8.2 Making an Appearance on the Shelves of the Room We Call Research: Autoethnography-as-Storyline-as-Interpretation in Education

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Introducing a Story

But, you may say, we wanted you to write about autoethnography and education—what has that got to do with interpretation, teaching and learning, theory and story, social justice, and Indigenous people? The title autoethnography and education might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, autoethnography and what it is like, or it might mean educators and the autoethnographies they write, or autoethnographers and the educative process of doing ethnographic work; or it might mean education and the autoethnographies written about it; or it might mean all are inextricably linked together and you want me to consider them in that light (after Woolf 1929/2001, pp. 1–2). And yet even before I begin, I realize I will fail—like Virginia Woolf whose words I have already, perhaps cheekily, but hopefully carefully, paraphrased—"I should never be able to fulfil what I understand is the first duty of a writer – to hand you . . . a nugget of pure truth wrapped up between the pages of your notebooks to keep on the mantelpiece forever" (Woolf 1929/2001, p. 2). The only thing I can promise is a moment to think with and about autoethnography as interpretation in educational research. It is for you to "decide whether any part [of this story] is worth keeping" (Woolf 1929/2001, p. 2).

Let us then begin there then—with and about story, for story and autoethnography are long-standing friends in this academic playground. If I use the word "story," what does it mean to you? Perhaps like me, the word story takes you back to a place in your childhood where everything was lived through your

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imagination. For some of you, the word story might easily be replaced with others such as fairy tale, fable, or fiction, or it might even take on a more cynical twist to mean a fanciful retelling of facts. Riessman (2008, p. 4) reminds us that stories, in an Aristotelian sense, are indeed always interpretive because “they mirror the world” rather than copy it exactly. Story is a kind of remembering, and Frantz Fanon might mischievously suggest that stories are revolutionary which should “properly be called a literature of combat” (1967, p. 193) for they evoke dangerous truths about a nation’s history and identity that “won’t stand still” (Denzin 2006, p. 334). If Hannah Arendt were here, she might say “storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it” (1968, p. 105); and Virginia Woolf would insist stories are essential for us to begin moving from the “cotton wool of daily life” to “moments of being” (1976, p. 72). Which is truth and which is illusion, is it fact or is it fiction (Woolf 1929/2001, p. 12), and are we locked inside or outside as ethnographers? “Fiction,” writes Woolf, “is like a spider’s web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners” (1929/2001, p. 34) and likely to contain more “truth” than fact (Woolf 1929/2001, p. 2). Autoethnography, I would argue, is the same—woven by the intercorporeal threads of life that we emotion, embody, and experience, to make an appearance on the shelves of the room we call research as story.

The threads which interlace and form the narrative web in this chapter bring together my work in Indigenous Australian communities as a music ethnographer; my feminist work related to gender, performance, and music; and my role in teaching, learning, and researching in and around educational issues with Indigenous Australians. The personal *becomes* the political *becomes* the performative *becomes* the pedagogical *becomes* the passion in this chapter and does not promise to be neat—I have delighted in doing away with the “angel in the house” (after Woolf 1974) that might predicate the writing to be otherwise, a risky but ever so tantalizing strategy which enacts the very essence of what autoethnography as storyline might and perhaps will do. “What it will do” is an interesting phrase in and of itself, don’t you think? Framed in this way, autoethnography as storyline no longer sits stagnantly in the corner of a room which is not her own, but shifts in agitation from one foot to the other ready to claim her space and dance her way with words about, in, and through life. She holds heartlines in her hand—looking outwards, inwards (Ellis 2004, pp. 37–38), and back and forth in time (Denzin 2014, p. x) at the self and the social so that the power of embodied, “emotioned,” and ethical ways of thinking, being, and doing autoethnography as storyline can take center stage. She urges us to consider the ways in which an ethical, wise, relational, and loving politic is key to social justice in our practice as qualitative researchers, and she finds her expression through autoethnography as storyline, a kind of writing which seeks to uncover the heart of the world, even for a moment, by drawing us into a space of “heart thinking” where emotion becomes entangled with experience and epistemology so that all and everything we have left is our response-ability. Is this not what you thought autoethnographic writing as storyline will do?

Together then, as always already readers, writers, and researchers, let's take an adventure into the educational performative story telling playground I alluded to earlier, to "work together to unconceal what is hidden, to contextualise what happens to us, to mediate the dialectic that keeps us on edge, that may be keeping us alive" (Greene 1995, p. 115). Let's promise ourselves in educational research that will not rest in our search for "wide awakeness" to social justice and be brave enough to hold the storylines in our hands and hearts as we play. Take a seat beside me on the wooden swing of educational research and listen to the creaking chains of interpretation beginning to move in ways familiar and strange. Backwards and forwards our legs will fly, higher and faster we will swing, inwards and outwards we will look, until the lines between the personal and the cultural (Ellis 2004, pp. 37–38), experience and theory (Holman Jones 2005, p. 765), the creative and the analytic (Richardson, in Richardson and St. Pierre 2005, p. 962) become loose and irrelevant and ruthlessly let go. We will wait with baited breath, hoping not to and yet desperately wanting the thrill of the fall as we become dizzy with the uncertainty of it all—for who can say who can say what will come flying out (Behar 1996, p. 19)?

