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Borderlands: an Australian Duo-Ethnography of First Nations and Western Psychology

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Abstract

The purpose of this work is to articulate, for other Western psychologists, learnings about the ways in which hegemonic Western psychology is a colonising practice, and how cultural humility can enable a space in which First Nations knowledge is given preference. Using duo-ethnography as a method of dialogical qualitative inquiry, we explore the cultural interface of First Nations knowledge and Western psychology in Australia. The story of a First Nations educator and activist, from the Bundjalung nation, explores borders in culture, geography and language. The story of a white psychologist examines colonisation and genocide in Australia, and the emergence of Western psychology from systems that subjugate First Nations Peoples. Using border theory, we create a dialogical space between these stories, forming a borderland that facilitates the development of cultural humility for the white psychologist.

Keywords Border studies · Duo-ethnography · Colonisation · First nations knowledge · Hegemonic psychology · Cultural interface

Introduction

This is a weaving of story by Dei Phillips, a First Nations educator from the Bundjalung nation and a white psychologist, Ruth Nelson. The weaving explores the interface, in modern Australia, of First Nations knowledge and Western psychology. Dei Phillips, Bundjalung educator and activist, contributes a story regarding language, spirituality and culture. I contribute a story about cultural humility and colonisation. I write the introduction and discussion. This structure is used because it is me, the white psychologist, who needs to learn ways of working ethically in a First Nations space, as I have been invited to practise psychology in an Aboriginal-led corporation.

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The method of inquiry is duo-ethnography, developed in response to a crisis of representation in qualitative research (Sawyer and Norris 2015). It is impossible, and unethical, to represent another person's views. In duo-ethnography, researchers of difference dialogically juxtapose their narratives in an act of dialogic imagination; meanings are transformed through the research act (Norris and Sawyer 2012).

In duo-ethnography, the role and relationship of participants must be defined and conversations transparent enough to witness the transformative process (Breault 2016). I am born in the UK to an Australian descendant of convicts and an English father. I settled in Australia as an adolescent and am enculturated into a white view of Australian history that starts with invasion by Captain Cook, the establishment of penal colony and settler society, and perceives 200 years as long enough to dismiss Aboriginal claims to sovereignty. Dei Phillips is a Bundjalung woman. Bundjalung country includes the north-east corner of New South Wales and south-eastern Queensland, on the east coast of Australia (Muurrbay Aboriginal Language 2018).

I interviewed Dei for *Creating Space Project*, a podcast that I host, in *Bundjalung Woman* (Phillips 2018). When I began writing this article and realised a self-narrative on cultural humility was not, in fact, practising cultural humility, I contacted Dei to ask permission to incorporate her story. She has provided guidance on drafts of this article. The initial interview was via Skype, and subsequent communication has been via email and text messaging.

Given the history of domination enacted on First Nations Peoples by settlers in Australia, I was fearful of approaching Dei. I imagined she would be angry with my efforts. This came not from any signal from her, but from my own shame.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from "time immemorial", and according to science more than 60, 000 years ago" (Referendum Council 2017, paragraph 2). Such is the context of the First Nations Peoples of this landmass, one of the oldest continuous cultures on Earth (Rasmussen et al. 2011) and colonised by the British in 1788.

This article could not be written alone because a monologue dominates. Ethical exploration of First Nations knowledge and Western psychology requires a First Nations voice. Through dialogism, then, this article embodies heteroglossia: double-voiced discourse serving a First Nations and a Western voice (Bakhtin 1981, 1984). Practising cultural humility facilitated an ethical creation of an interface, resolving my crisis of representation.

Form and content are indistinguishable (Bakhtin 1981), so form must satisfy conscience. The interdependence of structure and process makes dialogism fruitful, understanding emerging from both content and the relative position of each person in the dialogue (Silva Guimarães 2011).

