



The Indigenous Imaginary and Tertiary Institutions

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For Indigenous communities in colonized countries, education has been used as a weapon to silence their cultural practices, eradicate their ways of knowing, and forge their assimilation and subservience. Under the guise of protection, Indigenous children have been extracted from their communities, and Indigenous education has been supplanted with western curricula, teaching practices, learning outcomes, and pathways. In her discussion of Indigenous education prior to colonization, Joanne Archibald (1995), from the Stó:lō Nation and Professor Emerita at the University of British Columbia, commented that the western dismissal and mischaracterization of First Nations education have been used to justify assimilation, including residential schools. In contrast to such false and disparaging accounts, she recounts how Indigenous education was based upon principles (spiritual, physical, emotional, and economic) and methods that are holistic and experiential; individualized; and carefully sequential and systematic—with the support of the family and community, especially elders. Drawing upon a case study of the Stó:lō Nation of British Columbia, she stated:

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...educational expectations and the roles of all villagers were clearly defined and structured. Goals reflected the values of sharing, cooperation, and respect for the environment, oneself, and others. The curriculum content included training in cultural, historical, environmental, and physical (body) knowledge. Community members and the environment became teaching resources, individual empowerment in and responsibility for education created a lifelong learning process.... The educational process was not static; it allowed for adaptation to environmental change and outside cultural influences. These changes were controlled and directed by the Stó:lō people until the arrival of the missionaries. (Archibald, 1995, p. 292)

Similar colonizing forces were enlisted in other countries and perpetuated by a false deficit view of Indigenous culture and ways of knowing. As Australian Aboriginal author Bruce Pascoe (2014) lamented in the conclusion of his book, *Dark Emu*, Australian Aboriginal ways of knowing were destroyed, displaced, and hidden by the British colonialists:

It seems improbable that a country can continue to hide from the actuality of its history in order to validate the fact that having said sorry, we refuse to say thanks. Should we ever decide to say thanks, the next step on a nation's moral agenda is to ensure that every Australian acknowledges the history and insists that, as we are all Australians, we should have the opportunity to share the education, health and employment of that country on equal terms. To deny Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders agricultural and spiritual achievement is the single greatest impediment to the intercultural understanding and perhaps, to Australian moral wellbeing and economic prosperity. (pp. 228–229)

In the last fifty years, momentum for change has been gathering globally and within nations. Globally, the United Nations (UN) has produced a different imaginary through a number of declarations that have challenged current Indigenous circumstances with regard to human rights and freedoms. The UN declaration of Education for All, ratified in 1990, proclaimed education as a basic right for all anchored in respect for culture. It outlines the “responsibility to respect and build upon their collective cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage, to promote the education of others, to further the cause of social justice, to achieve environmental protection, to be tolerant towards social, political and religious systems which differ from their own” (United Nations, “Article 1,” 1990). In a similar vein, the pursuit of cultural ways of knowing is consistent with the UN Declaration of Human Rights for Indigenous Persons (2006), which declares Indigenous persons’ right to self-determination (Article 3); their right to establish and control Indigenous education systems tied to language and culture (Article 14); and Indigenous rights relative to traditional knowledge (Article 31). Befittingly, Indigenous considerations have also infiltrated discussions pertaining to global ecology

matters.¹ The UN has made clear the importance of the support and revitalization of languages and local knowledge in the interest of the planet's ecology and in the potential for addressing environmental disasters.

Furthermore, comparisons afforded by international benchmarking have exposed the shameful disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. In Canada and Australia, for example, comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities suggest major failures as well as the systemic oppression of Indigenous populations (in terms such as education, health, and other indicators of wellbeing, including income and incarceration rates). Consequently, governments have been forced to reconsider their Indigenous engagements—instigating policies that have provided incentives and sometimes mandates for change. These initiatives have led to quite mixed and often questionable results, as many seem to remain tethered to a colonial, assimilative sensibility rather than aligned with Indigenous tenets of respect, recognition, reciprocity, and relevancy. (Indeed, governments seem to be states of upheaval, as social movements including Black Lives Matter and the Uluru Statement, along with commitments to Reconciliation, have drawn attention to systems and practices that perpetuate racism and inequities.) The 2021 Australia Day comments offered by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison that seemed to commiserate with the British convicts arriving with the First Fleet—without acknowledging the genocide and continuing dismissive, assimilative practices against Aborigines—represent the lag in progress on addressing these matters.² They portend the reluctance of current political leadership to reconcile with past genocide and pursue a different course with respect to Aboriginal rights, freedoms, and equality.