But, do not be misled, our play is *serious* (Weber 2010, p. 136) and comes with a warning. The way in which some or all of this story is told may come across as dismissive, mocking, and disparaging of people whose identities are firmly embedded in by no means simple ways within discourses of "imperial white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks 2013, p. 23), and indeed the very academic institution education and research would be deemed to serve. If you are offended, I understand for I am stuck in and out of those discourses too; but I cannot say that I am sorry. This chapter as story is intended to be both troubling and troubled by the relationships it invokes (Gandhi 1998, p. 4) about the tangled up nature of race, response-ability, and representation in our practice as educators. It travels, as does Conrad's (1899/1999) novella, into the "heart of darkness" where words like ethics, social justice, relationship, compassion, vulnerability, and love make space for the difficult and unsettling issues of race, politics, power, and representation to take center stage in our theoretical, methodological, and interpretative narratives in education. In this playground, you will find me on the swing, watching myself watching the world to share moments of my experiences in educational research which came to life and continue to live through autoethnography as storyline, performative and interpretative work. Fragmentations of words written long ago, writing which mimics and plays with the poetics of others as though we were friends, and ideas and ideologies embodied as characters are the whoosh and whisper carried on the breeze as I swing backwards and forwards. I look to my left and notice the spare swing beside me. I wonder whether you as the reader will sit next to me, whether you might rather stand behind me and push, or whether in fact you might prefer to place yourself on the see saw which stands before us. After all, the positioning and performance of us all in the playground of research and education is a matter of interpretation.

Entering the Playground of Educational Research: A Tra-re-jectory

I swing backwards to look at my PhD in ethnomusicology, the moment that saw a group of Aboriginal women from the Yanyuwa, Mara, Garrwa, and Gudanji nation located in the remote community in Burrulula in the southwest gulf region of the Northern Territory of Australia begin the process of "growing me up." I went there as a young white woman, wanting to right/write the research record about unknown Aboriginal women's performance practices in this region, believing that research was my right/rite and that the right/rite thing to do was research. I went without invitation but as family, married to a Yanyuwa man and always already in relationship but not fully understanding what "being in relation" would come to mean. I began to make meaning, to interpret, and to write the words that fitted the research right/rite. I smile, nostalgic with memory and emotion of people and places, as I read my present in the past: *The end of the wet season had not yet brought the much desired 'knock em down rains' and the fan was switched to full strength in the small flat as we tried to keep ourselves cool. The three of us sat cross-legged in Eileen Manankurrmara McDinny's flat in Darwin, talking and singing together. I was showing Eileen and her half-sister Jemima Wuwarlu Miller some of the musical transcriptions of Yanyuwa song that I had recently completed. Upon seeing the music, Eileen commented: "Yeah ... you gotta give me this one, that [song] and I can show and I can tell [everybody] my sister bin working for that song now! ... This girl is doing this work for us, not for herself for us, write down this song for us! ... This girl bin write [song] and he [she] sing!" (pers. com. E. McDinny 1995) Eileen's comment illustrates the nature of my relationship with Yanyuwa people. Eileen recognised the dual role that I have to play in writing down Yanyuwa songs and also in my relationship with her as sister. Thus I am at once partial insider and partial outsider, a family member on the one hand and a researcher on the other* (Mackinlay 1998, p. 60). My smile becomes a grimace as I read on and remember the way I analyzed this duality and its effect upon the type of representation, which could have been possible and the type of representation it actually became. As I wrote, I knew that the worlds these words represented were not really mine, and yet I was in the business of representation so I needed to find the words. I continued to write them, trying to find a way to appease the discomfort which had begun to emerge through what I imagined to be a dialogic process. *This performance ethnography hopes to present both Yanyuwa and my own perspective of the meaning of performance. I have concentrated and emphasised what performers of the a-nguyulnguyul* [Yanyuwa women's public singing genre] *tradition have told me during singing sessions and in discussions elsewhere about performance of this genre in an attempt to involve indigenous* [sic] *perspectives in the ethnographic process* (Mackinlay 1998, pp. 40–41). I was no longer sure whose words were whose and what right I had to write them. I tried to write myself into the ethnographic and representational space. *I am a woman, an ethnomusicologist and a member of the extended Yanyuwa family. These three aspects of my life closely*

intersect and one can never be free of the others. My work is at once personal and professional. The literary style I have adopted in this work is as close as I can come to portraying the people with whom I have worked and the music they make while remaining true to my sense of family obligation (Mackinlay 1998, p. 82). These words starkly illustrate the inner turmoil I faced in trying to border cross between the professional and the familial, the personal and the political, the necessary and the self-indulgent in my retelling of a shared musical experience. Implicit here too is an acknowledgement that this ethnographic text will still not get it "right"—it is as close as I can come but not necessarily close enough to arrive at some kind of ethnographic *truth*. The words were still not right. I tried again. *Although I have attempted to have Yanyuwa voices heard throughout this study, statements from Yanyuwa people are inextricably bound up with my own theoretical and academic interests which are often quite separate from Yanyuwa interests* (Mackinlay 1998, p. 41).

I watch myself in this time past breathing out—for now at ease with the words I had written. My legs kicked lazily back and forth on the swing as I continue to stare back in time. More words flowed into publications, for after all, was this not my right/rite? "Music for dreaming: Aboriginal lullabies in the Yanyuwa community at Borroloola, Northern Territory" (Mackinlay 1999), "Maintaining grandmothers' law: Female song partners in Yanyuwa culture" (Mackinlay 2000a), "Blurring boundaries between restricted and unrestricted performance: A case study of the mermaid song of Yanyuwa women in Borroloola" (Mackinlay 2000b), "Women play too: Didjeridu performance at Borroloola, NT" (Mackinlay 2003b), and more still. I was giddy and soaring with the *good* work I was doing as a music ethnographer, butterflies of excitement fluttering in body and mind as I planned what I might write next. The good work was embedded in the notions I held about the capacity of research to work towards social justice—I thought that writing about Aboriginal women's musical worlds would somehow bring understanding, respect, and tolerance to Indigenous Australian peoples. I thought my academic work would somehow translate into "something better" for the women, men, and children whom I call family: better homes, a fair education, an end to racism, and the reinstatement of Indigenous Australians as a sovereign people. My PhD and the journal papers I subsequently wrote about the social and musical lives of Aboriginal women and men did not change anything, despite how well I wrote them and the prestige of the publications in which they appeared.

