each dance different, the songs compiled with a detailed knowledge of how to know and care for country. The intricacies of the differences are as diverse as the

country and people themselves compiled with a detailed knowledge for those that can read this text.



Figure 5 Women dancing at the DPC opening 2010

The next performance was from the Simpson Desert Women's Dance Group followed by the Anmatyere Women's Dance Group and then the Alyawarre Women's Dance Group from the East. Then the final women's dance group stepped onto the dance circle. These dancers represented 50% of Marie's family heritage and had travelled all the way from the Western Desert. So with pride and a smile Marie introduced the Warlpiri Women's Dance Group.



Figure 6 Woman playing clap sticks DPC opening 2010



Figure 7 Women from Utopia dancing DPC opening 2010



Figure 8 Warlpiri Women dancing DPC opening 2010

Next dancers were men from the southern regions of Central Australia, the Pitjantjarra Mens Dance Group.



Figure 9 Pitjantjarra Men Dancing DPC opening 2010

As protocol required, the dancing was brought to a finale by the local custodians; the Yeperenye men returned to the dancing circle and brought to a conclusion the dancing performances.

After the dancing had finished Marie returned to microphone. She looked out over the audience and saw smiling faces, kids with upturned heads engrossed and riveted, people laughing and crying and joyous and solemn – a people moved by the power of the public performance. Then she said:

“Our journey began when long ago our ancestors walked this beautiful desert land, following each other’s footprints in the sand.

Our journey began when all desert language groups came together as one to celebrate our creation time story of the land.

Our journey began when we all remember our ancestors that gave us the gift of life, survival skills, language, totems, families, and land.

Our journey began with footprints in the red desert sand, as many followed from the past, the present and now into the future.

Our journey begins here,

Desert Peoples Centre holds the key to our future,

Our Education

Our Achievement

Our Dream for our future.

Today we have gathered together as one family for this very special occasion.

Today we are gathered as one.

Celebrating our achievement from the past to the present and will carry our coolamon of knowledge for our children's children into the future.

Today all Aboriginal people, locals, residents, politicians and land owners have gathered as:

One voice.

One spirit.

One journey".

But the Opening Ceremony was still not completed. An important ritual was still to occur before the DPC was fully open to the public and to become a culturally safe workplace. Marie introduced the assembled people to this next act in the DPC Opening Ceremony:

“Ladies and gentlemen, now is the time for the smoking ceremony to begin. I would like to share the significance of the smoking ceremony and the meaning behind it.

Traditionally smoking ceremony was performed for the healing of the spiritual health and wellbeing of the desert people.

Smoking ceremony also is used to smoke the new born babies to help them grow spiritually strong.

Smoking ceremony is also practiced when a family member have passed onto the next spiritual world, cleansing of the loved one (who) once lived in the same dwelling”.

Marie then invited M.K. Turner & Amelia Turner to light the plant medicine that was to be carried as the smoking ceremony participants proceeded around the DPC campus and buildings. Marie announced that the ceremony would be the caterpillar walk. She advised anyone that was unable to make the walk to stay behind and rest. The caterpillar walk is both the way that the procession was to take place and the dreaming story for that place; the Yeperenye Dreaming is the caterpillar dreaming and is one of the main stories for this place.

“People that are able to make the walk are most welcome to join in. As we complete our journey for the smoking ceremony we meet back here and the cultural ceremony will be complete”.

There was some concern that not everyone would participate in the smoking ceremony, that it would be dismissed as not important or that people would reject

outright any personal involvement or participation in this Aboriginal ceremony. The photos below highlight how that didn't happen. In fact everyone participated and the reports back about the ceremony were really positive.



Figure 10 Participants in the smoking ceremony DPC opening

I highlight aspects of Marie's speech that stand out to me as the core values that the Institute could have adopted as its fundamental position to move forward into the future.

Conclusion and Reflections on the DPC opening

I argue that people who were there that day as participants in the Opening Ceremony would have been moved to varying degrees in their position on Aboriginal people and culture. The non-Aboriginal residents of Alice Springs and staff of BIITE and CAT were invited to create a different narrative from that day about Aboriginal people.

They quite simply couldn't sit in negative judgement of a culture as being lazy and or drunk or irrelevant or dying when the whole story as told by Marie and the dancers was one of absolute relevance to the aspirations held by the community for the Centre in a spirit of warm hearted generosity that welcomed all to walk this journey.

This is all that is important; to have educational opportunities for ourselves and the next generations that don't come at the expense of our identities and culture. That is the point of Batchelor Institute, that is who we are and why we were set up; our vision statements, as mentioned earlier, have all consistently outlined this. And Marie encapsulated this challenge for Batchelor Institute beautifully;

Our journey began when we all remember our ancestors that gave us the gift of life, survival skills, language, totems, families, and land.

Our journey began with footprints in the red desert sand, as many followed from the past, the present and now into the future.

Our journey begins here.

When we remember these tenets we don't go wrong, we don't stray off the path of our purpose. When we forget them though, we get lost. It is that simple.

The DPC opening also marked another pivotal point in the evolution of the Institute. The custom built Centre that housed both the Institute and CAT, a Centre that was about local knowledges being privileged, had been a long time in the making. This

was the Desert Peoples Centre and the Institute was the key partner player in this Centre. So this growth came after years of hard work and lobbying but also at a time when the Institute started to go into crisis; a crisis of identity and of purpose as well as of financial management.

I often wonder what would have happened if Julia Gillard, then Education Minister and Deputy Prime Minister had attended the whole ceremony. As it was she flew in for her speech and left shortly after receiving gifts and cutting the ceremonial ribbon, all the white ceremonial aspects of the day. I do wonder though if she had been there when all the women and men were dancing, when Aunty MK led the smoking ceremony, if she felt the cool heat of the smoke on her skin, saw with her own eyes some of the oldest dances in the world, listened to ancient languages being sung, I wonder if she would have agreed so easily to the later deal in 2010 that saw BIITE's undergraduate Higher Education courses transfer to Charles Darwin University under a partnership arrangement with ACIKE. I wonder if she would have agreed to this arrangement so easily if she had seen the strength and perpetuity and grounded knowledge of Aboriginal Australia. If just for a moment she saw the strength of culture, of proud speakers, of two ways truly working, I wonder if she had seen the reality instead of the negative narrative emerging from her appointed financial administrators, KordaMentha, if she would have agreed to give up on Batchelor Institute so easily.

This was a public celebration of culture. It was different to the whirlwind visits to communities that politicians and bureaucrats call consultation. This was a public statement about pride in cultural continuity and I wish that she could have

participated, because perhaps then she could have felt like we all felt at the end of that day, bursting with pride, on cloud nine, our hearts full of love and jubilant elation.



Figure 11 Marie Elena Ellis and Harold Furber giving gifts to Julia Gillard at the DPC opening



Figure 12 Julia Gillard flanked by local MP's Karl Hampton (NT MLA) and Warren Snowdon (Federal MHR) at the formal Non-Aboriginal part of the DPC opening ceremony

I like to give her the benefit of the doubt in my mind about that moment that she missed out on, because I liked the thought of having a female role model. Then I looked around and I saw yaya Marie and Aunty MK, and sister Amelia and all the Aboriginal staff of the Institute who had been working for weeks and started at half past five or six that day cooking BBQ breakfasts for the performers. Then I looked to my right and saw Mary Morton, diminutive yet incredibly strong, powerful, law woman, dancer, singer, and keeper of ancient knowledges, grandmother and great grandmother. My teacher of dancing, stories, hunting, ochre, cooking, shade building construction, how to kill a perentie or flush out a goanna, how to recognise the subtlest of movement on a track on the ground, how to speak in sign language, how to laugh and enjoy, how to hear stories of brutality and racism without being judgemental and so much more.

Then I smiled first at myself and my momentary celebrity star struck stupidity about leadership and strength. Then my smile became real and I looked at Mary and she smiled back at me, she came alongside me and we walked hand in hand for awhile or with my arm against the top of her shoulder, then my smile changed and my face lit up because I felt not only so proud but that everything was right in the world and my heart was at peace because I was surrounded by strong role models and my life was truly blessed. While smiling like that everyone looked and returned the smile, and I felt complete for that moment.