As a means of illustration, consider the circumstances of Indigenous developments in Australia at the tertiary level for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders beginning with some historic background and then focused upon recent developments using one of Australia's premier and first university as a case study.

AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS DEVELOPMENTS

For Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the effects of westernization immediately followed the arrival of the British on the eastern shores in 1770. Befitting the imposing nature of western science, a botanist on board James Cook's ship was quick to take samples of the land—labeling and categorizing the plant life as well as the places and animals that they encountered. In conjunction with their imperialistic claim to Australia as a British colony, they declared Australia as *Terra Nullius*—"land belonging to no one;" unoccupied; and uninhabited—despite the presence of Aboriginal communities with sophisticated systems of governance and flourishing societies. The western colonization of Australia occurred almost immediately thereafter, with the subsequent arrival of a fleet of British soldiers and convicts. Their approach to colonization involved a combination of efforts to exterminate or assimilate

Aboriginal communities, displacing the importance of Aboriginal knowledge, literacies, and languages. The colonists did so with little regard for the ecology of a country where Aboriginal peoples had thrived for at least 50,000 years.³

For political reasons, the colonists and settlers kept the world ignorant of Aboriginal communities—and their resistance to colonial rule—as they proceeded to proselytize, assimilate, annihilate, subordinate, and enact the forced removal of Aboriginal peoples from their lands (Willmot, 1987). Behind the British flag and under the banner of religion, they separated children from their communities to reeducate them in western traditions, thereby displacing or silencing Aboriginal practices. Their approach to colonization blatantly refrained from intercultural relationship-building; instead, they pursued the extermination of the Aboriginal culture (Rizvi, 2021) and by their ignorance devastating the lands that Aboriginal communities tilled and harvested with crops (Pascoe, 2014). As Morgan et al. (in press) note, the ongoing British occupation has altered a society that was rich in literacies, with hundreds of languages, to a present population (now a fraction of its size prior to colonization) that has very few remaining languages and traditions.⁴ Colonizing forces privileged anglophone knowledge and practices while taking control of or eliminating or erasing others (Hong, 2008). Essentially, the colony was intended to serve the interests of the empire (Connell, 2019; Nozaki, 2009). Nowadays, despite recognition of Australia's multiculturalism, populism related to nationalism—together with monolingualism and xenophobic tendencies—seems to serve as continuing justifications for dismissing Aboriginal cultural practices and opposing Indigenous sovereignty, or “*sui generis*,” along with culturally reciprocal forms of Indigenizing education (Rigney et al., 2015).

If engagement in tertiary education is enlisted as a proxy for the advancement of Australian Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, the results to date are dismal and alarming. Despite the investments and vocal support for social inclusion and diversity, the Australian government and Australian universities seem to be falling short in achieving social inclusion targets. By retaining restrictive forms of gatekeeping and maintaining forms of enculturation, they seem dominated by approaches that keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students excluded, marginalized, or assimilated. An interrogation of the data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' participation suggests that the methods to address and improve the educational experiences and learning outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are perpetuating a form of western status quo (resulting in a disproportionately low percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students completing high school, performing well on national and international tests, and being awarded places in universities). Viewed through a prism of access, participation, and success at the tertiary level, the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students falls significantly below the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the general population (i.e., participation at the tertiary level

is 1%, compared with 4% of the general population); additionally, the graduation rates fall significantly below those for non-Indigenous students. According to the government-commissioned report, *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (IHER, 2012), tertiary institutions in Australia are failing and remain far behind those in countries such as United States, Canada, and New Zealand—despite years of funding universities to increase enrolments and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. As the report’s authors commented:

Despite significant progress in recent decades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain significantly underrepresented in Australian universities. The important milestones in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education, such as the first Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student to receive a degree from an Australian university or the graduation of the first Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander doctor, came nearly a century after other countries with similar colonial histories, such as the United States, Canada and New Zealand.