So, to explore the interface of Western psychology and First Nations knowledge, duo-ethnography, a method of qualitative inquiry that presents two dialogically interrelated voices, was used to facilitate cultural humility in the person of myself, the white psychologist. This made possible the weaving.

Hegemonic psychology emerges from the historical and social conditions of northern Europe and spread through the world via colonisation. Reflecting domination by the privileged minority over the majority world, controlling psychological resources is a form of colonial violence (Adams et al. 2015). Hegemonic psychology colonises by imposing universalising,

individualistic constructions of behaviour and by negating First Nations knowledges and practices (Dudgeon and Walker 2015).

To begin deconstructing this, it is important to recognise that all psychologies are indigenous, arising from their own particular context (Marsella 2013). In colonial history, the zero point of civilisation was Europe, its internal history the only valid knowledge (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006). From this context emerged Western psychology, a set of practices that typically address the mental and emotional health of individuals, within a culture that strongly values individualism.

Other cultures hold their own epistemologies, from which arise valid perspectives on mental and emotional health. To decolonise hegemonic psychology is to fracture the zero point and bring to the foreground knowledge systems from the other side of the colonial border, which requires border thinking (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006).

The theoretical framework in which the weaving of story hangs, then, is a border study, a discursive strategy capable of deconstructing dominant paradigms (Castronovo 1997). Recognising the interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships (Bakhtin 1981), border studies examine the crossroads of time, history and space (Morales 1995). Suited to a consideration of First Nations knowledge and Western psychology, a crossroad loaded with 200 years of domination (Foucault 1977), border studies recognise First Nations histories, rather than the colonising practice of incorporating them into Western history (Nakata 2002).

People experience time as space. We see temporally dispersed events as simultaneously present spatial oppositions (Hermans 2001). So, while modern Australia has no legally constituted borders, First Nations borders still exist. Historical processes and culture structure our identities (Barcinski and Kalia 2005), and the places where we meet.

A circle constitutes the inside, outside and line separating the two (Herbst 1993). The outside is typically understood as empty space. So, a *border* is an outer edge, the end of a safe zone and beginning of an unsafe zone; borders create fear, crossing presumes risk (Lugo 1997). *Borderland*, space at or near a border, implies separation and contact; intersecting knowledges and discourses produce tension and shape what is possible (Marisco 2016; Nakata 2002).

To live on different sides of a border implies different learning contexts, influencing psychological processes (Cubero et al. 2016). On the Mexico-USA border, Mexicans viewed themselves as border citizens. Americans, however, saw border citizens as "other". The Americans saw themselves as inside, with the boundary the limit. For Mexicans, home was the borderland. First Nations Peoples live in a cultural interface; life in the borderland produces uncertainty, requiring constant negotiation of identities (Bhatia and Ram 2001; Hermans, 2001; Nakata 2002).

If there is a power imbalance between two sides of a border, a dialogical relationship partly reflects this (Hermans 2001). Western history accords dominance to Western psychology, and its parameters shape First Nations discourse (Nakata 2007).

Australia is one nation, according to Western history. Simultaneously, according to First Nations knowledge, this landmass holds myriad borders, constituting ancient and ongoing Aboriginal nations. Modern Australia dominates these First Nations. Tateo et al. (2018) inspired the theoretical framing of this article to explore these borders without a power imbalance. Discursive writing allows for transformation in the writer, and, in duo-ethnography, for an "effect", one partner must be the willing recipient of influence (Valsiner 2009). Here, the Bundjalung educator strongly influences me, the Western-trained psychologist.

From the borderlands, the hegemony of the privileged can be eroded (Lugo 1997). The interface of Western psychology and First Nations knowledge becomes a dialogical space between two people centred in their own cultures.

Borders, elements of transition, account for processes of continuity and discontinuity (Marsico and Tateo 2017; Tateo et al. 2018). The current article forms a border between a white psychologist and First Nations educator. It is impossible for me to cross the border to a First Nations perspective. But, it is possible to enter a borderland, in which I reflect upon my own colonising practices are upon the story of a Bundjalung educator. We are researchers from either side of a border, our collaboration a political act, co-creating a space in-between (Chaitin 2003; Marsico 2011).