We cannot under-estimate the importance of having ceremony that affirms and strengthens Aboriginal identity as well as welcomes and makes non-Aboriginal people feel good about participation. When we openly display our pride and our

culture we create a space that becomes inclusive, and when people feel good about doing something and they want to be there, then it changes the way we respond and react. These ceremonies invite everyone in to feel good and happy, and some of those ingrained attitudes spoken about in Chapter five become suspended if only for a moment.

In 2006 a Walpiri man, Wanta Jampijimpa Pawu-Kurlurlurnu, commented on why he thought a significant ceremony on his country, the Milpirri event, was so successful. Wanta responded:

‘People tasted it, they liked that taste in their mouth and they came back for more’. The taste Wanta refers to is ngurra-kurlu.

In ‘coming back for more’ they are enjoying the feeling of connecting or reconnecting with their culture, with a common sense of belonging. Wanta also said that in Milpirri people enjoyed *‘Feeling human again and not a shadow, that is, feeling like we have a voice and are not just a background people’* (Pawu –Kurlpurnu, 2008, p. 7-8).

The Desert Peoples Centre Opening Ceremony with the coming together of six nations of Central Australia in dance and song, exemplified the truth of Wanta’s explanation. Ceremony imbued and rich in Aboriginal knowledges is the text awaiting, as it has always been.

Chapter 10: Looking back to move forward.

Introduction

In this chapter I bring together the historical and theoretical perspectives of Chapters two and three of this thesis to analyse the significant events portrayed in the narratives of the data chapters; that is Chapters five, six, seven, eight, and nine. This analysis is presented in two stages. The first stage focuses in turn on the narratives of each data chapter. The second stage of the analysis brings together the insights and arguments contained in the second stage to form a meta-analysis that reflects the full argument supported by the whole thesis. In terms of narratives and portrayals, the data chapters contain five significant first level portrayals. The first analytical stage in this chapter is essentially a series of second level portrayals with each connected to the original narratives. The meta-analysis that follows can be understood as a third and final level portrayal that brings together all elements of this research study as set out in the previous chapters of the thesis into new understandings relevant to Aboriginal tertiary education.

In this chapter I am writing about a new way of being, knowing and practicing in tertiary education for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Drawing on theories of whiteness, ignorance, mimicry and interdiction, I hope that by undertaking these higher levels of narrative/portrayal we can forge a new form of Aboriginal

educational praxis that has blurred lines around the power binaries that have defeated us to this day in reaching our full aspirations.

Second Level Portrayals

Each portrayal focuses on the most significant events, actions or behaviours contained in the narratives, aspects that capture the essence of these narratives as first level portrayals. I analyse these essences to construct a deeper understanding of the full narrative. These deeper understandings are given meaning through the historical perspectives contained in Chapter two and through the theoretical framework developed in Chapter three.

Chapter Five analysis: Mimicry requires a dual desire; retribution for questioning the authority of whiteness.

The ideologies that were being played out in this chapter have deep seated roots in the racist history of this country and of colonisation everywhere. They find their legitimacy in the racial hierarchies that see white people and culture on the top of the ladder and Aboriginal people on the absolute bottom, with other first nations people and cultures on the sliding scale in between. This hierarchy based on race has long and lasting effects. It literally placed Aboriginal people from Australia as sub human, as savages. The detritus from this positioning is still felt today and evidenced in the actions of the CSWE team and others working in the NT as told in this Chapter five narrative. It seems extreme to say that these people are still operating from within this hierarchy and that the effects and intent of this are still enacted today. It may seem extreme but it is also evidenced in the narrative. I don't believe that now these

women colleagues would say that Aboriginal people are less than human. Those words wouldn't come out of their mouths, but their actions demonstrate that the effects, shadows, echoes, intent, purpose and meaning of this racial hierarchy are played out today. Though the language may have changed, the effects are still the same; the behaviours are still in accordance with this scaling of humanity from the 19th Century. In Chapter five we see this played out by the assimilatory actions and abjectifying gaze of the women portrayed.

The ideological structures of this racism have long run and lasting effects. In the back of the minds of these women, in a deep ideological sense, was the lasting impression that the gift of white culture was what was needed and wanted. That at the heart of Aboriginality was dys-function and savagery.

If we accept that with colonisation came subjection to the western system, then the move to subjugation with the consequential abjection of the Aboriginal body came with these racialised hierarchies. The permission needed to act with disdain towards Aboriginal culture comes, ultimately from these racialised hierarchies, from a long history of discriminatory policies, from Social Darwinism and the resulting theories of race-based cognitive capacities.

The fear of 'mixed blood' people like me comes from not being positioned clearly within this sliding scale. Where to put the fair skinned person who has grown up knowing both cultures, who has the strength of both? This inability to place me squarely in the white or black camp led to an ambivalence and curiosity about 'me' amongst my work colleagues; an ambivalence towards me and who I represented. My

Aboriginal presence raised questions and uncertainties for my colleagues about a range of matters. Was I acting on behalf of the assimilative intent of this team or did I have a more culturally balanced agenda with my students? Whose side was I effectively on in the quest to assimilate as defined in reality by the content of the course I was teaching at that time? The language around sides of allegiance would never be spoken about but was clearly articulated by the taking of the photographs of me dancing with my Elders and the subsequent punishing of me for being on the wrong side, for publically displaying my Aboriginality. The correcting of me, as in rectifying my perceived imperfections, was played out in the constant over-riding of my results, the shutting down of Alyawarr language in my classroom, the pressure on me to obey the English-language-only norm amongst myself and my students, and the insistence of videotaping as a means of student assessment. I was clearly being told that there was one correct way to be and to act and that it did not involve recognising or celebrating any alternative (not white) ways of being and knowing; ways that were sensible and meaningful to my Aboriginal students and to myself.

The first identifier to my background happened at the interview when I requested the Utopia position, an Aboriginal community northeast of Alice Springs. This seemed to me to be an innocuous request. But mentioning that I had family out there sparked the suspicion and mistrust that followed. The request for the Utopia position alerted them to the fact that, though I was qualified, in some cases more qualified than some of my colleagues, I was a product of mimicry. I was not quite like them, not quite the same as them and that was problematic. The declaration of 'family out there' was enough to alert them to my not-quite-like -them status and the retribution was immediate. I felt the sharp sting of the words of my senior colleague when she told me I would go

where I was sent; that was her decision not mine. I had crossed a line I knew nothing about; that is, seeking a position that was 'contaminated' by Aboriginal family connectedness. I was chastised and put in my place. I was taught the unambiguous lesson that any variation from the white norm here would not be tolerated.

This sting was contrasted by the casual comfort I had felt on the campus of the Institute when I first arrived; the grace of Meg, the interview process itself which had seemed to go well. The feel of the place was at odds with my senior colleague's chastisement. It didn't feel like a place where I should have felt ashamed of my Aboriginality. These pieces of information were at odds with each other, culturally embracing entry into the Institution through a successful interview and the sharp 'know your place' rebuke on entry into my allocated professional duties, but either way the path of containment under whiteness had been set for me.

These internal contradictions are the basis for the interdictory site which I will elaborate on later in the chapter. The casual comfort that I felt against the sharp sting of rebuke, the rebuke being a pre-emptive strike against any further declarations that I might make. I had been told and the battle lines drawn.

Through the insight of mimicry theory, I was never going to be as good as them; I was always going to be not quite good enough. I was never truly going to be accepted as one of them, even though I was more educated in a western sense than some of them. I didn't get the jokes. I didn't find them funny. I didn't want to participate in their snide comments about our mature-aged Aboriginal students. So they had created a narrative around me that portrayed me as restless, fidgety, not focused,

disorganized, a bit chaotic. They did this through their use of casual racism in meetings, their micro managing gaze, the different rules for me. They portrayed me as always somewhat a little lesser than themselves. This was despite the fact that I had all the markers of success that was expected and more. I had more students, more resulting achievements, more successful course completions. I had triple, even quadruple, the amount of students the other lecturers had. I had quadrupled my ACH (actual contact hours) allocation and was carrying the other programs in terms of funded teaching load. All these markers of success were ignored because ostensibly I wasn't like them, didn't behave exactly like them. I was almost but not quite white.