The Panel believes that this disadvantage comes at a cost not only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but also to the nation in terms of opportunities lost. (IHER, 2012, p. 4)

Taken together, the situation in Australian tertiary institutions befits the mantra of assimilation and non-recognition of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty in the interests of perpetuating the social reproduction of western privilege for those of Anglo-Saxon heritage. When confronting university administrators at the executive level with the possibility of complicity with social reproduction, the responses have been flaccid suggesting the acceptability of their privileged traditions and the reasonableness of placing reputation of the university ahead of social responsibility and cultural responsiveness using arguments for objectivity and culturally free approaches as rational, preferred, and legal defensibility to justify their complicity. Indeed, the strategy taken by most Australian universities is consistent with a view that universities will identify and serve the needs of those exceptional Aboriginal students who perform well on traditional high school tests of western knowledge and provide some support for them to perform well at university without a substantial respect or regard for building upon their background of experiences or cultural knowledge.

The positioning of Indigenous knowledge ignores its vital role in Aboriginal people’s lives. Marie Battiste (1998), from the Potlotek First Nations in Nova Scotia, has suggested that in Canada, as in Australia, the notion that Eurocentric knowledge and concepts are better and should be considered universal is a form of cognitive imperialism. Educational tests mask their Eurocentric features behind labels such as “culturally-free” or “unbiased.” Students from diverse backgrounds who are identified as falling behind may find themselves receiving a narrower curriculum, caught in a corrupt cycle of prescribed

learning (often devoid of cultural considerations). This positioning of Indigenous knowledge ignores its vital role in Aboriginal people's lives. As Australian Aboriginal leader Bob Morgan (2019) noted, being an Australian Aboriginal is akin to being an Indigenous stranger in one's own land—reflective of a “guest paradigm” in which colonizers advance scholarly venues, educational systems, and cultural norms with which non-westerners and Indigenous people are expected to align. As a 2017 report by the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs poignantly declared, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders do not feel

... (a) sense of belonging when at school. This is because they attend schools that do not accept the relevance of, or acknowledge, understand or celebrate their culture, which results in children not feeling culturally safe. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, 2017, p. 43)

Unfortunately, if you examine the circumstances more closely tertiary institutions often have pursued approaches that have been directed at relegating Indigenous engagements to a minor or aligned with the status of a stepchild or outlier while maintaining the status quo of a western primacy. Take if you will the record of the University of Sydney, which dates back over 150 years.

The University of Sydney

Founded in 1850, the University of Sydney was Australia's first established university and is one of the historic “sandstones,” or elite Group of Eight (Go8), universities. The University is located on the traditional lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. Traditionally these lands were regarded as a site for exchanges among Aboriginal communities around the water springs in the area. It was also a burial site for Aboriginal people, usually in trees positioned alongside of what is now the University of Sydney's main quadrangle and Great Hall. Notably, it is situated on the edge of what is now the downtown of Sydney, adjacent to Redfern, Newtown, and Glebe—suburbs that include the largest urban Aboriginal population that flowed to the city from various rural and interstate clans.

The University of Sydney claims of commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders might be supported by its role in the matriculation of one of Australia's first Aboriginal graduates (Charles Perkins, who graduated from the university in 1966) and the launching in 1989 of one the first Aboriginal and Torres Islander centers at an Australian university (the Koori Center). But recent reviews of their commitment suggest limited progress in terms of accessibility and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation as students, staff, or faculty hires. If their approaches to Indigenous ways of knowing are examined, their programs seem anemic and subordinative. Their interfacing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society seems detached and patronizing.

Despite claims of significant increases, the overall percentage of Aboriginal- and Torres Strait Islander-enrolled students remains close to 1% across the university, statistically comparable with the national average enrollment for tertiary institutions but well below the overall 4% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the nation (The University of Sydney, 2017, 2020; Tierney et al., 2010a, 2010b). For example, in its 2021–2024 strategy report, *One Sydney, Many People*, the University of Sydney (2020) acknowledged that it “has a lower proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (0.9%) than the Australian sector (average 1.72%). The University is currently placed 7th amongst its Group of Eight (Go8) peers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation” (p. 14).