Ashamed and embarrassed, my legs propel the swing roughly forwards 10 years later to another PhD, this time in education. Write, my right/rite, everything changed. I began to write my right/rite differently. *"You now baba (sister)!" says Jemima a-Wuwarlu Miller as she turns to me to begin painting my body with white ochre in the appropriate body design for performance of the Yanyuwa women's dance called Ngardirdji. Forty pairs of student eyes are upon us as Yanyuwa performers Dinah a-Marrangawi Norman, Jemima, Rosie a-Makurndurnamara Noble, Linda a-Wambadurnamara McDinny and I prepare ourselves for performance. We sit together and "paint up", we make small talk and sing quietly. We take our time, we are well practised and yet nervousness, uncertainty and fear also*

pervade this moment. It is not the first occasion that we have performed this ritual for performance in the Indigenous women's music and dance ... classroom at the University of Queensland. It is not the first time that I have sat and questioned what do they see in the actions of these four moving and animated bodies, three black and one white? (Mackinlay 2003a, p. 1) I had begun to ask different questions about performance, ethnography, and research and my own positioning within these discourses. *Being half on the inside and being half on the outside have lead to an overwhelmingly sense of personal and political commitment to an ethical and moral re/presentation of knowledge in mainstream circles about Indigenous Australian women's performance practice. This study has provided a vehicle for me to understand my role as pedagogue in this setting, the impact that I have upon students, my relationships with performers and the efficacy of my praxis at building a teaching and learning environment with the potential to transform lives* (2003a, p. 2). I see myself writing these words, pen flying fervently across the page, fighting against the futility of knowing that these words were not right yet. There was something important missing. I realized that despite the new personal-is-political sentiment these words alluded to, I was still writing the research right/rite as it had always been done. I see myself wondering whether the words in fact had changed at all. For all my talk about resistance, social justice, and transformation within/against the boundaries of race in educational praxis, they were only words: empty words, hollow words, white words some of my Yanyuwa family might say. The words seemed to fall seamlessly into step with a research right/rite that no longer fitted a wide awakeness to the power and privilege of writing white. I see myself realizing that while people might be hearing the words I spoke at conferences and reading those that appeared in my writing, they were not listening—not with their hearts. Neither were the words I wrote those which my Aboriginal family wanted to listen to—they didn't tell a good story. My words were heartless and the butterflies were not excitement at all—they were harbingers of shame and guilt as I became painfully aware of my positioning as a non-Indigenous woman in relation to and in relation with Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and cultures and the enormous white power and privilege I held. Other kinds of words needed to be found—words at once curious and furious, cheekily refusing easy endings, brave enough to ban boring beginnings, and meddlesome enough to mix it up and mess around in the middle ground. Words replete with relationship and being in relation, words that went straight to the heart of the matter with no thought or care for return, racey enough to at once e/mb-race to the finish line knowing that you will be forever on the way (after Greene), all the while holding enough of the flesh, breath, and blood of life to speak to the heart. I tried to find different words. *I see the futility of so much of my earlier music research, dotted quavers on white pages trying to capture the sung magic of black singers – too many dots I painstakingly plotted so that I could take an understanding and text it into shape for a Western academic audience so that they too may have this understanding which was never given in that way. I think to myself how ironic it is that I began my work as an ethnomusicologist with the credo of preservation firmly in my front pocket. I am reminded of*

summer time at home with my Mum and my sister. We would stand in the cool kitchen and help Mum carefully cut and peel boxes and kilos of stoned fruit – peaches, apricots, plums – and delicately arrange them in glass vacola jars to preserve them for winter. We wanted to savour the flavour of these summer fruits for as long as we could, even though we knew they wouldn't taste quite the same. When children are hungry, when my kundiyarra cannot keep themselves safe, warm or healthy; when grog and so much other violence kills too much of life; when the words and ceremonies of ancestors can no longer be heard or sung because whitefella business steals, colonises, interrupts and destroys – any dots on a white page I may write, fancy presentations at conferences I may give, and written papers in academic journals I publish, are just not enough for me anymore. The intellectual thirst, greed and desire for more of the Others squeezes the life, the song, the voice, the essence out of what I do. The music becomes lifeless because the singers cannot take breath. Their mouths are smothered by the heavy blankets of analysis, transcription and theory. The less they breathe, the more we as researchers take – selfishly and without care for life, committing a further act of dispossession (Mackinlay 2009, p. 243). I refuse to write this research right/rite any longer. *I look into the mirror of research and see music. She glares back at me and accusingly screams, "You didn't hear me!" And then so forlornly, "Such beautiful songs I sang for you, why did you leave me?" I turn my head away. Even then she keeps on with a tight voice, pursed lips and teeth clenched. "Why did you stop singing with me?" I put down my head ashamed. She shouts at me. "What is this performance you call research?" She pauses. And then comes a soft and sad whisper, "And why did he replace me?" I cannot bear her sadness. I know what I must do. I lift my head up and look bravely into the mirror. I stop seeing research and now I see music. I wonder how I could have ever let her fade away. I hear nothing but her . . . as I open my mouth . . . to sing* (Mackinlay 2009, p. 226).