That wasn't the betrayal however. Mimicry only works with the dual desire. They needed me to need them and their approval. They needed me to want to be like them. They needed me to validate them through choosing to hide, to pass as white, to want to be almost but not quite white. As long as that was the dynamic then the power balance hadn't really been shifted. My betrayal was choosing to celebrate my grandmother's culture, choosing to embrace Alyawarr knowledge and culture, claiming it as part of me and showing pride. This was my betrayal and they felt it completely and they knew that swift retaliation was needed. I had shifted the desire, I had refused to accept their offer, now I was not their mimic 'man' but something else.

My potential to become their mimic 'man' had been there. I had stopped talking about any family connections I might have in Utopia and Alice Springs. I had stopped referring to my Aboriginality around them. I was polite and used speech, forms of English, with which they would feel comfortable, would recognise. I was a good little parrot around them mimicking back to them their language of politeness and power.

The use of this polite language was a marker that I was adopting the values that they were letting me know were acceptable, both overtly and subconsciously. When I identified with my white grandfather on my chaperoned arrival to Utopia instead of my black grandmother, when I sat silent at their sickening jokes about Elders during our course team meetings, I had felt myself complicit in their schemes, felt sick at myself for not screaming and raging at them. But somehow all these subtle tacit instructions on how to play 'white' were not enough because for all the snide remarks, all the subtle instruction, they couldn't make me change in the sense of being desirous of them, of aspiring to be white.

An inverted form of mimicry was being played out. They played at letting me belong, I played at acting like them. So my rejection of their values and their efforts to teach conformity by publicly celebrating Alyawarr knowledge was complete. Their retribution was swift, they mocked, they laughed. The photos for them signified a comical parody that was not white culture or black culture but some grotesque puppet show in between.

The question remains though if Batchelor Institute had been embracing of Indigenous knowledges surely my colleagues would have celebrated my dancing as an extension of my own Indigenous knowledge and professional learning. That what I brought to the Institution could have been a celebration of Aboriginal knowledge and used as a model for learning within the Institute. The reality though was that the decision to dance made me a joke to my white colleagues. I was mocked and disrespected till it became a point of shame for me. There was a disconnect between the ideals of the Institution, the values of the leadership and what was happening on the ground around

me as an Aboriginal academic in an Indigenous Institute. The subversion of the vision was being played out on my body. I became the embodiment of black fun to them. But they weren't just disrespecting me; they were disrespecting the Council, the leadership, the communities that had invested in creating Batchelor Institute as a place respectful of Aboriginal cultures and knowledges. Whilst I embodied the site of ridicule for my colleagues, their ridicule was larger than just an attack on me. It was an attack on the importance of that ceremony and the dances taking place within it as expressions of First Nations knowledge traditions, on Institute academics willing to participate in those expressions of knowledge and, therefore, on First Nations Peoples' knowledges and cultures.

The attack on me though became complete with the photographing of me and the subsequent distribution of these photographs. The ambivalence they had felt towards me and my position on their scale of racial hierarchies had become clearly set. I was Bhabha's mimic 'man'. I had the capacity through my skin colour and education to play the mimic man role completely. All I had to do was pass as white, to become the embodiment of white values, to be a model for them in their belief of the superiority of white culture. They would have loved to have held me up as an example of all that is good and white (right) in the world. When I danced though, I had crossed, for them, into another space. No longer was I just an annoyance, a nuisance to be monitored, a threat or disruption to their white authority. Now I had clearly chosen a side, in their eyes I had reverted to my Aboriginality, I had 'gone native', and they could not forgive me for it. For them I was no longer passing as white (though incompletely as in mimicry theory), I was now privileging the black side of me, for them again incompletely. They reverted to ridicule. The glee that they exhibited at

having caught me in the act was almost too much to bear. I had proved them right in their mistrust; they had caught me in the act and they had evidence of it. Evidence of my betrayal to whiteness.

Those white women in Chapter five were smart educated women, strong on women's rights. Yet their feminism didn't extend to the Aboriginal women they were working with; their strength and resistant spirits could not be acknowledged. Their achievements as mothers and grandmothers could not be acknowledged. Why when all the information was there for them to see did they insist on remaining ignorant and negative? Ortega's (2006) insight is relevant here.

Perhaps it is true that sometimes the hardest thing to see is that
which is in front of us, which should be the most visible (p. 58).

It is part of the colonial narrative that we are useless, not effective not relevant. There is an investment in us doubting ourselves which is perhaps why they foster their own ignorance of us, deliberately only reflecting back to us their constructed negative stereotypes.

The dual dimensions of ignorance and the different realities that are created through strategic use of ignorance as a weapon are evidenced in Chapter five and in the other data chapters. This is the dual strategy that a possessive investment in ignorance applies, a denigration of black people that then allows white privilege to exist and thrive as an unthought of, unconscious way of acting and reacting in the world

I ask the question in Chapter five if there is a knowing around what they do, if they deliberately set out to assimilate. Is this their intention? Perhaps not but it is what they do through talk of standards and disadvantage, the labeling and stereotyping of Aboriginal cultures. Aileen Moreton Robinson (2009) calls it “the pathologising of Aboriginal people”. Through sleight of hand, like a master magician they say look over here as the deception happens while your eyes are averted. This is exactly what they are doing by ‘pathologising’ and problematising Aboriginal communities and people. No one sees the real trickery that is happening while your eyes are averted. This is how ignorance works, this is the cloak of invisibility, because almost anything can be justified in the name of benevolence.

My colleagues in the Chapter five narrative were heavily invested in their ignorance that allowed them to enforce their white privilege and superiority. Whilst white privilege remains un-interrogated at Batchelor Institute we will keep making the same mistakes. While we don’t acknowledge bias and structural racism in the in the classroom we will keep making the same mistakes. A central part of my argument goes to ignorance. While Lipsitz (2002) talks of a possessive investment in whiteness I argue that in the last eleven years there has been a possessive investment in ignorance as well. I argue that the ignorance of race relations, of power structures, of institutional racism and white privilege has been fostered and fed at the Institute. This further duality, a possessive investment in ignorance which underpins the possessive investment in whiteness, can be applied to Batchelor Institute. I develop this argument further in the next section, an analysis of the Chapter six narrative where I postulate that the palpable fear expressed by non-Aboriginal academic staff was perhaps a fear of losing their ignorance.

Chapter Six analysis: The possessive investment in ignorance: What lengths will they go to really not know.

The possessive investment in ignorance exists because with knowledge or knowing amongst people of conscience would presage behavioural change. To maintain an inequitable status quo when the veil of ignorance is removed becomes an act of willfulness. You cannot claim ignorance when the argument, the knowing, the real life situation is laid out before you. But you can willfully deflect the argument onto some other, more comfortable ground such as Aboriginal incompetence, compliance with national standards, alcoholism and violence – a seemingly endless list.

What I will be calling the possessive investment in ignorance is day to day behaviours and attitudes that actively promote a deliberate not seeing. It is turning your head the other way in advance or only ever looking through a particular lens such as only seeing the negative in one race and never seeing the negative in the white race. Lipsitz (2002) calls it a deliberate mis-seeing. In this context it is not seeing positives, actively avoiding meaningful encounters, a denial of truth and history. This mis-seeing is connected to the conscious and unconscious behaviours and attitudes that continually pathologise Aboriginal people and cultures so as to maintain an illusion of superiority, that in turn maintains whiteness and all of its privileges. This is possessive investment in ignorance. It is possessively guarding a not knowing, not seeing so as to avoid behavioural and structural change.

One way that a possessive investment in ignorance is enacted is through interdiction and creating an interdictory site.

In Chapter six we see interdiction being played out all reminiscent of the historical interdictions of the Catholic church; denying access to sacred spaces as a form of punishment. We can see that Veronica and Berice were denied access to that ‘sacred’ space attached to power in academia; the sacred space of decision making over curriculum, pedagogy and governance. Access denial through interdiction however requires an all-encompassing sense of righteousness. Where in the narrative do we find this sense of the right-way in the world of the Institute?

Veronica and Berice had, in attempting to access the sacred space of academia dared to cross over into the area of white privilege. They were attempting to control the gaze, dictating the agenda and reclaiming a right to self identify. They were accused of privileging a First Nations perspective, of daring to speak of an Indigenous ontology and its role within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. They, as two empowered educated and culturally informed women, were controlling the agenda and directing the gaze and this was unacceptable. People responded with incredulity, they couldn’t believe this was happening. As Bell Hooks (1990) puts it, that by controlling the direction of the gaze one:

perpetuates the fantasy that the other who is subjugated who is sub human, lacks the ability to comprehend, to understand, to see the working of the powerful in white supremacist society. White people can safely imagine they are invisible to black people since they have historically asserted the right to control the black gaze (p. 340).