The data in terms of participation across faculties are also quite troubling. The enrollment pattern at the University of Sydney suggests that faculties in the Health Sciences and Education account for many more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrollees than other faculties. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in agricultural, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy, science, and engineering are very limited. And, regardless of the faculty, it is striking how few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been enrolled in research degrees (0.06% of the total number of students enrolled, with the majority of faculties with either one or no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander enrollees). Adding to this bleakness, the University focuses a significant amount of research on Aboriginal matters—conducted predominately by non-Aboriginal scholars.

As one might predict, there is a strong correlation between Aboriginal student participation and staffing. The percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across faculties as administrators and other personnel is very low. Indeed, there is a chronic shortage of general and academic staff that identify as Aboriginal, despite targeted employment pursuits (including the hiring of an Aboriginal Deputy Vice Chancellor). While University enrollment is approximately 50,000 students (2:1 in terms of the proportion of undergraduate to postgraduate students), the total number of academics over the past ten years has been approximately 3000–3500, and the number of general staff has been approximately 3500–4000 (The University of Sydney, 2015). The number of those academic and general staff who are Indigenous has remained at approximately 1%. According to the University’s 2016 Annual Report, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employed within the University was 84 (65.39 full-time equivalent positions), with 21 targeted positions that would increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander overall to slightly more than 1% (The University of Sydney, 2017, p. 28). While a number of universities seem to be on the verge of enacting plans for significant hiring, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff has failed to be realized. As the *One Sydney, Many People* strategic plan acknowledged: “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, both professional and academic,

are under-represented at the University, with only 1.2 percent of staff identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander” (The University of Sydney, 2020, p. 15).

Indigenous Ways of Knowing at the University of Sydney

Alongside undertaking various reviews of their support services and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, the University of Sydney has proffered various strategies. However, an analysis of these initiatives suggests that the strategies have historically had and continue to have a reverence for mainstream Australia, aligned with western traditions rather than being respectful of or relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and ways of knowing. Despite widely-touted Indigenous strategic initiatives, the University of Sydney’s approach has been tempered in terms of its acknowledgment and support of Indigenous communities and ways of knowing. It might be viewed as more “talk” and “show” than “walk” and “empowerment.”

For example, in 2012 the University initiated the Wingara Mura-Bunga Barrabugu Strategy (The University of Sydney, 2020; see also The University of Sydney, 2019). This program touts the University’s ambitions to support diversity, but in a fashion that suggests a new narrative for all Australians without regard for the existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. It is as if there exists a new convenience that excludes and displaces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in service to a broader cultural milieu of diversity—one that is actually assimilative and subordinating. Despite more Aboriginal course offerings and an integration of Aboriginal matters into coursework, Aboriginal culture remains secondary and dominated by an overall allegiance to western traditions.

More recently, the University’s 2020 strategic plan for 2021–2024 entitled, *One Sydney, Many People*, outlines a number of initiatives that suggest an enhanced and renewed commitment to addressing the shortcomings of the University’s pursuits to date. It promises a stronger commitment to integrating Aboriginal perspectives, ways of knowing and practices in a fashion that the University refers to as “authentic,” with dedicated offerings as well as pathways and access points for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Yet, in conjunction with these goals, the University has pursued campus-wide initiatives that are intended to heighten cultural understandings pertaining to a broad vision of diversity. As its National Centre for Cultural Competence (the NCCC, a joint venture between the University and the Australian government for \$AU 5.6 million) states:

We develop knowledge and build capacity in cultural competence across a range of social domains. The NCCC has initially prioritized the growth of student, staff and community cultural competence. Our broader perspective is forming national and international partnerships, initiating dialogues and implementing initiatives to improve educational, economic, cultural and social outcomes throughout society. (NCCC, 2021)

Essentially, it is as if a banner of “cultural competence” instantiates a vision of culture that overshadows Indigenous considerations, reconciliation, and advancement. The University of Sydney’s approach seems aligned with a western image of multiculturalism that shapes the image of “others.” Indeed, the University of Sydney’s motto, “Sidere mens eadem mutato,” reflects the singularity of this orientation. Its many translations are all tied to a single model of the mind—namely, “the stars change, the mind remains the same;” “the constellation is changed, the disposition is the same;” or “the same learning under new stars” (The University of Sydney, 2021).