Following are narratives from Bundjalung and white, each with their own concerns. A discussion then explores the themes and attempts to connect these to ethical psychological practice with First Nations Peoples.

Language, Story and Identity: Dei Phillips

My grandmother was a Bundjalung woman. She brought us up. For Aboriginal people, your grandmother is your mother. We would travel from Sydney to my grandmother's a lot. If something happened, like I got suspended, I would get sent to my grandmother's, a thousand kilometres away.

I would go to school there with my cousins. Going to school with your mob is freeing. You do not feel like people are making judgements as much as when you are the only Aboriginal child in the school, which I was all the way to year 9.

When another Aboriginal person came into my school, I attached myself to her, only to find out that we were actually related, which is crazy because I did not know her face. I knew who her family was. That is how it works with us, you see somebody and know who they are based on their features and how they hold themselves and the way they talk.

This is a very Aboriginal cultural thing. You see another Aboriginal person, and skin colour is not a part of this equation. You could be white with blonde hair and blue eyes and we can still look at you and go "Is your family this family? Are you this mob?" It is something you cannot explain. It is like a trait Aboriginal people have.

If you have never been able to feel it, it is hard to grasp the concept. Basically, it is a spiritual thing. You are connecting to someone else's spirit, and we are able to see people, strangers, and our instinct tells us that they are mob or that they are Aboriginal.

You will find it really hard to find an Aboriginal person who is connected to their culture who cannot do that. It would have been really important, because before colonisation, our countries were not separated by fences or signs that said you are going into this country. So, when another mob is walking through your country, they would have had to have been able to figure out who they were, so they knew how to communicate with them.

If a member of your mob stepped onto another mob's land without asking, without showing respect, that was important. It would be like going to another country without your passport saying who you are. That is what your passport is. It is your introduction to that country. It tells them about you and where you are from. So, it is the same as going onto another country without introducing yourself.

I do not know if you have been overseas, but they ask, "What are you going to do here?" It was the same. You had to introduce yourself. You had to say what you were there for and you had to get permission. Just like we do today with other countries.

This is something that people struggle to understand. Australia, as it was named, is one block landmass. But, before colonisation, there were a mass of little countries. Each had their own cultures, their own languages, their own systems, and their own laws.

A lot of the laws interconnected. They had to, for trading and things like that, and marriage, because we never married within our own mob, within our own skin group. We had a very intricate marriage system. We kept track of who was married to who and their children so that we knew who to marry their children with. That is why decisions of marriage were made early, when they were young. That child is probably going to marry someone from that tribe or that mob. It was important and they made note of that.

People find it really difficult to understand, perhaps because it is such an old part of our culture. You are going back thousands of years, if you want to talk about early days, and you are going back 200 odd years. People are like it is all those years ago, how is that you still have that within you? Well, I do not know.

There are just some things that I cannot explain about our culture. It is spiritual, and it is natural. It is connected to land and connected to people. It is just part of who we are.

If you are talking about, say, Eora mob in Sydney, and the Arrernte in Alice Springs, their cultures are completely different, and their language. If you follow the language from Arrernte and down through the tribes to get to Sydney, you can see how words start disappearing. If you go the other way, you can see how words start connecting. In Sydney with your language groups there, all of those Sydney mobs have different dialects, but you can connect the words. There are hundreds of words that mean the same thing.

You could see how some words are important to stay the same for trading. So, they have words that are the same for mobs that are across the other side of the landmass. When you look at it, you can understand why. There are trading lines. They would have had common words to not just trade, but to sit down and talk out any problems.

I read a story not long ago about my mob, Bundjalung, who had issues with a mob just outside of Bundjalung. What happened was that they did not have many common words, not enough to sit down and sort out this problem. So, they brought one of the mobs in between them in to translate, because they knew both the languages. Aboriginal people are bilingual. We knew at least four different dialects and languages. That is still the same today for traditional Aboriginal people. You will find it difficult to find a traditional Aboriginal person who only knows their language.