As portrayed in the Chapter six narrative, Veronica and Berice had confronted this controlling history; they, by their call for an authentic recognition of First Nations knowledge in the Institute's sacred business, its curriculum, pedagogy and governance, were unravelling the white fantasy.

We see in Chapter six that once the email was sent around that had the two categories of generalised characteristics of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people the outrage grew exponentially. These binaries had been accepted for decades by non-Aboriginal people working within Aboriginal education as a white interpretation of Aboriginal worldviews. But generalised worldviews were then posited against a seemingly, at the time, neutral evaluation of white culture and its values. When this information was circulated as white-on-black, it was fine. When the position was reversed, when an Aboriginal woman dared to make generalisations about white culture, the white supremacist revolution began. Whiteness and its privilege raised its head to right the power situation. How dare someone tell me about me. How could you presume to know about white culture? How could you possibly think that you could understand the nuances of my culture? How could you understand the complicated person that I am as an individual?

Again Hooks (1990) elaborates on the same situation in a different place.

Racist white people find it easy to imagine that black people cannot see them if within their desire they do not want to be seen.they

think they are seen by black folks only as they want to appear (p. 340).

Was it the shock of seeing themselves represented through the ‘other’s’ eyes that was so affronting or was it that they felt themselves objectified momentarily? After all their hard work ‘giving’ to Aboriginal people that they were going to get treated like this. Like what? For just a short time they were being asked to identify themselves in a cultural binary constructed by the other, the Aboriginal. They briefly recognised that they were being treated like they had treated Aboriginal people. I often wonder whether it was for the first time that they saw their face as the ‘other’ that scared them most. How can they continue to objectify and abjectify if they identify, even momentarily, even for the briefest of seconds, with the ‘other’. This was exactly what Veronica and Berice were asking them to do, to evaluate their culture (not in the critical way I am doing, but gently). So that these moments of being uncomfortable could be constructive conversations starters and the important process of institutional transformation could begin; the process of shared understandings, of learning from each other about our sameness, about our differences.

This was a moment lost however. The identification invitation was too much. Perhaps they saw this as the start of something much bigger with them being left less powerful, if not, in their worst fears, powerless. This perception of course ignores all the structures that support them in their white privilege but even if we suspend our disbelief and say that there was a moment of trauma, still this could have been a moment for reflectivity. As I said in Chapter six I recorded the initial meeting and not

once was it mentioned that non-Aboriginal people were not welcome or wanted on this journey, yet that is what they heard.

I suspect that that moment in time represented something more than a moment of discomfort. I think the veil on their ignorance was about to be lifted. This was ‘felt’, was emotively foreshadowed, then panicky resistance ensued. By identifying even briefly with our students, by feeling like they were being racially categorized, I think that they collectively understood that they were being asked to understand, to feel and to know, to let go of some of their structured ignorance. The thing about ignorance is once the knowledge is brought to the surface, once you know and once you get it, you are in a new space of knowing and understanding, not only of the ‘other’, but of your society, its history and, more profoundly, of yourself. From this new state of consciousness it then takes a lot more dedicated ‘ignorance work’ to unlearn it, to return in good conscious to one’s prior comfort zone. From the narrative it is clear that they really did feel threatened, but not of losing their jobs, or their positions; it was their ignorance that was being threatened. And their collective ignorance was the foundation of the way that they behaved in the world including the cross-cultural world of the Institute. They did see their world of white privilege being threatened because what they were being asked to lose was their ignorance; they were being asked to know, and then to try and understand.

Lipsitz (2002) writes that white privilege and ignorance of that privilege accords advantages for white people. And that ignorance operates at the level of not knowing and therefore not able to do anything about it. His primary argument is that “part of

the problem is not because of our race but because of our possessive investment in it” (p. 79).

It is not about ignorance but the possessive investment in it, the deliberate maintenance of it. This possessive investment manifested itself through non-participation in meetings and deliberately hijacking of process. When the panicky resistance was met with a quiet determination on Veronica’s behalf, the possessive investment in ignorance was amped up to include walking out of the meeting and holding an operational meeting with the senior office bearers of Council.

It was this possessive investment that became most obvious in the 2004/ 2005 period of Batchelor Institute. On display was non-Aboriginal people’s possessive investment in maintaining white race privilege and maintaining their levels of ignorance. They knew on some ideologically-informed level that by losing their ignorance, their unthinking, unquestioning receipt of white privilege would be threatened. By participating in what was being asked of them they intuitively ‘knew’ that they would be changed. It was their ignorance that was threatened and that threw them and the Institute into a tailspin, a tailspin from which it has never recovered.

Chapter Seven analysis: 3R’s - Rights, recognition and rhetoric

The analysis of the Chapter seven narrative takes on a markedly different tone from those above. In describing the Common Units there is a sense of collective pride. Pride toward those who developed them, who delivered them and an immense pride for the First Nations students who embraced them and made them their own.

The Common Units were successful.

All of this was executed using the foundations of Western philosophical traditions, that of Plato and Aristotle and herein lies the brilliance of these Units. These ancient western traditions of education, along with a structure that allowed open content with supportive audiences and clear direction in a comfortable environment, struck exactly the right chord needed for students to have their say. And in so doing their Aboriginality was being privileged. Many of the students had never experienced this before, particularly in a classroom situation.

It is here in these Common Units that the internal gaze was one of warmth and admiration. The emotions in the classroom are palpable, everyone partaking feels a glow, and, paradoxically, the coloniser's tool is being used to validate the student's opinion and the audience's reaction. How ironic that an ancient tradition of teaching has such a positive effect on students from one of the most ancient cultures, that the educational practices admired most by the colonising elite in their educational sphere is being used differently but with the same. The expectation of leadership, the power of persuasive speech and the right just to be heard was being shared by the richest and the poorest in Australian society.

By understanding the ancient Greek structures of education, Plato's Academy and Academia were shown to be the founders of this academic world we were entering as Higher Education students and lecturers and, in so doing, this thing called academia became demystified and grounded.

Loud classroom discussions about Socrates choice of hemlock over banishment were broken down into the importance of country and the pain of dispossession. If these were the ancestors of western education and the choices that surrounded them then we accorded them the respect that they deserved. By knowing the conflict between Aristotle and his teacher Plato, by knowing that they differed in their approach, meant that we could apply that knowledge to our knowledge of current classrooms, to the contemporary western education system as we knew it and had experienced it. It broke down western education into a model and, in so doing, removed the omniscient power of western education to that of simply a winning model. This insight opened the door to alternatives. So the school based teacher as authority with a set curriculum is merely a model to be taken or left; it is not an ever present enduring norm. It is a model that works for some but not for others.

Knowledge is power and in the Public Communication classroom, as we discussed knowledge production, as we discussed the wisdom of our Elders, as we learnt about differing styles of education, we did so from our own uniquely varied but First Nations people's position. We felt ourselves growing more powerful through a knowledge of the other (western education). By removing the invisibility of the current western education system we could discuss from our own First Nation's perspective the value of our own education system as well as the pros and cons of the various western systems.

This synthesis of knowledge came from two sources; one a non Indigenous academic's detailed knowledge of Greek educators and modern philosophers, the

other the First Nations students' detailed knowledge of their own educational practices (some call this their home education) and their own educational journeys, often the disconnect from what they knew and have been taught by family and community, and what they have been taught in schools. By applying this knowledge to our real world, a whole new level of understanding about the role and purpose of knowledge sharing through generations was revealed.

So in the same way that a look at the legislative history of Australia builds an undeniable argument of racism, so to by looking at the history of western education we see the influence on its structure of political ideologies over this same history. It was in this way that we used the coloniser's educative tools for integration and assimilation to our own benefit, for our self-determination. We moved from being mere subjects of power and became agents of power. We managed to move our position on the power continuum from being passive recipients of the consequences derived from others' positions of power through their benevolent goodwill to becoming speakers of our truths. Just being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person in this country is political, our very survival is political, so when we get up and speak our truths it becomes a revolutionary moment that changes all of us.