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Indigenous concerns seem to be relegated to the study of Aboriginality rather than being on an equal footing or substantially integrated into all studies. For instance, you might expect to see an expanded set of course offerings on Aboriginal matters in many degree programs, such as the Indigenous Studies degree within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (see: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences).⁵ Indeed, there will likely be the addition of units within areas targeted for early adoption of the strategy (e.g., Music, Science, and Law). But it remains to be seen if these developments will exist as parallel and somewhat separate, or viewed as equal to the pre-existing western traditions of teaching, research, and service pursuits. The rhetoric of the *One Sydney, Many People* strategy remains ambiguous:

We recognize that the exchange of knowledge, teaching and learning occurred on the Countries and places across the nation predating that of higher education institutions anywhere in the world. By expanding upon the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ knowledges, skills and understanding we honour the founding knowledge of the custodians of the land upon which the University’s campuses are situated. (The University of Sydney, 2020, p. 16)

...

As part of One Sydney, Many People, we will support curriculum owners to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values, culture and teachings across all faculties and schools. A range of models will be employed to facilitate innovative and culturally quality-assured representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges in curriculum, programs and courses. To ensure the successful delivery of these knowledges we will support development opportunities for teaching and research staff to be equipped to deliver Indigenous content appropriately and with an understanding of the ethical and other requirements of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and students. We will commence this work with the Faculty of Science, The University of Sydney Law School and Sydney Conservatorium of Music. (University of Sydney, 2020, p. 16)

It is notable that the umbrella notions of “one” and “many” are enlisted in a fashion befitting the Australian government’s educational initiatives. That is, although the diversity of Australia, with over 400 language groups enrolled in schools, is acknowledged, the approach is streamed toward a largely monolingual education (Morgan et al., in press). In the University plan there is little mention of Aboriginal Languages, nor are there statements that would suggest building substantial connections to Aboriginal ways of knowing.

Engagements with Aboriginal Communities at the University of Sydney

The pivoting away from and failure to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander considerations more fully and in a transformative manner befit the sidelining of engagement with the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The University of Sydney has positioned itself alongside of these communities instead of being actively engaged with them. Despite the location of the University in the largest urban populations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia, only a few programs are engaged with those communities. Apart from programs offering community-based fieldwork, the University remains largely separate from Aboriginal communities—failing to engage in substantial partnerships let alone oversight involving Aboriginal community representatives. No one denies that for universities to move forward, the cultural mix of institutions needs to change. But such a need extends to the communities within which universities are located or are intended to serve.

Even for those faculties that may already have embraced community engagements, the path is not straightforward. This was illustrated well in a 2012 study sponsored by the Australian Council of Deans of Education, which looked at the preparation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers across Australia (Lambert & Burnett, 2012; Patton et al., 2012). While this research suggests success in attracting Indigenous students to teacher education programs, it also—with few exceptions—points to a failure to address a range of Indigenous issues in these programs, as well as a failure to address Indigenous teachers’ experiences of racism upon entering the profession. Across the various teacher education programs in Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander failure levels are aggregated at approximately 70%.⁶ While the University of Sydney teacher education program has had more success in terms of graduation rates of Aboriginal students, many of the students in the program have felt as though they did not belong and express a sense of alienation alongside those they perceive to be their privileged “white” students. Many of them struggle to meet the demands of a university that seems fitted to the life of those full-time students who have few other commitments and easy access to resources that enable them to invest fully in teacher preparation (Chambers, 2012).