I have lost my language. I only have basic words in Bundjalung. I say them all the time. Sometimes I say them in weird places. Like at the hairdressers, I have used a Bundjalung word for ear, and I have to stop and go "That just means ear." All my children do it. Growing up, they would have friends over and they would say a word, and their friends would say "What does that mean?" Your children look at you as if to say "How come they don't know that word? It's a word we've used since I can remember. How come nobody else knows what it is?" It is because it is only these few words. We are talking about less than 20 words.

We have a couple of people that can speak Bundjalung, but not my dialect. So, I have completely lost my language. It is a part of you that you would love to have. You hold onto the words that you do have.

It is something that you miss. It is like a grief. It feels like you have lost something and you know you have lost it because of horrible things. It is one of those feelings that has micro-

feelings. It is not just one feeling. You feel sad and you are grieving for the loss and you feel angry and violated. Because you know that it was not something that you did. It was not because you did not take the time to learn it, or because you were not interested in speaking it. It was literally taken from us.

People ask us all the time, how do you steal a language? How does one steal language? You put laws and policies in place to tell people they cannot speak it. That is how you steal it. You force them to speak English or whatever language you are trying to instil.

If you change the word *language* to *stories*, and I do not know another word to say it, because they are *stories* to us, but if you change it to *stories* or *culture*, it means something completely different. You get a gist of what they actually took from us. Do not forget how closely stories are connected to language. If you do not have language to tell a story, then you do not have any of it. If you do not have the ability of language, you cannot pass down your history or knowledge or education. This is how we get to loss of culture or stolen culture.

I think about how each part of our culture connects. If you take one part out, the rest seems to get lost. It is not like a chink in a chain. If you take that chink out, the rest is still connected. Once you take a part out, the rest of it seems to get lost.

The colonisers did it deliberately, knowing the outcome. They had done it before. We were not the first country they did this to, to natives. They have done it before. People think that they did not know or they were just trying to survive. They knew what they were doing because they had done it before.

When you think about language, think about when they took the children, the babies away from their mothers and taught them English. When they finally get to connect with their mob again, it has been all taken from them. We hear stories all the time of Stolen Generations[1] who went back and found their mob and their families and were not able to connect.

This is what I try to tell people, when you steal children and take away their culture and embed a culture of slavery, brutalisation and terrorism, and then when they have children, those things roll off in your parenting. Every problem that we have within our culture and our mobs—alcoholism, drugs, violence, and child sexual assault—every single one of them connects back to colonisation.

We have had Closing the Gap[2] for 10 years now, nothing has moved. Most of the things are still the same, and you have things that are worse. The only way to fix the problems is to have our government acknowledge that the problems we have is because of what their ancestors did. Without that, then every single thing, or the billions of dollars that they spend, is not going to fix it because they refuse to go back to that.

Can you imagine if someone did something horrible to you that changed you and then refused to acknowledge that they did it and the reason why you are hurting is because they did it? That would be hard. And that is what is happening. On top of that, you have people who say things like "get over it" and "you get thirty-three billion dollars a year, why can't you fix it?" Ignorant statements come out a lot. I hear them every day.

So you can imagine growing up as a child, hearing these things, day in, day out. You start to believe them. Some part of you in your psyche starts to believe them and you start acting on

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[1] First Nations children were forcibly removed from their families, through government policy, and raised in institutions or by white families (AIATSIS, 2017).

[2] Targets aimed at eliminating the gap in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, including mortality (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2018).

them. If you constantly tell a child that they are worthless and violent, they are going to behave that way.

Cultural Humility: Ruth Nelson

A settler on the Eora nation (Sydney, Australia), I benefit from colonisation. I am a psychologist, invited into practice with First Nations Peoples. How can I do this ethically? The short answer is cultural humility. I learn to take up less room. I learn the ways in which psychology is the product of colonising practices.