The transition from being individuals beholden to the power of non-Indigenous others to individuals holding power and with space to speak was a transformative educational moment. The holding of space and agency is important on many levels. Not only is it about sharing something that has never been shared outside of the family, or something that you are passionate about, it is a personal achievement. So the act of speaking ones' truths has dual meaning. It is important for the public

sphere, adding to the knowledge of the room, the town, the country, but it is also important on a personal level. The public / private sphere is transformed into a collective space imbued with all the strength and power of stories never before told, or needing to be re-told with the hopes and expectations and community mindedness of the whole classroom. In this moment, the subjugation of the past is removed, the feelings of inadequacy gone, as we for a moment feel empowered. Speaking the truth of our lives, telling a story of a grandfather banned from the islands and the effects on him, three generations of one family in care because of the stolen generations, a story of survival from a massacre in NSW, stories of triumph against adversity, stories of survival, recollections of idyllic childhoods on the river, at the beach or in the desert, manifestos on hunting and bush food, and native title claims, for each student a moment of embodying the power of an ancient culture and sharing that with an audience.

The analyses of the narratives of Chapters five and six revealed how we as Indigenous people teaching and studying at Batchelor Institute were subjugated by power structures. This analysis of the Common Units narrative is all about the celebration of speaking and enacting the power of our ancestors through the students telling their stories, talking their histories into existence.

Butler (2010) speaks of this transition from subjugation to agency

It seemed that if you were subjugated, there were also forms of agency that were available to you, and you were not just a victim, or you were not only oppressed, but oppression could become the

condition of your agency (<http://www.haaretz.com/news/judith-butler-as-a-jew-i-was-taught-it-was-ethically-imperative-to-speak-up-1.266243> accessed May 2013).

It was this act of speaking up and out to an audience that is one of the key strengths of and the greatest threats to the Common Units. The presentations were all informative and entertaining and strong, and they all held Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' views, worldviews, stories, realities. This often times had a profound effect on the audience but also I believe was the underlying aggravant behind the mistrust and dislike of these units identified in the narrative chapter. Every speech and every performance challenged ignorance. That was the very point of doing them, to communicate our histories to an audience. This is not problematic unless it happens in an environment where there is a possessive investment in ignorance. The possessive investment means that anything that tells a counter truth to dominant Australian narratives must be questioned, that the investment in ignorance must be possessively guarded.

The Common Units, with their open storytelling style, not only confronted that ignorance but actively dismantled it. When the audience is sitting through a performance based around massacres on cattle stations in the Northern Territory, there is a profound impact on, if not eradicating, of ignorance. Or when audience members watch a 'smash the Act' performance with a black Joh Bjelke Peterson and screaming protestors at the Commonwealth games, screaming students being dragged out of the classroom/stage by other students wearing police costumes, stage that right and all disbelief is suspended, the audience is emotionally engaged, the action

happening right there. Add to this the enactments of the histories of Pemulwuy, Jandamarra and the Freedom Rides, a life story of Sir Douglas Nicholls or William Cooper, Broome half caste girls home and so many stories of the stolen generations, of mothers losing their children or being in the detention centres called homes. I learnt so much from these stories.

All of these stories, communicated powerfully through performance, song and dance, change those that hear them, teach those who engage with them and confront those who don't want to hear them. The Common Units, Public Communication and Telling Histories, had eleven years of pushing the boundaries of ignorance possession. Whilst the Units may well have been dismissed as being trivial, not academic, not serving a real academic function, the stories and speeches told within the Units were less easily dismissed. Many staff just didn't attend the presentations, tried to boycott them so to speak. In fact we knew in advance who from the staff were going to come or not. However, even though they tried through avoidance to maintain their investment in ignorance, this also did not fully protect them as the students in their classes would talk of the performances as would other staff over lunch the next day. The word got around what the content of the performances or speeches were. These truths told at these times were inescapable. Momentarily within the Institute the central story being told was one of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievement, history, strength and survival. The classrooms and the offices had been hijacked and, whether it was one speech or story in particular that grabbed the audience's attention, the focus briefly was not on curriculum content or discipline specific knowledges that maintain the accustomed binary power relationships within the Institute, but all about First Nations peoples' strength, knowledge, stories and capacity. Conversations about

the amazing props, or the Islander dancing or the realistic spears spoke to a greater truth and it was all about the students' capacities and competence.

This ran contrary to other narratives that surround First Nations people. The gaze had shifted. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strength and competency were being displayed and this sat at odds with the hegemonic narrative. As such, it was mistrusted, denigrated and needing to be contained. The form of containment, and ultimately the Units demise, was enacted through the strategic use of western standards. The possessive investment in ignorance was displayed every time myself and my colleagues had to justify and defend the Units at all the forums described in the narrative chapter, with my senior lecturer telling me these Units were universally despised,

These Units were the flagship of Batchelor Institute for so many people and the bane and thorn in the 'hegemonic side' for so many more. The arguments that surrounded them were bigger than content, outcomes, standards. The animosity was larger than those lecturers seeking to protect their own disciplines by seeking to regain the 'loss' of 20 credit points in their degree taken up by these Units.

The argument that surrounded these Common Units centred on the right of Indigenous students at an Indigenous Institute to speak and to represent themselves. These Units and their outcomes ran contrary to white privilege and its pathologising narratives. The celebratory analysis and presentation that happened within these Units stood as a direct challenge to white privileging and notions of Aboriginal mimicry through assimilation. These Units demonstrated and celebrated First Nation

competency, not only in the high pass rates of students but in the very outcomes and challenges that the Units achieved. They ran counter to the ideology of whiteness.

The Common Units were in fact an anomaly in the broader body of Batchelor Institute and they weren't free of the white critical gaze. Questions were asked around why were the students doing so well? why were they working so late into the night and over the weekend? Concerns (if not fears) about this bustle of activity and energy were cloaked in queries around the need to improve students' essay writing skills and their introduction to the Harvard system of referencing versus author date.

Complaints were made about racism as we read a Malcolm X speech and the discomfort around the rallies, all masking the fact that these Units were successful but they didn't fit within the construction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being incompetent, or non attending, not able to achieve, not working late. All of these constructions were obliterated in the actual outcomes and achievements of the students within the Units.

The Common Units questioned the validity of the stereotypes that the dominant narratives had been constructed against. They were too successful.

So the Common Units, through their expressed intent, impacted upon the levels of ignorance that significant 'others' employed at the Institute had an investment in. The Units also undermined the hegemonic power imported into the Institute by saying, 'you may think this but you quite simply cannot deny the power of these stories and the work put in to the display of them'. Two weeks is all we had to change the world around us a little bit, but that's OK, that's all we needed, we were that good!

Chapter Eight Analysis: Graduation – interdiction as a slow denial of supplies

In this analysis of the Chapter eight narrative I am using the concept of interdiction in its military sense as distinct from its use in religious, sacred circles.

Graduations are undoubtedly a celebration of student achievement and success. The graduations at Batchelor Institute are no exception. These graduation ceremonies are, at their best, a unique blend of cultures that serve as an indicator of the Institute's relative strength culturally, in terms of Aboriginal leadership, governance and community participation. The internal tensions that I mentioned above in this chapter were played out on and in the Institute's graduation ceremonies. Here in the graduation ceremonies the vision and investment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Institute was played out publically against a mainstreaming agenda that was articulated through technical issues like confidentiality, time management and efficiency of proceedings that functioned to minimise public displays of community-based cultural knowledges. Again this internal conflict about who and what the Institute represents is publically expressed within this interdictory site; that is, the site of Indigenous students' graduation ceremonies. As the narrative in Chapter eight unfolded we saw a slow dilution that happened over time, a weakening of the expression of Indigenous cultural knowledge through dance, music and song just outside of our direct vision, again the sleight of hand trick. It is often only when a token of the former fuller expression of our cultural 'texts' is left or completely removed that you become aware of the erosion happening, but all too late.

Two cultures at war and the graduation ceremony becomes one of the interdictory sites and with all the efficacy of a well oiled military machine the interdictory starving of resources took place, a slow cutting off of supplies, so your enemy starves, to eradicate and reduce them. This interdiction has a slow crippling effect, gradually less and less you see yourself reflected until when you look the reflection is not yours anymore. The act of interdiction, to cut off supplies, manifested itself in this battle as the slow, eradicating and eroding of the right of Indigenous self-representation within graduation ceremonies, the right to practice and celebrate culture, to have autonomy over the form of the ceremony. The slow cutting off of the supplies that were part of the life blood of Aboriginal culture, took place through micro-aggressions that were slow and steady, yet stealth-like in nature, until suddenly bang, it's gone.