Finding Hope Within/Against Ethnographic Research: A Story

I jump from the swing and find myself in another kind of playground—an academic conference. I am reminded immediately of Ruth Behar's (1996, p. 161) desire to be somewhere else once she arrives at the place where she thought she needed to be. Behar describes the apprehension she felt when discussing the "difficult" aspects of her work to colleagues at an academic conference, and I am about to do the same. I have not presented in this forum since the arrival of my two children almost 10 years ago. I am nervous, unsure of whether I still belong. A young girl in a black t-shirt with the organization's logo scrawled in white across the front asks if I have received a program and hands me a conference bag. A brief peruse tells me that my name is not written anywhere on the conference schedule and my anxiety about whether or not I should be here increases in intensity. Even though my

doctoral research qualifies me to call myself an ethnographer—indeed, a music ethnographer, I am doubtful that the kind of ethnographic work I do these days is of the accepted disciplinary kind in Australia. And yet, that is partly why I am here. I want to give voice to the kind of applied and activist music ethnography—of autoethnography as storyline that I believe in—a personal and politicized research practice which aligns itself as close as is possible with Indigenous Australian peoples in a "struggle for rights, redress . . . empowerment and a commitment to produce knowledge in collaboration and dialogue" (Hale 2007, p. 105). Some might decry it as "black-arm" band or "heart on your sleeve" ethnography, but my relationships and responsibilities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a white Australian who has used her power and privilege to cross over into their worlds under the guise of research mean that I can no longer "do" ethnography any other way.

The paper I am giving is a direct hit on the colonial and patriarchal underpinnings of music ethnography in Australia. The irony of trying to negotiate a space to speak with the white male conference organizer *after* my erasure buzzes around in my head like a swarm of angry wasps poised to strike and sting. He apologizes profusely and makes space for me to give my paper at 5:00 pm. The air is close and still as my sense of foreboding thickens. My instincts are screaming at me to walk away and never come back, but my commitment to imagining and creating a different kind of ethnography compels me to stay. I am the final presenter of the day. I see many weary and ready to go home faces in the audience, and I promise them that I will try to make it lively and interesting. Imagining myself as the kind of iron butterfly that Regine speaks of—a woman who is about to make herself "radically vulnerable" (2010, p. 17)—I take a deep breath and words become the life of a new story.

In the Beginning[1]

When the world of ethnography was first created, it was a happy place of discovery and adventure. Joining the crusade of Colonialism and scientific exploration, ethnographers armed themselves first with notebooks and then the gramophone and all manner of visual and audio recording equipment to collect, capture, and catalogue the world's musical cultures (c.f., Cooley 1997, pp. 5–11). They worked alongside and oftentimes in collaboration with Colonialism's soldiers, administrators, and missionaries, driven by a desire for the exotic sounds of the Other. The sun shone every day, but the ethnographers paid no heed to the shadows they cast in the

[1] An earlier version of this story was published under the title "Decolonising Australian ethnomusicology through autoethnography: A retelling of Pandora's story" and appears in *Creative Approaches to Research, 5*(1), 3–14. Full copyright permission to reprint this paper here has been granted by the Editor of *Creative Approaches to Research.*

lives and worlds of the Others. Their eyes were fixed firmly on the prize of detailed documentation, description, and explanation of the peoples, languages, musics, and cultures they found rather than on the white power and privilege which enabled them to be there in the field with the Others in the first place. At the end of each day, the ethnographers would return home to their world, suitcases heavily laden with words, artifacts, melodies, rhythms, and musical and cultural symbols not their own to be rewarded by the god Colonialism with praise and promises of potential expeditions, promotions, and professorships.

One afternoon, a woman called Ethnography was inside her office at the university carefully cataloguing the recent recordings she had made of Yanyuwa Aboriginal music from Burrulula in the Northern Territory, when Colonialism knocked on the door. Ethnography sighed heavily. Her colleague Aboriginalism, excited by the "traditional" and "authentic" Aboriginal melodies he said he had heard coming from her room, had already interrupted her many times today. She pasted the brightest smile she could muster on her face and opened the door. Colonialism stood there, bowed down to the ground holding a dark wooden chest that he was carrying on his shoulders. He looked as though he might collapse under its sheer imperialistic weight. Ethnography rushed to get the worn-out Colonialism a seat and called out to her colleagues to assist. Aboriginalism, Colonialism's right-hand man, arrived quickly and dutifully to help the old man lower the chest onto the floor. It was tied shut with golden cords and carved with unusual musical markings variously resembling long-necked lutes, reversed treble clefs, and dancing women.

"Oh thank you my dear girl!" Colonialism sighed as he sat down heavily on Ethnography's only chair. She bit her tongue in frustration at once again being patted on the head as the young female scholar—the dutiful daughter—doing her time. Looking directly at Aboriginalism and ignoring Ethnography, Colonialism asked, "My friend, I have come to ask of you a great favor." Aboriginalism nodded eagerly, already agreeing to the something that Colonialism required of him. "This academic environment is so heated right now and I am finding this box, burdened as it is with artifacts of history and so on, too heavy for me to carry on the next leg of my neocolonial journey. Would you mind terribly if I left it here in your office while I take this backwards step forwards into a-colonial amnesia and a convenient forgetting of the trauma and aftermath of my actions?" Ethnography cleared her throat noisily, and when she spoke her voice was saccharine sweet: "With all due respect Colonialism, this is actually my office and I'm not sure I have that much space for your ... what did you call them? ... trophies of the past? Are you sure that's what they are anyway?" Colonialism looked at Ethnography with a sneer that was filled with both incredulity and contempt. "My dear girl, how could you think they might be anything else? There is nothing else except for my legacy!" Worried that the two were headed for a showdown, Aboriginalism hastily interjected, "Ethnography was only joking, weren't you E? Of course you can leave your box here!" After hauling the large box into Ethnography's office, Colonialism furtively poked his head out to look up and down the hallway. "Are you sure no one will steal it?" he asked anxiously. "This is my box and NO ONE under ANY circumstances must challenge it, damage it, open it, or take it without my authority!"