Narayan et al. (2000, p.4) write of the psychological dimensions of poverty, "powerlessness, voicelessness, shame and humiliation," whose varied manifestations include alcoholism, domestic violence and depression (Sloan 2003).

There are many forms of resistance to poverty by First Nations Peoples. Affirmation of cultural identities and practices are common responses to histories of oppression, offering the basis for gaining acknowledgement of human rights (Dudgeon and Fielder 2006; Groot et al. 2011). Ali Cobby Eckermann, speaking at the Iowa Writers Program (2014), describes the importance of the Aboriginal flag. It flies in resistance to *terra nullius*, the assertion that Australia was devoid of people at the time of British invasion. There are Australian councils that still refuse to fly the Aboriginal flag. First Nations Peoples frequently wear the colours of the flag, in resistance and solidarity. Cobby Eckermann also talks about the importance of poetry for First Nations resistance (Iowa Writers Program 2014). In contrast to dialogism, poetry is closed and entire. This lets you bring anger and firm opinions, which is important for people who face pressure to assimilate.

The Aboriginal-led corporation where I will work is often attended by families experiencing poverty. I cannot work with there without examining my role in causing poverty among First Nations Peoples, through my induction, from birth, into colonising practices.

Ahmed (2018) introduced a concept startling to me. "Practice is used as an example (referencing black and brown bodies) and theory as frame (referencing white minds)." Writing about psychology in an Aboriginal-led corporation, my white mind is the frame, conceiving the theory. I am centred and elevated, Smith's (1999) adventurer, my unexamined gaze on the indigenous other.

How do I de-centre? I have only my embodied experience. If I describe First Nations knowledge, my voice colonises. This is why I asked Dei to participate. Interviewing her contributed enormously to my learning. Dei provides the framework of First Nations Knowledge, referencing the practices of colonisers.

I am trained to be anonymous, hiding personal experience. Protecting the psychologist, this boundary ignores the value of relationship for Aboriginal people and the difficulty of removing self (Houston 2015). In some cultures, a psychologist is sought out because of opportunity for a dual relationship, marked by reciprocal trust and connectedness (Pederson 1997). Fundamentally different understandings of personhood shape these two approaches (Grieves 2009). Preferencing Western practice supports a power imbalance.

Academic writing, preferencing Western knowledge systems, may not reflect ethical conduct for First Nations Peoples (Jull et al. 2016). To overcome this, First Nations methodologies are needed to challenge the imperial basis of Western knowledge. Houston (2015) suggests combining the tradition of storytelling with academic research.

Waters ([2013](#)) highlights the importance of recognising Aboriginal knowledge as foundational. At the centre of the circle, sit the Aunties, with all they know. I am outside, honoured to be listening. I hear *Munjana* (Roach [1990](#)). "They took him from her arms and made her feel ashamed". Russell Moore, Aboriginal child, stolen from his mother. Homeless, drug addicted, and gaoled. "Who will shed a tear for Munjana?" I do. Tied to colonialism, I feel ashamed.

Western psychology presumes global relevance, displacing and devaluing indigenous knowledge (Moghaddam [1987](#)). Exposed to Western psychology, the identities of people from other cultures are diminished, their knowledge rendered obsolete (Misra [1996](#)). Western psychology individualises pathology; attributing problems to personal defects, and ignoring failures in social systems, reinforces oppression (Sloan [2003](#)).

Colonisation

Colonisation fills me and I fill the space of what I call Australia. Indigenous people represent the unfinished business of colonisation (Smith [1999](#)), an oft-denied reminder of injustice. Colonisation is the underlying factor resulting in inequitable health for First Nations Peoples in Australia (Griffiths et al. [2016](#)).