The interdiction that was spoken of in Chapter eight was the slow, insidious and culturally crippling interdiction of colonialism, hegemony and white privilege that fosters an ignorance of Aboriginal culture so that whiteness can remain strong, unseen and unquestioned. That yet again we see in the trajectory of the Institute's graduation ceremonies, strong public expressions of Aboriginal knowledge constructed in the white mind as exotic but not significant, peripheral to the main business, never at its core and ultimately needing to be expunged or retained as a muted token.

Chapter Nine analysis: The Desert Peoples' Centre opening ceremony

In Chapter nine we saw the narratives included in the thesis go a full circle. The dances that I was so vilified for in Chapter five became central to the strength of, and the key shapers of the character of the DPC opening ceremony. Though I didn't have the courage to perform in that public space, the performance of all these dances and songs spoke to a rewriting of the narrative of incompetence and non-relevance.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2006) writes of Patriarchal White Sovereignty and its need for control over all spaces. This moment then was a rupture to this entrenched form of white sovereignty. A recognition of old cultures is recognition on some level of First Nations sovereignty and its on going existence.

The opening ceremony was a statement of survival, of despite your best efforts First Nations cultures and knowledges in Australia are alive and well and not going away. Batchelor Institute, and its partner organisation, CAT, through the DPC opening, contracted to value these knowledges as a cornerstone of the future of the DPC. The cultural traditions of the people from Alice Springs and neighbouring nations in Central Australia was the strength that was needed to launch this new campus into existence and into the future. Not relegated to some anthropological paper in the past, this was culture alive and thriving, expressing from its deep well springs the old knowledge that informed and gave meaning to those dances and songs. This cultural bedrock was there for everyone to see and share in. Momentarily the critical gaze was again averted and the power of ceremony, as in the reading of high-status 'texts', was shared with everyone there. The generosity of the Elders was undeniable as they

invited everyone to come and share and draw upon the great strengths and depths of knowledge that exist within Central Australian First Nations people's culture.

The abiding belief that Central Australian people had in Batchelor Institute and CAT was also evidenced. The opening ceremony was a ceremony covering a great distance of country. I cannot think of any other educational organisations that could have organized this outcome. The goodwill shown towards the DPC by the Elders and performers was a tribute to how well received and how much needed both organisations are in the bush. It was also a testament to the wide reaching pull of the personal connections and familial relationships of staff and students at Batchelor Institute and CAT. This was a large operation that seamlessly guided the audience to a show of the strength and diversity within Central Australian cultures.

Common ground through celebration and ceremony was achieved. There seemed on the day to be no possessive investment in the space, no tensions around competing knowledges, no underlying judgements, no interdictory moments.

The integration of high-knowledge dance and song ceremonies from eight different Central Australian Aboriginal counties within the DPC opening ceremony grounded the new campus deeply within First Nations knowledges. It showed how when we do it the old way first it can be right the first time. But while Aboriginal culture by its very essence is inclusive and the DPC opening showed that within the western educational paradigm, or discursive arena of Academia, that there is room for First Nations knowledges, Aboriginal cultures also stress the importance of reciprocity. We give you this gift through ceremony but with the expectation that you will fulfill your

side of the contract. In other words, there is an expectation that you (Batchelor Institute and CAT) will reciprocate. The DPC opening ceremony held within it a binding contract to be honoured. That contract requires that, for Batchelor Institute, the arrogance of ignorance must be re-translated into a new paradigm of inclusive First Nations tertiary education, a paradigm beyond the binaries crippling the best intentions in this field to date. For me the DPC opening ceremony spoke this message. Has it been heard? Can we respond with integrity?

In the next and final section of this chapter, where I enter into my third level portrayal, I will go further into the invisibility of whiteness and its privileges. But for now I want to leave on the celebratory note of strength, survival and the undeniable existence of Aboriginal deep culture in Australia and its role in contemporary society. We are still here!

Third Level Portrayal: a Meta-analysis of the five narratives

Interdiction happens when conflict exists between two opposing forces, one powerful with the capacity for destruction and one less powerful, but powerful enough to create an interdictory site. Interdiction doesn't happen between a powerful and a non-powerful presence that is simply colonization, conquest, defeat, subjugation. An interdictory site by its nature involves fear, fear of a loss of privilege and power by the more dominant force. We have seen this played out in my narrative accounts included in this thesis. An interdictory site also involves mimicry as a potential outcome for the less powerful. My argument is that we can move beyond this oppressive outcome as First Nations peoples with retained power sourced from our own cultural knowledges and heritages.

Batchelor Institute itself is an interdictory site, full of internal conflicts and competing agendas. The battle to provide western education while affirming Indigenous identities is met with a hidden underlying desire of maintenance of white privilege and ignorance. This battle is fought out across campuses and in the classrooms. The possessive investment in ignorance is not universal; it is not felt by all non-Aboriginal people but the benefits that come from structural white privilege are. This possessive investment in ignorance and the white privileges that flow from it are fundamental to the creation of Batchelor Institute as the interdictory site, the site of conflict between two opposing forces. Our bodies and the classrooms then become the battlefield. This battlefield encompasses the sacred space of western academia.

Becoming a member of the western academy has always had initiatory rites to enter, but we now see these rites as more than just an entry process; they become the benchmarks and goal posts of exclusion based, not on knowledge, but on race and cultural heritage. The keepers of this sacred space will allow entry, but entry is only allowed within its own sacred terms; entry into this world is built upon disavowal. You must give up part of yourself in order to be allowed entry and participation. When Aboriginal people then enter this world, what is it that is disavowed? We have seen the consequences of maintaining a strong Indigenous identity within this sacred space both in Chapters five and six. In the Chapter five narrative the consequences were personal and threatening to my identity. In the Chapter six narrative the consequences were many. Academic positions lost, Council restructured and organisational transformation stymied. This was a large and obvious response to a rupture to the trajectory of the Institute to become a truly First Nations tertiary

Institute. It was also a large and obvious response to the rupture to the sacredness of maintaining the Academy as a white space, a white space with a shallow tokenism towards Indigenous cultural knowledges.

My concern now is to postulate on how we can build beyond the tokenism of the past. My thesis supports the insight of Audre Lorde (1984)

For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.
They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but
they will never enable us to bring about genuine change (Lorde,
1984, p. 112).

This quote has almost become too famous it is used at every feminist explanation of difference or possibilities of different ways. But I ask you where can it be applied better than in the context of Batchelor Institute's rise and fall? Why do we keep looking to the master's tools to dismantle the house that is oppressing us? Why when we have an alternative; trust in culture, trust in the strength of our convictions and in our old and new 'old' ways (Arbon, 2008)? We have the oldest continuing culture in the world. This means we have the oldest continuing education system in the world. The Common Units show us that it is possible in a diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander classroom to have effective inclusive Indigenous education in a higher education setting. Payi Linda Ford showed us that it is possible to build a whole curriculum around First Nations Knowledge in Higher Education (Ford, 2006).

The early graduations before the reversion to more western ceremonial formats (Chapter eight) and the DPC opening ceremony (Chapter nine) show us that when we

do trust ourselves, the connection to the deep wellspring of our cultural knowledges is ever available and always successful. As this thesis has shown, Batchelor Institute has had opportunities to step outside of this colonial mentality that manifest itself in the containment arguments around standards and competencies, to trust in our cultures. These cultures have never really let us down; they are there strong, constant always changing yet fixed in the earth and in ourselves. We, as the key stakeholders in the Institute, need to get back our pride in ourselves and in our educational place. We need to walk with our heads high and we need to trust in our difference, trust that it is only in celebrating our difference, not pretending sameness as in oppressive mimicry, that we can reclaim the Institute as a leading tertiary education provider to and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

For if the master's tools that bind us are whiteness and its privileges, ignorance and an investment in its maintenance, interdiction and subjection, subjugation and abjection, then how can we possibly dismantle the master's house? But also more importantly how can we construct our own house with those same tools, with those as our foundation? How can any aspirational program be constructed on such destructive foundations? What we have seen with Batchelor Institute is that without acknowledging these foundations and then attempting to build a new more inclusive Indigenous institution, internal interdictory conflicts will dismantle the new fragile entity itself in its very infancy. As with the Indigenous cultural standards initiative central to the narrative of Chapter six, any new initiative espousing First nations inclusivity, undertaken without heeding the above caveat, will be still born.