Aboriginalism laughed a little too confidently, "Don't worry Colonialism, I will always protect what is yours—in fact, I'll fight to the death to make sure that what you own becomes dogmatically and directly enshrined in the theory and practice of ethnomusicology, that race is placed firmly in the back of the cupboard along with all of our other skeletons, and that our view of what constitutes Indigenous Australian peoples identities, performance practices, histories, and contemporary realities stays firmly in place." Colonialism looked Aboriginalism squarely in the face and stared at him sternly. "Alright, I'm leaving my legacy in your hands. This box contains powerful and dangerous things that must not be released. It's up to you to continue the grand narrative of whiteness and rightness—don't let me down Aboriginalism—the very premise on which this grand nation of ours was peacefully settled depends upon it!" The two men shook hands as Colonialism left.

The Whispering Begins

Aboriginalism exhaled noisily. "Well, what are you going to do for the rest of the day E? Fancy a little bit of transcription and analysis?" Ethnography looked at him in disgust. Guys like him just didn't get it. The postmodern move to self-reflection had brought Ethnography a crisis of representation—"jargon to some, provocative insight to others" (Barz 1997, p. 206)—whereby ethnographic texts in all of their guises were now deservedly subject to interrogation. She constantly questioned her right to be white, the power and privilege she carried because she was white, and the heavy mark that her whiteness brought to bear on her work and relationships with Indigenous Australian people. Ethnography knew in her heart that it was up to her to do something different, but she was torn. She was struggling. She felt uncomfortable. But she knew it was a discomfort that she had to own and live with—the comfortable alternative would only breed complacency and complicity with Colonialism, and Ethnography would rather die than jump into bed with him and his band of merry men.

Turning back to the here and now of Aboriginalism standing in front of her, Ethnography replied, "Oh why don't you just f . . ." but stopped and frowned. "Can you hear that?" Aboriginalism listened hard, but heard nothing. "What are you talking about E? I can't hear anything except Patriarchy clinking cups around in the tea room." "No, listen Aboriginalism! I'm sure I can hear voices whispering!" Aboriginalism stood very still this time, tilting his head slightly to one side as if that would help his auditory perception. Ethnography sat down cross-legged next to the strange box and waited. "What the hell are you doing E? Colonialism forbade us to do anything to the box! Move away from it!" Aboriginalism was angry with Ethnography and roughly tried to pull her to one side. But she would not be moved. She was sure the whispering had come from inside the box. After only a few seconds, she heard the voices again. "Ethnography, listen to us! Decolonize

. . .” the voices were so low and whispery, she wasn’t sure whether she was really hearing them or imagining them. She bent down even closer and put her ear to the lid. No, this time she was sure—the box was calling to her. “De-col–on–i-ssss . . . this whispering . . . can you hear us? de-col–on– i–s-a-tion . . . de-col – on – i – sshhh . . . ” Ethnography looked up at Aboriginalism who just stood there staring at her in disbelief. Why can’t he hear it? She thought to herself. Ethnography sat in the silence between them and realized that the murmuring she heard was stirring inside her alone. The voices were getting louder and louder. “Ethnography! Please let us out . . . we are stuck in this dark box of colonialism! Please help us to escape!” Again Ethnography glanced at Aboriginalism. Surely, he could hear them now? Her breath caught in her throat. Why? Why can’t he hear it, this whispering so persistent? How can he stand there so indifferent to “[the] dispossession, death and despair” (Rose 2004, p. 5) she could hear in the voices?

There were so many voices. Ethnography imagined she could hear those of her Mara, Kudanji, Garrwa, and Yanyuwa teachers, friends, sisters, family, and *kundiyarra*—her most necessary companions (see Mackinlay 2000)—as they sat around the campfire and lifted the songs of the Dreaming mermaids right up into the night sky. She heard the voices of many senior song men and song women who were no longer alive as they walked her through the country of their ancestors on foot and their feet kicking up sand on the ceremony ground. Ethnography heard her granddaughters as they put their own Yanyuwa words to silly made up whitefella songs and laughed until they cried. She heard the wailing of women as they cried for the stolen country, stolen innocence, stolen children, stolen identities, stolen knowledges, and stolen freedom.

“Ethnography! Don’t turn away from us! Listen to this whispering in your heart. Henry Reynolds (1998) did it, Ruth Behar (1996) has opened up to her vulnerability, Deborah Bird Rose (2004) has even taken us on a journey into the wild country and back again! You are not alone. Listen Ethnography! We beg you!” The voices inside the box were now reaching a fevered pitch. “Let us out so that we can work together to expose Aboriginalism and Colonialism’s research for what they are—vehicles of sustained oppression, a tool of colonization (Mutua and Swadener 2004, p. 14), machines which continue to dominate our worlds as Indigenous and non-Indigenous people today.” Ethnography felt as if she were going mad and hastily covered her ears with her hands to block out the voices. “Ethnography, don’t you realize? Everything is in danger of colonizing—everything is suspicious (Cary 2004, p. 77)—just think about the Colonialism has protected this box which has now invaded your office! Listen to us, let us lead you to let go of your power and privilege so that you can really ‘look at us’—your-self at us, the Other!” Ethnography could no longer stand it. Suddenly all fingers and thumbs, she fumbled to untie the knots in the golden cords that held the box tightly shut and all the while pleading voices filled her ears. At last Ethnography undid the thick threads and the gleaming cords fell away. She took a deep breath and opened the lid.

Unconcealing Colonialism, Unleashing Ethical Ways of Being in Relation

Now we all know what happens next in the most well-known version of this Greek story—Ethnography opens the box and unleashes all kinds of unspeakable evils onto her disciplinary male-dominated world. She would be forever demonized as the woman who brought about the downfall of ethnomusicology just as another woman in a garden in another world was blamed for war, death, disease, and all of mankind's other ills. But if it is true, as bell hooks (2010) tells us, that what we cannot imagine cannot come into being, then, it is my wish to take this ending of the Pandora's box story on a very different turn.