Therapy can facilitate adjustment to injustice. Systems of power regulate therapeutic space, sometimes creating the "paradoxical position of adhering to regulatory requirements at the same time as supporting clients to live in ways that hold meaning for them" (Conyer [2014](#), p.7). This statement caused me to take a breath. I am worried about documentation. The act of documenting is integral to therapy. It is also the action of the imperial gaze researching the native other, viewed rightfully with mistrust by First Nations Peoples (Smith [1999](#)). How do I balance this paradox?

Healing is personal process and political act (Conyer [2014](#)). Clinical psychologists, in community projects with oppressed people, work as allies (Newnes [2014](#)). Instead of privileging psychological discourse, they focus on a narrative that exposes oppression. Their discourse is political.

While chewing on this idea, I was ironing tablecloths. Ironing is unusual for me and requires concentration. The back and forth of ironing. I thought of putting on the radio and foolishly expected the *Archers*. My mother ironing is an uncomplicated childhood memory. The muscle memory of ironing releases, like steam, a slew of unexpected memories.

What happens when a black body talks about trauma to a white body? The person chooses to talk, but what happens to their body? I chose to iron but was surprised at how many memories were evoked. I cannot separate from colonising practices. However, I can become aware, as a white Australian, that there are Black nations here. Train lines atop trading lines, sovereignty unceded. Genocide occurred.

Genocide

Genocide is defined by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide ([1948](#)):

> Article II
> In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

a. Killing members of the group;
b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Much of Australia's interracial history constitutes genocide (Tatz 1999). For example, the Australian government ratified the Convention in 1949 and continued the forcible removal of children for decades afterwards. First Nations children are overrepresented in out-of-home care (Smart 2017). Defenders of the practice focus on abuse and mistreatment, placing sole blame on First Nations families. Consider, however, the effects of colonisation: Poverty, intergenerational trauma and discrimination impact First Nations Peoples in ways that hurt their own children (Smart 2017).

Despite believing genocide was perpetrated, I went to the research, seeking reputable sources to cite as evidence before writing that word. By reputable, what did I mean? Demonstrated to be true by the system of knowledge that trained me? Imperial and colonial?

Culture is powerful. Like an ocean current, I am pulled into my colonial gaze. A settler on the Eora nation, questioning genocide. I am not sure, following disease, slaughter and dispossession, how many from the Eora clans are left to contend genocide. Besides, it happened so long ago.

It was so long ago.
It wasn't me.
They should get over it.
They are just being divisive.
They. They. They.

How shrilly and furiously we protest. Australia cannot move forward until we face genocide and incorporate the truth of colonisation into our identity. The limit of my influence in this matter is myself, and even then, only just.

Cultural Humility

With the help of Merle Conyer (2018), I have come to understand *cultural humility* as my current goal. What lies further along, I am unclear.

Two years ago, I had to deliver some goods to an Aboriginal Women's Centre. They suggested I stay for lunch and then said see you next week. So, I kept returning.

No one seemed bothered about what I did the rest of the week, which I mistook for disinterest in me. In my culture, we ply a newcomer with questions. I interpreted lack of questioning as a devaluing of me.

Then I started to notice more clearly the warmth of the welcome. They seemed genuinely delighted that I was there. It was peculiar. I sat. I did not say much. How could they be pleased to see me when they didn't know me?

The feeling of welcome was warming in a period of my life marked by loss. For months, when approaching the Centre, I started to feel sad. I think it was because I was allowed to feel sad there. No one expected anything from me. There was no performative component. I could simply sit and be.

I realised something startling. It was the first time I had felt welcomed not for what I could offer, or even who I was. I was welcome simply for being.

I had no language for what I was doing. The need did not arise. Then, as this self-conscious process of identifying colonising practices began, so too did a fumbling for explanation. Merle Conyer (2018) offered an unfamiliar phrase, *cultural humility*.