To build a new First Nations inclusive form of tertiary education we will need to remove the current ever-present fear of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in Australia. But to remove this fear, a fear built up through the decades of colonial laws and legislation informed by deliberate stereotyping and mistruths (as outlined in Chapter two) will require judicious strategic thought and action. Time and time again we have seen the generosity of First Nations Elders to share culture and stories and traditions. Time and time again we have seen these gifts of this generosity marginalized to the realm of the exotic - anthropological artifacts from another world, belonging to another place (Ford, 2006, p. 180 -181).

Whilst discussing with an Aboriginal colleague the first Batchelor Institute staff meeting for the introduction of Indigenous cultural standards into the Institute, she reflected that maybe Veronica and Berice should have had a smoking ceremony at the door. Cleansing everyone as they came in, thereby making the meeting room an Aboriginal space, demonstrating a significant Aboriginal custom. I initially dismissed this idea as a token gesture, a gesture that would have set the Institute's Aboriginal leaders up for mockery but in hindsight I now realize I was wrong. If, for example, this meeting, or a meeting like it, was held at the DPC and Arrente Elders were there smoking everyone (or some other welcoming ceremony according to cultural beliefs) and welcoming the Institute staff into this new-shared space, perhaps such a meeting would have unfolded differently. Then I wondered why I was instantly dismissive of this idea. Was it because I didn't trust my colleagues to participate and take seriously this important ritual or was it because I didn't trust the ritual to have the effect of marking the space as an Aboriginal space for Aboriginal new business?

On reflection I believe that a welcoming and cleansing ceremony would have changed the way that the meeting was received. It would have marked the space, in the case of a meeting located at DPC, as an Arrente space, on Arrente country imbued with Arrente knowledge. And it would have given a practical example for people from which to reference Veronica's knowledge and her proposal. By holding the ceremony to mark the occasion of moving towards a First Nations knowledge space, perhaps the participants would have felt an inclusive sense of obligation to take seriously the message contained in the proposal.

I have been thinking about what could have been achieved by holding a relevant Aboriginal ceremony at the beginning of this meeting that was about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge inclusion and a new way of working in Indigenous tertiary education in Australia. Reflecting on the threat that Indigenous ceremony posed to white privilege in Chapter five and on the inclusive and celebratory experience of the DPC opening ceremony in Chapter nine with its sharing of high First Nations knowledge, I now wonder what would happen if similar ceremonies and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges contained therein underpinned every unit of study within an Indigenous Tertiary Institute? Could First Nations ceremonies and knowledges be the beginning point for a unit to unfold from? I wonder also about what would happen to the power binary and to ignorance if whiteness and its privileges were exposed. Exposed through a learning environment, prefaced by ceremony, in which First Nations cultures and their strengths are explored? I cannot think of a single unit covered within mainstream education that cannot be represented and launched through song, painting, dance, speech, story or ceremony.

If you would have told me at the early stages of writing this thesis that I would be saying First Nations ceremonies would be integral to a new form of Indigenous tertiary education I would have laughed. But through the telling of these stories, and writing and reflecting throughout my doctoral journey, this is a point I have reached. I now understand inclusive First nations education as an education unencumbered by binary thinking, that exposes white privilege and ignorance, that tells the truth about our history and that privileges First Nations knowledge as being relevant and integral. It is through ceremony that significant First Nations knowledge metaphors can be released into the learning environment to then provide meta-frames for inclusive knowledge work. It is through ceremony that the sacred territory of tertiary curriculum and pedagogy can be redefined, all within an accompanying exposure of whiteness and an unveiling of its sustaining companion – ignorance.

The interdictory site at Batchelor Institute finds its roots in the internal conflict between the vision statement of strengthening Indigenous identity and the actual practising of possessive investments in ignorance to maintain white privilege. This has meant that the Institute was effectively at war with itself and the best possible outcome to emerge from this conflict was mimicry - an ‘almost but not quite’ form of western education. In 2004 / 2005 Batchelor stood at an intersection, on a precipice about to launch itself as a truly independent Institution that had at its core Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being accommodating western ways of knowing embedded within that strong Indigenous core. We saw the rupture to that process when white privilege was threatened as narrated in this thesis.

Batchelor Institute, or a similar body, has to deal with the interdictory site, the competing agendas, because it cannot be both partly white and partly First Nations because the structural asymmetries will always see whiteness with all of its power and privilege dominate. How do we reverse the structural asymmetry to privilege a non-western way of knowing and seeing so that the power isn't always pulled one way but rather find a real place in the middle of the two circles that Veronica was talking about in Chapter six. Maybe the real place is not in the middle but in our own circle now enriched, according to our own cultural standards, through contemporary sources of knowledge from across the world.

Whilst Batchelor Institute maintains this internal conflict, sustained through whiteness, ignorance, interdiction and subjection, subjugation and abjection, it will remain a mimic institution. We need to explicitly acknowledge the roles played by white privilege and the possessive investment in ignorance. We need to celebrate not fear traditional culture in these contemporary times as it has always been our strength. Trusting in ourselves is one part of the picture. The next steps are harder to realize. These will require deeper critical reflection and critique informing strategic and judicious actions based on an agreed common agenda; reflection on and actions towards the establishment of a new form of Indigenous inclusivity in tertiary education.

These steps will be counter to the grand narrative of white superiority so entrenched within all Australian institutions and standing as the benchmarking mirage to mimical Indigenous organisations. Watson (2009) puts the point in the following terms:

The foundation for the Australian colonial project lies within an 'originary violence' in which the state retains a vested interest in maintaining the founding order of things. Inequalities and iniquities are maintained for the purpose of sustaining the life and continuity of the state (p. 45).

Indigenous community controlled organisations or bodies must seek to tell a different version of our truth.

This telling has been central to my thesis.

In my version of history as narrated in this thesis, Batchelor Institute had strong First Nations governance and was positioned to be the one Institute in this country that could have created a counter narrative, a narrative that privileged First Nations People's worldviews. Batchelor Institute was poised to become a site that celebrates who we are, what we have done, a site that doesn't shy away from our lived realities and histories but celebrates our resistance and continued survival. Batchelor Institute was on the threshold of becoming a site where real discussions and debate around Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges could happen between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, where discussions around being a Torres Strait Islander person were welcomed. Where difference is celebrated not feared.

With the insights from my analysis and argument presented in this thesis, I am claiming that we will be better prepared when the opportunity next presents itself.

Chapter 11: Conclusion to the Research Study.

As outlined in the introductory chapter of this thesis I was motivated to undertake this doctoral research study by the end of the 2000's decade implosion of Batchelor Institute, an Institute for which I had, and still have, a great love and commitment.

I wanted to reflect on 'what could have been' and to understand more deeply 'why not'. As forecast in its introduction, my thesis charts my reflective journey towards an understanding.

My research focus throughout this study has been to research the struggle to transform Batchelor Institute, as Indigenous tertiary institution with vision statements to value and respect Indigenous cultures and knowledges, into a more authentic First Nations educational provider in the period prior to its implosion. The personal narratives in Chapters five to nine have provided a database from which to analyse and come to a deeper understanding of this potentially transformative struggle.

My analysis of these five narrative accounts was informed firstly by an overview of Australia's pattern of legislation in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy, From this standpoint my analysis drew on a theoretical framework supported by literature in the broad field of race-based oppression. The touchstones of my theoretical framework were whiteness theory with an emphasis on ignorance,

mimicry, the continuum from subjection through to abjection, and the dual components of interdiction – protection of the sacred and repulsion via resource starvation. This framework provided me with a language to describe and come to understand the complexities facing First Nations leaders and their communities as they struggle to re-invent Indigenous education within established institutions. The third level analysis concluding the previous chapter provides a full explication of this new understanding.

This explication, carried by the language of my analytical framework, underpins a new and powerful approach to break through the shackles of well meaning but stultifying binaries that have hindered our progress towards inclusive forms of First Nations education in Australia to this point in our colonial history. This explication, as a guide for transformative work, provides a liberating way for First Nations academics, educators and community leaders to work together on the implementation of this inclusive Indigenous educational project.