As soon as Ethnography opened the lid, she realized what she had done. The box had been crammed with all of the secrets of Colonialism's past. The hush-hush hide it under the carpet actions and attitudes about Indigenous Australian people that he had never wanted anyone to know about because of the threat they posed to his position of as the civilizing presence and power in this country. All of these secrets came flying out. They flew out of the chest in a great swarm and fluttered all over Ethnography's skin. For the very first time, Ethnography felt pain, regret, and guilt, a guilt so heavy she began to struggle to breathe: Her baba Jemima telling the story of being a slave for the mijijis at the big house, the white boss smelling around the young gins to make or take yellafella kids, and the white trash selling grog to 7-year-old girls today; the Binbingga people who were led to a cliff and forced to jump or they would be shot, white men shooting Aboriginal people like wild animals, and white men using and abusing my mother-in-law and her children in exactly the same way; the missionary's car shining in the sun as it came to take ceremony, culture, and children away and the doctor's plane taking on the same sinister gleam as it similarly came and went with too much frequency; and young men and women dying from alcohol, gunja, violence and jail, suicide. She saw her white ancestors standing around, laughing, and pointing at her Aboriginal family, screaming at the top of their lungs, "See, we told you! They'll never be any bloody good—they were never *meant* to survive." Ethnography staggered and stared at them in disbelief. "These are *my* people," she thought, "these whites who knew and think they still know best." She began to wail with anger, confusion, shame, and despair, and all too late, she slammed the lid down onto the box.

Ethnography cradled her head in her hands and curled up into a tight ball on the floor of her office, oblivious to the coffee stains and ingrained dirt. She tried to calm herself, slowly breathing in and out, and again, and again until she almost choked. "Shit! There it is again!" Ethnography once more heard voices coming from inside the box. She had foolishly thought that all of Colonialism's secrets had flown away but she was sadly mistaken. "Let us out Ethnography!" Ethnography waited. Not daring to move. "Don't be afraid of us! We can help you!" came the voices yet again. Ethnography whispered, "What am I going to do?" Ultimately, she knew that there was only one thing she could do. Uncurling herself from the floor, she opened her eyes and turned to open Colonialism's chest for a second time.

Ethnography gasped. She saw with her own two eyes that Colonialism's box was not actually a box, but a beautiful large vase half buried in the ground. Before her demotion by Hesiod and later Erasmus in Greek mythology, Pandora was known as "she who sends up gifts," and the vase was representative of her status as the earth goddess who bestowed all things necessary for life (Marquardt 1982, p. 286). Ethnography gently lifted the lid, and one by one the whispers she had heard began to appear out of the vase. First to appear was Decolonization, holding hands with Postcolonialism, Critical Race Theory stood side by side with Whiteness studies, and lastly came Feminism in an embrace with the Ethical Necessity of Being in Relation with the Other. Decolonization spoke first.

"Ethnography, we promised that we would offer you something and so I bring to you openness. Somewhat risky I know because you 'do not know the outcome . . . one's own ground can become destabilised . . . one's self [is] available to be surprised, to be challenged, and to be changed' (Rose 2004, p. 22). However, openness comes hand in hand with situatedness and dialogue. What matters is that you take me on board as a way of thinking which requires us to be critically vigilant (hooks 2010, p. 26) about the colonial past in the present—to not be afraid to look into the dark corners of our fieldwork notes, recordings, and research papers to uncover what may be lurking there." Ethnography looked at Decolonization, "So what you're saying is that you want me to uncover and remember the history of ethnomusicology in Australia with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a racialized landscape, because after all, race is everywhere (c.f., Radano and Bohlman 2000)?" Decolonization smiled and made space for the Ethical Necessity of Being in Relation with the Other to speak.

Clearing her throat, Ethical Necessity spoke quietly. "Ethnography my message to you comes from Levinas and his good friend Rosalyn Diprose (2002). The face of the other—all of the Indigenous people we work with—calls the subject (that's you Ethnography) to responsibility . . . it does so in a way which that demands our attention to [her] call. [She] shows [her]self to us, and we cannot help but respond, because we cannot turn away" (Levinas, in Fryer 2004, p. 42). Ethnography immediately understood the truth of what Ethical Necessity said and a single tear fell down her cheek. "Through such literal, discursive, and intercorporeal looking," Ethical Necessity continued, "You and them enter into a relationship with and a responsibility to one another—lives, histories, memories, stories, conversations, emotions, and desires become entangled. You have to be brave enough to listen to the whispering in your heart and once you have heard, wear it proudly on your sleeve." Ethnography is unsure, "Is that all I have to do?" "Well no—there is one more thing," Decolonization interjected. "Don't waste the words we have given you—there are too many wasted words in academia. We ask that now you have released us from Colonialism's box, embrace the gifts from this vase, and begin the dialogue we have started with you with others—your colleagues, the ones that matter, those who have the power and privilege to start telling the stories behind Colonialism so that together we can deconstruct his discipline and reconstruct a future in the present." Ethnography was still not convinced. "But really, what good is that going to do? Colonialism is everywhere—he is too powerful. He is inside our

heads, our institutions, our disciplinary practice, our classrooms—I bet he's even here in this office if we look closely enough!" Ethical Necessity moved herself closer so that she could look directly into Ethnography's face. "All we ask is that 'on the day that we [you] can conceive of a different state of affairs [and] a new light falls on [your] troubles and [you] decide that these are unbearable' (Sartre 1956, pp. 434–435)" (in Greene 1995, p. 5), then you at least begin to imagine what a decolonized ethnography—and, indeed, education—might look like. "There are always vacancies: there are always roads not taken, vistas not acknowledged. The search must be ongoing; the end can never be quite known" (Greene 1995, p. 15). I can't promise you that you will find what you are looking for, but is it not our responsibility to at least try?"