The interface of these failings with the broader circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders throughout Australia should not be dismissed. For example, teacher education programs might aspire to prepare teachers

with the disposition, talents, and knowledge to make schools places that are “culturally safe” (Papps & Ramsden, 1996) and bridge between the communities and their students. However, most surveys of teachers suggest that they lack the knowledge and strategies to accommodate the Indigenous students they encounter, whether they are teaching these students in urban or remote settings (Luke et al., 2012). As a number of Indigenous scholars stress, without more substantial development of teachers’ understandings of the communities that they serve, they will likely fall back to mainstream and “white”-informed practices (Phillips, 2011; Phillips et al., 2007; Prior, 2009; Smith, 1999, 2005, 2015).

The University of Sydney and many other tertiary institutions seem tethered to their allegiances to western traditions and a view of their exclusivity and superiority. The predisposition to partially integrate Aboriginal matters and ways of knowing seems to treat them as objects of study rather than key vehicles and lenses for a world conceived of as equal. Tertiary institutions seem to be having difficulty bridging from creating centers devoted to Indigenous support to more university-wide, transformational change. The adoption of the Indigenous commitments and units of study seem isolated and, in some cases, seem to default to a generic, uniform approach to diversity. The integration of some elements, in other words, is often overshadowed by an overall assimilative orientation (i.e., a reverence for western ways of knowing and a subordination of Indigenous elements and focus).

Indeed, the status quo in most Australian universities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outreach appears based upon a reverence for a western mainstream. At the point of recruitment, there is a focus upon the use of traditional measures of performance without regard for non-western cultural engagements. In terms of what counts as participation, there appears to be a bias toward a westernized mainstream curricula and a monolingualism tied to English—befitting what Morgan et al. (in press) described as a generally muffled background of xenophobia. There is a tendency to underscore the genuineness and authenticity of the approach while refraining from elevating Aboriginal ways of knowing to equal status. Aboriginal matters remain at the discretion of traditional forces within the university. One should be careful not to equate signage and spaces, especially dedicated museum space, with significant change or equal footing for Aboriginal matters (see Fordham & Schwab, 2007; Rigney, 2011; Rigney & Hattam, 2018).

MOVING FORWARD

The privileged position of Western epistemologies is deeply embedded within a number of western universities. It is supported by a number of internal and external support systems that block, mute, or fuse change in ways that ensure the reproduction of western domination. This should not be surprising, given the stakes and the shifts required to change. Epistemological accommodation

involves wrestling with issues as formidable as re-naturalization, the revitalization of language, the re-establishment of organic pursuits, an awareness and respect for cultural ways of knowing, and the repeated leveraging of a future educated by the past (but not stuck in it). Epistemological change requires all parties to commit to interrogating, challenging, and perhaps shifting their values, practices, and privileges.

In the New Zealand context, for example, despite Maori leaders being able to leverage changes to ensure and advance some foundational rights and protocols (stemming from the Treaty of Waitangi, first signed by the British and Maori chiefs in 1840), Maori efforts at tertiary institutions have often confronted opposing forces, fear, and a failure to recognize the forms of aspirational, transformative change being pursued. Unfortunately, the past privilege of mainstream circumstances often impedes progress and results in forms of obstructionism or compromised approaches. Indigenous engagements have faltered due to tertiary institutions' efforts to wed their colonizing pasts with an imaginary, decolonized future. Sometimes universities position approaches in ways that maintain the status quo. As Sharon Stein (2017) notes, universities perpetuate a form of subordination of Indigenous engagements, which enables

... the rest of the institution to largely continue reproducing the status quo. By granting conditional inclusion without also substantively redistributing resources, decentering whiteness, or shifting other disciplines' curricula, universities largely left in place existing institutional hierarchies of knowledge and indeed of humanity (Ferguson, 2012). Today these interdisciplinary fields consistently face de-/underfunding, forced consolidation, or even termination.... (Stein, 2017, p. S36)

One would hope that universities were politically independent—not shaped by the same hierarchical forces that are aligned with colonization. Indeed, in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and some other countries (e.g., Norway, India, and China), a number of independent Indigenous tertiary institutions have been established with a strong commitment to connecting with local communities. For these independent universities—disillusioned by the sense of alienation and removal experienced at mainstream western institutions—connections with community have been shown as key to their sustainability and the realization of educational pursuits that resonate with cultural practices and ways of knowing (Barnhardt, 1991).