I conclude my thesis with a set of principles, arising as recommendations supported by my research, to guide such inclusivity projects.

Principles for the Creation of Inclusive Education for First Nations Students and their Communities

The following principles are a summation of the outcomes of my doctoral study and are presented here as a challenge to and a guide for further productive work in the

field of First Nations education that has our cultures, traditions, knowledges and ontologies at its core.

Principle 1: There is no deep internal conflict over the vision of an inclusive Indigenous education program and its actualization.

Principle 2: Privilege the vision as the organisation's common agenda- every action and decision should be working towards an agreed inclusive Indigenous education vision statement, from student travel, to administration to finance, to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; every person working within the educational organisation will know the vision statement and make decisions everyday to realize it.

Principle 3: White privilege and all its structural accompaniments must be made obvious, discussed and rectified as appropriate.

Principle 4: Ignorance and the possessive investment in maintaining it, whether conscious and unconscious, must be unveiled and explicitly addressed.

Principle 5: Introduce the concept of mimicry as an outcome of the assimilative intent of western education for Indigenous students and debate this concept with students and staff.

- Principle 6; Structural racism in all its forms including interdictory forms to be identified within the routine functioning of the organisation, discussed openly and addressed.
- Principle 7: Staff collectively talk honestly about their cultural conditioning, their need for cultural competency learning and how their cultural conditionings influence their roles within the organisation.
- Principle 8: Value and privilege First Nations knowledge not as a single token gesture but in meaningful ways within the unfolding of curriculum content and pedagogical practices.
- For example, have Kungkarakan and Arrente elders welcoming new students to country and then have ceremonies that represent and present individual discipline's knowledge through a First Nations worldview, thereby providing the overarching framework within which to learn the associated western understandings.
- Principle 9: Acknowledge the already vast knowledge that sits within the Academy from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and knowledge creators, both traditional Elders and contemporary academics. This is done as a ceremony acknowledging those that have come before us, our ancestors and academic predecessors.

- Principle 10: Acknowledge that we don't sit alone and that every Indigenous student entering into the academic arena does so in an Indigenous context and we celebrate that context by respecting and building on the knowledge embodied in each student.
- Principle 11: Acknowledge the Indigenous communities of Australia as the well springs of our knowledge through connectedness through ceremony and visiting Elders.
- Principle 12: Allocate financial resources adequately across all areas of the organisation in order to secure the inclusivity agenda in reality and to keep interdictory forces at bay.

Conclusion

I invite readers of this thesis to add to the above list of principles in order to further strengthen their endeavours to make inclusive First Nations Education a reality. My further hope is that my thesis will further energise the debate over, and the implementation of, more culturally authentic expressions of First nations Education. A further aim is that through this thesis I can give name to those moments that are felt but heretofore unnamed, the interdictory site, assimilative mimicry and the possessive guarding of ignorance have been felt since invasion but rarely named.

Appendix One

A Selection of Student Evaluations of Batchelor Institute's Common Units from 2005 to 2010

- Liked the course very much; we all supported one another; had the freedom to express ourselves; I would repeat it all if I could
- Empowering; learnt how to speak out; people power; better self-esteem; helped us in voicing our opinions
- Meeting new people; making new friends; meeting and listening to new people
- Learning about my people from all over the country; becoming part of the culture of my country people; brought a new hunger for my own people
- Strong content; interesting; unit guides were good
- Learning new things; brought new hunger for learning, listening is important
- Working in teams; building a team together; respect for each other; achieving goals as a team; thinking collectively as a group
- Doing the speeches; having the courage to get up and speak; standing in front of a crowd delivering a speech that was close to my heart; learning to be game
- Learning how to structure a speech; confidence in writing for the speech – using academic words
- How to speak with power and not rush it; learning to get the message across in blackfella way
- Doing the individual speech; feeling really nervous but did it – got over the nerves!
- Doing the banner – doing it as a team; the creative designing and painting in our people
- Doing the march; loved the march; holding the banners up, chanting out loud and feeling proud; doing the traditional dance in the march
- Was the groups inputs of everything
- Working with groups and group input for everything
- Meeting new people and new faces and making new friends
- Standing in front of the class and reading my speech
- Participate in my team effort
- I felt happy and strong about my individual speech in front of big groups
- The march and the speeches, make friends with the other ladies
- Finally getting my speech done and being team leader
- Joined a team of lovely women as team leader and thoroughly enjoyed the experience
- Asked for help when I usually don't
- Getting the confidence to do my speech in front of an audience
- Do my speech and the march and banner
- My individual speech as I have more confidence in myself now.

- Speech and march
- Group work and positive communication
- The banner
- Coming to Batchelor to study Language and Linguistics
- My individual speech/2/3/4
- Gained the courage to present my speech
- In giving my courage to present my speech
- Come to Batchelor
- Pick the group I was with
- Listening to speech's, found it very emotional but informative
- Being supporting to my group and others
- The things I like to talk about is when we meet other community people and talking and explaining the differences of the cultures.
- About this workshop it was good because we meet different students and learnt different things from each other.
- I learnt more about public communication
- I learnt more about the computers, about tutors and about where everything is.
- Quality of workbooks, just like working through the books. Practicing text patterns – interesting about the text patterns. Malcolm X speeches, he had it all, his speech was so powerful and clear that's what I like about his speech.
- Working in teams, group discussion and march on Thursday
- The group work and the ladies.
- Painting the banner and furthering my connection with remote women and learning more about their cultures
- Explanation of text patterns
- Learning new and different things – myself, gaining confidence – meeting new people
- Getting to work with different people and making a lot friends
- I liked all of the subjects for the two weeks I was here and I liked my team workers the Ngapa Gummoo team.
- The knowledge and help I received from others
- How we worked as a group, supported each other through our individual speeches
- Meeting students from all over Australia and all supporting each other.
- The banner
- The group work. The creation of the banner. The march. The diversity of the students, and learning to communicate with them.
- The banner
- Working in the group
- Meeting different Indigenous people and working with the All Sorts
- Learning the tools to speak better and the friendships formed during this course
- The team work, learning about text patterns, learning about public speaking, doing the banner.
- All Sorts, our team was awesome, all the different speeches
- I learnt more about people
- The knowledge I received from some of the younger students in my group
- Meeting and hearing other people's views and stories
- Working in groups and meeting new people and all working together
- The things I learnt is that we are one mob and are equal in many ways

- Hard part was the speech because it was my first time
- Was learning and sharing with others in the group and also working equally
- Relevance overall theme – public communication
- Culture, language, people.
- Things I learn in this workshop is what I didn't think I was going to learn but I find it very good about public communication so I can stand in public and talk and not be ashamed.
- Broader minded – on academic literacy, the formal language people use on their individual speech, team work and how to log into the computer.
- Importance of working together as a team and the Malcolm X speeches. Oh yeah and all the speech stuff, models, anti models etc; rhetoric stuff.
- I learnt that I know how Charles Perkins felt about protesting and the compassion one can feel when involved in our protest
- Self confidence and team work
- The structure of public speaking
- 1 structuring my speech with text patterns 2 to work more constructively within my group – not to give up
- To be confident, and text patterns
- I learnt some very interesting views on each and everyone of us in the class.
- How to write a speech, - The confidence to deliver my speech in front of an audience.
- To be more assertive in discussing issues that have been raised during the workshop
- That you are never too old to learn – listen – be educated
- That the art of communication is more complex than I realised. Communication is possible despite the differences in opinions or perceptions.
- Text patterns, doing the speech (how to do it)
- Better communication, better understanding, better listening
- How to speak up in a crowd and make sense of what I say and to get the message across fast and concise
- Different text patterns, how to write a speech
- How to write a speech, text patterns
- I learnt the writing process to help me through my own course of creative writing
- Learning how to put words together, that make a statement
- How to structure speeches that can be read and follow a sequence
- It's the same as what I've written over the page in my individual speech – Our community is what makes us who we are, gives us our strength, gives us our identity
- I like to come to Batchelor to achieve better goals in the future
- I like the course, I like how it is set up and also use of computers and tutors.
- I have really enjoyed it
- Where do we go from here
- I am really glad I did it. It has helped me enormously with my self esteem and cultural awareness
- More understanding of text patterns
- Thankyou
- I can stand up in front of 90 plus people and speak – smiley face

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