"Cultural humility is… self-reflection and self-critique, to get some insights into the assumptions that our cultures train us into thinking and believing. [It] recognises that there's much more fluidity around ways of being in the world. Working with Aboriginal communities… for me, it's emphasised the need not only for accountability of myself, but to start becoming aware of the systems I'm working in and how, by working in those systems, I might be supporting the re-enacting of things that might be oppressive."

Initially, I only understood in terms of stepping into another culture's frame of reference, respecting, if not understanding, difference. I saw it as perspective-taking. I was falling short. As Merle explained, "It requires us seeing how the spaces we work in can re-enact the things that give rise to people not being able to speak for themselves. And us no longer participating in those things. So it's not just us knowing more about how another might hold a world view about some things, but it's us noticing how the spaces and places where we contributed, which we contribute to, continue to exclude people from being present. And then speaking up and changing those" (Conyer 2018).

I am still grappling with what this means. But, I have some language, I think, that describes what I am doing as learning cultural humility.

Discussion

This is a journey into a borderland, undertaken to better understand cultural humility and ways in which Western psychology is a colonising practice, and to learn ethical practice of psychology in a First Nations setting. Its value comes from the narrative from Dei Phillips.

A limitation of this discourse is that the impact on Dei, the Bundjalung educator is unexplored. This was intentional. Often, knowledge produced in English does not take into account knowledge in another language (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006). The emotional labour here is for me, the settler who needs to do the unsettling work of discovering the impact of my profession on First Nations Peoples. I have attempted to understand colonisation through knowledge produced according to a Bundjalung episte-mology. This concerns Bakhtin's (1984) polyphony, two voices, speaking for their individual selves, intertwining but unfinalised.

Borderwork is research across socio-cultural divides in colonised states, engaging indige-nous and non-indigenous actors grappling with socially and culturally liminal spaces (Morris 2012). With an unquestioning and unquestioned apprehension of the world (Bourdieu 2000), hegemonic psychology in Australia is naturalised, divorced from historical and political bases. Unexamined, power imbalances manifest in structural violence, evident in the lives of First Nations Peoples in Australia (Morris 2012), such as advocating for the removal of children from First Nations families. Borderwork, then, suits an exploration of the interface between First Nations knowledge and hegemonic psychology in Australia.

Using duo-ethnography, a dialogical approach suited to liminal spaces, Dei Phillips and I co-created a borderland. Border spaces are innovative (Marsico 2016). It is new to me to use First Nations knowledge to reflect on psychological practice.

Borders separate and unify, creating a mutual relatedness between parts (Marsico 2016). The border of colonisation between Dei and I separates us. Gazing upon it, momentarily, unifies us. Dei's story is full of rich historical detail of borders. I feel strong gratitude for her story. She allows me to grow. This is the border that makes our perspectives interrelated.

Her story, perhaps, is the kind of counter-narrative that challenges colonial knowledge through recovery of historical memory (Martín-Baró 1994). I learnt about national borders crisscrossed with trade routes, geography shaping identity and language facilitating the resolution of tension.

Language is a border. When you lose your language, you lose an important way of entering your own nation. My people forced Dei's people over the border of language. We took them away from land, stories and identities. We take their children, so culture cannot be passed down. The space between a First Nations client and myself is filled with this.

In one sense, Dei and I are researchers on opposing sides of a conflict, that is, the colonisation of her sovereign nation. Our task is a collaborative peace-building effort (Chaitin 2003). If I do not expose the political narrative of colonisation, I collude with it.

A border makes us feel safe (Tateo et al. 2018). Entering the borderland felt risky. Exploring cultural humility led to experiencing shame. Exposing it to Dei caused fear. There is an impulse to retreat from painful emotions, an urge to retreat from the borderland. But, this means reconciling to genocide, closing off to dialogism. Recognising injustices of oppression and doing nothing to change them is farcical (Freire 2000). Neutrality is not ethical.

So, my psychological processes, in constant evolutive tension, reflect an emerging border (Marsico and Tateo 2017; Tateo et al. 2018). Dei's story introduced the concept of cultural interface, which becomes a discrete place, held by First Nations borders in time and space. Previously, I saw Australia, discontiguous from pre-colonial history.