Various forms of affiliations have also been shown to be key. For example, some programs act akin to satellite programs within Indigenous communities, maintaining connections to other universities to enable the completion of programs and provide a fuller set of offerings. These affiliations can be mutually beneficial by supporting transactions across institutions that are respectful and affording fusions that are synergistic. Other affiliations have involved graduate study collaborations in which Indigenous faculty come together to

support various cohorts from different universities. In New Zealand, this model was the basis for the successful pursuit of 500 Maori doctorates in 5 years. In Canada, it served as the basis for the SAGE initiative across British Columbian universities. Some universities have also established centers devoted to supporting Indigenous students and initiatives, with strong ties and mandated commitments to the communities that they serve (e.g., First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia, or the Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle). Although still dependent upon the good will of tertiary institutions, such centers have served as vital links and leaders in their communities.

CLOSING

The advancement of Indigenous developments in tertiary institutions are not minor shifts, nor are they straightforward—especially given the extent to which faculty may have privileged western norms and be ignorant of Indigenous matters. Without an orientation and set of values and understandings tied to cultural mores, the path forward continues to be challenging. Wittingly or unwittingly, the education system seems complicit in perpetuating these circumstances, especially through its adoption of certain curricula and assessment methods and the hierarchy it continues to impose. It seems most troubling that educators at the top of this institutional hierarchy (i.e., at universities) are partners in this.

Despite revering intellectual freedom and political independence, universities are not blameless. Historically, most western universities, touted as temples of learning, represent denominational allegiances. They espouse forms of education and scholarship dominated by European colonizing forces have an interest in re-socializing diverse populations in that image, and commodify or claim discovery of the knowledge of others. For Indigenous societies, educational institutions represent the vestiges of oppression, displacement, and assimilation that Indigenous educators and southern scholars have decried (e.g., Alfred, 2004; Barnhardt, 1991; Archibald & Hare, 2017; Ottmann, 2017). It is a colonial history of exclusion that has existed for at least six centuries (Stein, 2017). It is how education is used to advance the empire. As Willinsky (1998) postulated, it is to “make the whole of the world coherent for the West by bringing all we knew of it within the imperial order of things” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 11).

There might be a shift to a rhetoric of recognition, but the policies and practices of many colonizing nations fall short of transformative change befitting full recognition. In Australia, the government offered an apology, but still fails to recognize Aboriginal sovereignty. In Canada, the government has declared respect for Aboriginal rights of recognition and an education that builds upon their language and culture, yet with few exceptions, western education tenets remain dominant in such Indigenous education. Oftentimes

developments seem to ebb and flow—as if governments and the tertiary institutions in colonizing countries shift back and forth from an embrace of the possibilities to reluctance, again not willing to fully recognize Indigenous peoples, their ways of knowing or their rights. When measured against what Indigenous scholars refer to the 4 Rs—respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility—mainstream tertiary institutions fail on what they consider to be key tenets.

As past analyses indicate, Indigenous students often experience a sense of estrangement in mainstream Eurocentric tertiary institutions. They report experiencing a lack of respect, verging on racism; a failure to find content relevant to their experiences within their community; and a lack of regard for Indigenous ways of knowing (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2014; Anderson, 2011; Campbell et al., 2012; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, 2017). There seems to be a loss of community connections, and little recognition of Indigenous autonomy—let alone a balanced approach to teaching and learning wherein Indigenous interests are given equal status. It is as if despite a clear articulation of the importance of connections to community and the relevance of Indigenous ways of knowing, mainstream universities remain anchored in an assimilative orientation rather than an accommodative transformation. As Battiste (1998) stated almost 25 years ago:

The modern context of Eurocentrism is seriously endangering Indigenous knowledge and heritage. Rapid economic development guided by Eurocentric theories has subordinated the strategy of sustainable development. Eurocentric laws have denied equal protection of the law to Indigenous knowledge and heritage. Transforming any of the entrenched Eurocentric contexts will be difficult; yet such a transformation is a prerequisite to obtaining respect for Indigenous worldviews. The challenge of protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage requires the transformation of all these interdependent areas. This is a huge undertaking that will require concerted, comprehensive effort. It will require many generations working together with persistence. It will take vision, trust, and tolerance, which can be manifested by skilled diplomacy, strategic agreements, and deliberate commitments by all parties. Creating these transformations and respecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage is an intimidating task but a necessary goal for the end of colonialism and for the construction of postcolonial global and national orders. (Battiste, 1998, pp. 289–290)

While the rhetoric suggests a repositioning of Indigenous engagements within tertiary institutions (e.g., across institutions in Australia and Canada), institutional forces reflect a lack of commitment to Indigenous programs rooted in decolonial Indigenization. As Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) note, based upon interviews with Indigenous Canadian faculty members and allies, while they might envision a reorientation based upon a “dual university structure,” tertiary institutions and non-Indigenous faculty seem more interested in much

more modest models that increase inclusion of some content and more Indigenous enrollees. It is, as Morgan (2019) noted in Australia and Kuokkanen (2007) described for Canada, a discourse that befits a view of Indigenous staff and students as guests: “The academy represents itself as a welcoming host, but not without conditions. Indigenous epistemes are unconditionally welcome only to a handful of marginal spaces that are insignificant to the academy at large” (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 131).

NOTES

1. At various other UN gatherings on issues of diversity and ecology, such as the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity), there has been recognition of the importance of the Indigenous knowledge and their relationship with the land.
2. According to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Morrison commented: “When those 12 ships turned up in Sydney all those years ago, it wasn’t a particularly flash day for the people on those vessels either” (Harris & Nicolussi, 2021, para. 5). Such commemoration in defense of Australia Day diverges with the view held by many that this moment represents an Invasion.
3. Based upon research at a number of archeological sites (e.g., Nauwalabila I in the Northern Territory), it is generally believed that there is evidence of Aboriginal communities and culture dating as far back as 65,000 years.
4. This is a consequence of schooling, which has also become increasingly disconnected from Aboriginal lives. Nevertheless, recent research suggests that the stability of populations, the development of rich narrative cultures, and culture-specific mechanisms of intergenerational transmission have combined to make Australian Aboriginal people the custodians of the world’s oldest orally-transmitted memories. These include recording, for instance, late-Holocene inundations of the continental shelf that occurred about 10,000 years ago (Nunn & Reid, 2016), a narrative feat of human memory probably unparalleled on other continents.
5. The Aboriginal studies degree includes a focus upon, as they state:
 - *Contemporary and traditional Indigenous Australian cultures, cosmologies, and societies.*
 - *The centrality of Indigenous cultural integrity, cultural wellbeing, and cultural expression.*
 - *How and why contemporary Indigenous cultures continue to flourish despite the impacts of colonisation, dispossession, and the trauma of assimilation.*
 - *The various phases and critical issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, politics, and cultural development.*

- *Connecting traditional and contemporary Indigenous knowledge and narratives to a range of key disciplinary issues.*
- *The students can choose to focus upon.*
- *Traditional and contemporary Indigenous Australia and the sustenance of cultural traditions.*
- *The history of colonization and its social, legal, and environmental legacies.*
- *The national and international resurgence of Indigenous cultures during the late twentieth century.*
- *Language revitalization and the importance of language in the sustenance of Aboriginal cultural wellbeing and integrity.*

Aboriginal creative expression in art, literature, film, music and performance, and critical curatorial and market issues.

6. In their review of teacher education as well as their survey of some 33 teacher education programs, Lambert and Burnett (2012) reported a history of shortcomings relative to Aboriginal teachers, the programs to support them, the failure to integrate Aboriginal understandings into the curriculum and the difficulties (verging on racism) preservice teachers encounter in their programs. As they noted:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are significantly under-represented in Australia, making up less than 1% of teachers in schools. Although the need to increase the numbers of Indigenous teachers has been highlighted for many years, nationally, little has changed since the 1980s when Hughes and Willmot (1992) called for 1000 Indigenous teachers by 1990. (Lambert & Burnett, 2012, p. 1)

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