Seeing that Ethnography understood, Decolonization and Ethical Necessity kissed her gently on the forehead and waved good-bye. Ethnography felt terribly alone and did not know what to do. She turned towards the vase, remembering that Colonialism would soon be back and would want an explanation for why the box was now a vase and why the once box was now open and empty. As she turned to replace the lid, out of the vase came another whisper—it was Hope. Ethnography heard clearly in that moment the message Hope held—it was a belief in the capacity of humanity to recognize wrong doings, to be transformed, to engage with one another's differences with honesty and openness, and thereby to enter into a relationship with a wise and loving politic necessary to achieve any measure of justice. Ethnography sobbed with relief as Hope fluttered gently against her skin, soothing her sadness and singing a song for a new tomorrow. And luckily, Hope has stayed with her ever since.

A Decision Is Made

The three colleagues from the Faculty of Social Science sat around a small round table in a square office far removed from the swing in the playground, each of them silent and deep in thought. They had all heard her paper at the conference and felt strongly that it was time to make a decision. One of them, head in her hands, sighed noisily.

"What are we to do then?" Amanda asked. "She's gone and done it, she's finally done it!"

"I know, I still can't quite believe it," Paul's face was white. "I never thought she would actually do it. I mean; I know she's been talking about it for awhile, but I thought it was all just talk."

It was Sarah's turn to speak. This is how their departmental committee meetings always went—Amanda first, then Paul, and last of all Sarah, always in that order and always with the same intent. Usually Elizabeth was there to add something to the conversation but today was different. Today, Elizabeth was absent and she

was the main item on the agenda. Sarah continued to sit quietly, waiting for the right words and moment to speak.

"Well, come on Sarah, what are we going to do about Elizabeth? We cannot simply stand by and do nothing—no, that won't do at all," Amanda shook her head vehemently.

Paul began to resemble a bobblehead on the dashboard of a car as he joined her. "Yes, I agree, we have to do something. What Elizabeth has done goes completely against everything that we believe in as traditional realist ethnographers!"

They both looked at Sarah expectantly, waiting for her wise and considered response.

"Well," Sarah began. "Her paper was very performative—I do remember somewhere reading or someone telling me that she was a dancer in a former life, but I am afraid I have to agree with you both. Can we seriously think that autoethnographic writing and research—*or whatever it is she calling it these days, storyline*—is proper social science? That is the question for us to consider today."

"Are you kidding me?" Amanda was incredulous. "The goal of social science—of which she claims autoethnography to be an example of—is to study the social world; let me say that again, the social world. If the topic of autoethnographic research is the self, how on earth can it be considered valid and legitimate social science?"

"I mean what would our head of school say if he was there to hear her sanctimonious crap about heart, hope, *and storyline* in ethnography?" Paul asked. "Does he know this is what she does, gets paid a generous salary to sit in her office obsessing about herself writing narcissistic narratives? Sociology is an empirical discipline and we are supposed to study the social (from Delamont 2009, p. 60)."

"Mmm," Sarah agreed. "I can see your point. I guess whether we like it or not—and I happen to not like it—the self has always been present in ethnography, and the postmodern turn has shifted our attention to issues of voice, power, authority, and representation in the work that we do in, out, and between the field. These theoretical, philosophical, and methodological debates have certainly laid fertile ground for the growth of autoethnography over the past 15–20 years."

"But does this necessarily mean that this is a good thing?" Amanda wanted to know. "A good thing for ethnography? These autoethnographers can't even agree on a label for what they do—sociological introspection; critical autobiography; personal, self, reflexive, and/or phenomenological ethnography; psychobiography; self-ethnography; auto-anthropology; personal and/or self-writing; native and/or narrative ethnography; emotionalism; evocative and/or experimental ethnography; analytic; interpretive . . ."

Paul groaned loudly and dramatically, "Oh please don't get me started on Norman Denzin (2014), I mean really, 'A call to arms?' What does he think . . .?"

"OK, we get the message Paul," Sarah interrupted. "And yes, I am as frustrated by it as you are."

"I wonder what happened," Amanda began, "To Elizabeth, I mean. Why did she start writing like this? She used to be such a nice dutiful daughter of traditional ethnographic method. We've all read her early papers and PhD on the social and musical lives of Aboriginal women—such solid pieces of analytic research grounded in data from the field."

"She erased the line between 'the researcher's self and the investigation' (Delamont 2009, p. 60)," Paul offered. "She let relationship—god knows we've heard her harp on about that for years—cloud her judgement and blurred the boundaries between the familiar and the strange. Studying ourselves can never make anything ethnographically strange and our task has always been to fight familiarity."

Amanda agreed. "It's just a little too familiar and subjective for my liking. And quite honestly, we are not interesting enough to write about in journals, to teach about, to expect attention from others" (Delamont 2009, p. 59).

"Yes," Sarah nodded. "And one of my main concerns relates to exactly that. Because of the reliance on the self and the telling of a good story, autoethnographic research is . . . well, it's basically unethical."

Amanda shook her head once more. "You know in this recent paper she gave about decolonizing ethnography, she talked about people at Burrulula—people she claims to have relationships with? Did she ask her family if she could use them in this paper? That's a huge problem with autoethnographic research and writing—other social actors cannot be disguised or protected. Did she get their permission to describe their world and their experiences in such a revealing way?"

"I doubt it," Sarah declared somewhat smugly. "And she dares to rant and rave about white power and privilege, social justice, and ethical necessity. From where I stand, when you write autoethnographically, you are standing categorically on the wrong side of the fence. Because you cannot see beyond yourself, you can only focus on the powerful—you. 'Autoethnography is, whatever else it may or not be, about things that matter a great deal to the autoethnographer' (Delamont 2009, p. 57), but I would argue that it's the powerless to whom we should be directing our sociological gaze."

A snide smile appeared on Paul's face. "I can just imagine what she would say in her defence. It would begin with 'from my experience . . .'"