Groot et al. (2011) explore key Māori cultural concepts, including kinship, spirituality, and place, that relate to identity, social and emotional strength, and resilience. Acknowledging that Bundjalung cultural identity is different to Māori identity, there are similar circumstances for indigenous people in post-settler states. Memmott et al. (2003) refer to spiritual and psychological homelessness. First Nations Peoples in Australia are displaced from ancestral lands, knowledge, and kinship networks. These concepts seem not dissimilar to those addressed by Groot et al. (2011) and appear present in Dei's story.

Kinship seems reflected throughout Dei's story, in references to her grandmother and the freedom of "going to school with your mob". The importance of country also seems apparent, for example, descriptions of pre-colonial nations, and perhaps in returning to her grandmother's country whenever something happened. The knowledge shared in the story gave me, a white settler, some insight into the importance of spirituality in First Nations cultures. As Dei explained, "It's spiritual... connected to land, and connected to people."

Perceptions of health among First Nations Peoples in Australia are influenced by historical experiences and relationships between cultural identity, kinship and land, and Dudgeon and Walker (2015) propose social and emotional well-being (SEWB) as a set of interconnected domains to suit these. SEWB comprises connection to body, mind and emotions, family and kinship, community, culture, and land and country. Spirituality is central to First Nations' SEWB (Grieves 2009).

How does this duo-ethnography help me practise in ways that promote SEWB, decoupling my practice from colonising behaviours? Adams et al. (2015) summarise three approaches: (1) indigenising, preferencing the knowledge systems of First Nations Peoples; (2) accompaniment, in which a First Nations community permits a mainstream psychologist to work

alongside them; and (3) denaturalisation, by which mainstream psychology examines its own practices for participation in colonial violence.

These approaches challenge coloniality of knowledge in mainstream psychology, or a specific Eurocentric perspective, presumed globally hegemonic (Dudgeon and Walker 2015). This lets me recognise the validity of observations and meanings drawn from different cultures (Silva Guimarães 2011), creating space for other epistemologies, such as those centring kinship, culture and country, embedding SEWB in an interconnected spirituality. This provides a much firmer base for action which liberates both myself, the oppressor and the First Nations client, the oppressed (Martín-Baró, 1994).

My role in liberatory action, as I understand it, is one of accompaniment. Detached authority is exchanged for engaged humility; I learn from the people in the community where I sit (Adams et al. 2015; Watkins 2015). Accompaniment means walking alongside, listening, witnessing and finding joint imagination (Watkins 2015). There is a basis for collective action. I contribute by participating in the daily struggles, while recognising that the tasks of liberation belong to the oppressed, not to me (Freire 2000; Martín-Baró 1994).

Conclusions

The juxtaposing of narratives enabled a dialogical-hermeneutic process, in which my relationship to hegemonic psychology in colonial Australia was transformed. Knowledge of the cultural interface is constructed through the perspectives of each author, nested within our own epistemologies, formed in our own cultures (Simão, 2015). This manifests, I hope, in me, the white psychologist, gaining cultural humility. It changes my practice within a First Nations setting, engendering psychosocial accompaniment and the possibility of mutual liberatory action.

This has been achieved via duo-ethnography, a methodology convergent with Amerindian perspectivism, which suggests researchers discover the meaning of a particular topic according to an insider in that group (Silva Guimarães, 2011). This shifts the power imbalance often experienced by hegemonic psychologists working with oppressed and vulnerable people, by affording validity to their interpretations and meanings. Accordingly, in Dei's narrative, her Bundjalung voice is present and represents itself. We co-create meaning regarding hegemonic psychology and First Nations knowledge. This is our borderland.

From here, I continue learning. A Wailwan elder has suggested that we weave story. The borderland itself is ongoing evolutive tension. As Nakata (2002) says, the cultural interface is the beginning.

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