"A-ha! Exactly!" Sarah was beginning to warm up now. "Autoethnography is all experience—there is no data. Research is supposed to be analytic, not experiential, and autoethnography is noticeably lacking in analytic outcome—there is no analytic mileage (Delamont 2009, p. 58). It abrogates our duty to go out and collect data."

"And we can't forget that sociologists are a privileged group," Paul added. "Qualitative sociologists are particularly lucky as our work lasts. Think about what sociology is remembered for—the great ethnographies: *City of women* (1994) by Ruth Landes or *Boys in white* (1961) by Howard Becker et al. Autoethnography is an abuse of that privilege—our duty is to go out and research and write the ethnographies which will become the classic texts of the year 2090—not sit in our homes focusing on ourselves."

Sarah slapped her hand on the table. “Damn it! There is nothing more to be said about it. The assumption that there is something more inherently authentic and authoritative about autoethnographic writing is total bullshit. It’s mischievous—some would say malicious even. Autoethnographers are nothing but bricoleurs—tricksters! They assert, exaggerate, speculate, improvise, and don’t test out ideas! Autoethnographers are essentially lazy—literally lazy and intellectually lazy. And what’s more, they all think that by being ‘artistic’ and ‘creative’ they are performing science! Most of them can’t even write well, they’re just second-rate, two bit, wannabe novelists and poets!”

Paul and Amanda looked wide-eyed at Sarah and would later solemnly swear they had actually seen smoke and fire snorting from her nose. Gathering as much courage as he could, Paul asked, “Well, we are still left with the same question Sarah—what are we to do?”

Amanda’s eyes glittered with revenge. “We can reject all and any of the work she submits for publication, ensure that she is never given an opportunity to speak at conferences, and when she does get a look in, we can heckle her from the back . . . I don’t suppose a good old-fashioned public burning at the stake is an option?”

Sarah’s mouth set in a hard line. “We can but do the only honest thing . . .”

Elizabeth leant back against the stone bricks lining the hallway, her breathing shallow and fast. She knew she was not supposed to have heard the words she had stumbled upon – they were about her and they were designed to hurt after the fact. She hadn’t meant to eavesdrop, but the conversation was too public and too loud to ignore once she had encountered it. The cold hard reality of the wall steadied her and as she looked down at the heartlines on her hand, she felt her blood pumping with a new sense of resolve to w/rite/right. She would leave this School of the Lifeless, replete as it was with inert concepts and colleagues, and return to the playground to begin writing life. Knowing that others were waiting for her there on the seats of the wooden swings, Elizabeth became filled with the ‘courage, the desire, to approach” (Cixous 1993, p. 7) writing as a way of learning to die, to break with the darkness of dominator culture and write herself (Cixous 1976, p. 880). She would write herself and her being into new ways of becoming an educational researcher as storylines in her hand and heart, indeed, “From now on, who, if we say so, can say no to us [me]? We’ve [I’ve] come back from always” (Cixous 1976, p. 878).

The Only Honest Thing

The truth is, now that I have reached the end, I realize that a chapter about autoethnography as storyline in educational research always had “one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion” (Woolf 1929/2001, p. 2). My mind has become increasingly tangled as I have thrown around words,

turned over pages, written and rewritten carefully constructed sentences only to erase them and start all over again. I write autoethnography as storyline because it is the only honest thing I know to do in this particular personal–pedagogical–political somewhere I find myself. It is the only interpretative move, which holds the possibility for living the discomfort of writing, researching, and being in relation as a white settler colonial woman. If I imagine autoethnography as a person, she is woman, sitting in a room of her own (Woolf 1929/2001) writing in "white ink" and "draw[ing] her story into history" (Cixous 1976, p. 881). She is an "undutiful daughter" who loves the part she plays in conceptual disobedience and disturbance (Braidotti 2012, p. xii), and in the here and now, she impulsively tosses away her name to become in the moment of being storyline. She wears her heart on her sleeve as philosophy, theory, and methodology (Denzin 2006, p. 334) and is not afraid to break it once, twice, and then do it all over again. Relationship is the breath which gives flesh and life to the very bones of her existence as a researcher and an educator. Emotion, empathy, and experience are embodied in the storylines she writes because she knows from her heart to hand that "censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time . . . your body must be heard" (Cixous 1976, p. 880). She wants you to know intimately with every fiber of your being the good alongside the bad through the self and the social world. She loudly and shamelessly proclaims the personal-as-performative-as-pedagogical-as-political in a quest for education as the practice of freedom (Denzin 2003, pp. 258–559). Storyline demands a response and will continue to speak where some would prefer silence. She threw away her white naiveté long ago and dares to ask questions about moral discourse and ethical responsibility—and she refuses to stay quiet. She knows that not everyone likes her, respects her, understands her, or thinks she has a place, but she stays the course. There is too much at stake to give up now, and besides, that would be the easy way out. Hope is the steady and rhythmic swing to her storyline reason, punctuated with tumbles and turns towards giving and vulnerability, community and solidarity, conversation and compassion. The game she plays privileges relationship, relationship as pedagogy, and the power of such a pedagogy of heart—indeed, of love—holds for *not forgetting*, shifting, changing, and transforming the ways in which we think about, make representations of, and engage with Indigenous Australian peoples in education and ethnography. She wants the play to stay long after the sun goes down, the cold sets in, and the day ends, to carry you across the threshold from mere disinterested critique into a space where empathy, compassion, and mindful caring emerge as necessary recognition and a vital response to the "somewhere" we find ourselves. "[She] is the words; [she] is the music; [she] is the thing itself" (Woolf 1976, p. 46) and she must "write herself" (Cixous 1976, p. 875). I would like to think that if storyline were a person, she and I would be friends, swinging side by side in this educational playground we call research.

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