Developing a decolonial gaze: Articulating research/er positionality and relationship to colonial power

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This article details some of the tensions and complexities of doing research on decolonising higher education. It argues for feminist-informed, reflexive-methodological approaches that are sensitive to power, in particular to the power relations existing in/of settler-colonial social terrains (Tuck & Yang 2012). By reflecting on the methodology of a research project designed to provide insights into an ethical praxis of decolonising higher education, I explore how reflexive approaches engage with questions of research/er and participant epistemological and ontological positioning in relation to colonial power and discourse (Ahmed 2007; Alcoff 2007). My approach resists positivist discourses that uphold Western patriarchal rationalities of an objective, controllable world (Lather 1991). I pay attention to the social construction of knowledge and knowing practices aiming to be perceptive of the social situatedness of both the researcher and the researched. This includes considering the contentions raised by decolonial feminists who have argued that the limitation of 'White feminism' (Lazreg 1994) – particularly in the way Whiteness remains unmarked – 'works to avoid an engagement with [an] Indigenous critical gaze on the white racial subject who constructs and represents the "Other"' (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 181).

Keywords: feminist-social epistemology; coloniality; Whiteness; reflexive methodology

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Introduction

This article explores some of the philosophical questions and principles of my methodological approach as I researched efforts to decolonise pedagogical practices in higher education. By reflecting on methodological complexities as a non-Indigenous White woman my purpose is to contribute to discussions of epistemic responsibility in relation to decolonisation/Indigenisation discourses in Australia (Bunda, Zipin & Brennan 2012; Butler & Young 2009; Jakobi 2019; Rigney 2011). In particular I address questions of research/er positionality in the context of ongoing coloniality and the implications for making knowledge claims.

In this discussion I position Australian higher education as an institution constructed through (un)settler-colonial social relations (Hokowhitu 2020a). Accordingly, socio-epistemic relations are formed through dominant Eurocentric and androcentric worldviews (Dudgeon & Walker 2015; Kuokkanen 2007; Moreton-Robinson 2011). This is the legacy of an imperialist past that shapes the contemporary educational landscape (Hokowhitu 2020a). A discussion of research and decolonial thinking takes as a starting point institutional responsibilities to disrupt patriarchal colonial constructions of knowing and knowledge (Battiste 2013; Hayes, Luckett & Misiaszek 2021). I suggest practices of feminist-informed reflexivity and 'responsible agency' (Medina, 2013) as appropriate methodologies to counter partiality and problematise knowledge constructions of privileged groups (Crenshaw 1989; Haraway 1988; Harding 1986; Hartsock 1983; Hill Collins 1986, 2009; Mohanty 1988; Smith 1987).

My awareness of the importance of reflexivity grew from addressing how I research decolonising the institution from a non-Indigenous perspective. 'Non-Indigenous' positionality, as referred to in this article, represents perspectives or categories of experience that do not derive from, identify as, nor claim, a privileged Indigenous standpoint (Moreton-Robinson 2013; Nakata 1998). Non-Indigenous positionality may draw on Indigenous standpoints to better understand Indigeneity but cannot claim Indigenous epistemological and/or ontological authority. In my study I collected data and constructed interpretative analyses with non-Indigenous participants to examine dominant subjectivities intersecting with Whiteness and approaches to Indigenisation. I explored how the White institution both accepts and refuses engagement with Indigenous knowledges and ontologies. This is something I needed to consider in the way I developed a reflexive methodological approach in order to avoid reproducing dualistic thinking and essentialising identities and positionality.

Harding argues for 'strong reflexivity' (2004, p. 136) in which there is no subject/object split. In other words, the subject is critically examined in the same way as the object of inquiry in order to locate beliefs and values that play a central role in research and the production of knowledge. Without strong objectivity, certain values (and subjectivities) can be 'vetoed' by academic or scientific communities if they do not resemble the dominant or 'qualified' profile. The nature of racialised and gendered 'vetoes' or exclusions that occur in academia, has been the subject of debate (for discussions and debates on race, gender and situated knowledge see: hooks 1982, 2004; Brah & Phoenix 2004; Mirza 1997). The following account is my attempt to show how I made use of reflexivity as a critical methodological tool to unpack some of the political/social contexts, implications and tensions of doing research (Lather 1991) on decolonising the institution.

The research context

The underpinning study explores how academics and students articulate and take up the responsibility of decolonising/'Indigenising' pedagogy and the curricula[1]. This work was motivated by my desire to shift the gaze to the institution of higher education and explore how Whiteness and coloniality operate to exclude Indigenous peoples and their knowledges, and the resulting struggles for epistemic justice.

A qualitative approach consisted of two case studies focussing on the degree programs of Psychology and Development Studies at a regional university in Australia. Over a period of two teaching semesters I conducted observations, focus groups and interviews with 30 participants including academics and students in their final years of study. Participants were selected from Psychology and Development Studies because there was a level of engagement with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives 'across the curriculum' (Rigney 2011, p. 6) in both programs of study. They offered the opportunity to examine interdisciplinary subjects and access to 'a wide range of curricular discourses' (Quinn 2003, p. 9). I targeted the science faculty because related studies show that more work is needed on responsibilities and (re)positioning of Indigenous knowledges (and equity) in science degree programs (Phillips, 2011).

Indicating a nexus between Indigenous and discipline knowledges, the cases were an opportunity to explore in depth 'what was going on'. Case study research is suited to capturing 'processes and relationships' (Denscombe 2007, p. 38) and 'activities being evaluated' (Cousin 2009, p. 132) through consideration of multiple variables that shape complex environments and practices in specific settings. Ethnographic data captured in the study included accounts by students and staff from heterogeneous disciplinary communities in the faculty, showing some of the subtleties and complexities that exist in the processes and effects of curricula and pedagogy at the cultural interface (Nakata et al., 2012). A multi-sited approach attempted to capture daily practices in discipline areas that are at different levels of engagement. This approach was important to the study so as 'not to overlook the differences, compromises, and negotiations' (O'Hern & Nozaki, 2015, p. 7) that may be apparent in the faculty of science as well as the broader university environment regarding commitments to 'Indigenous reconciliation'.

Through a decolonial lens, I investigated discourses that influence students and academic staff as they engage with questions of curricula, pedagogy and knowledge, including opportunities to engage with knowledges of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities. I focussed on the pedagogical and curricula issues they considered important and whether these were related to policy, social justice and/or student experiences. The idea for this work emerged through my experiences of teaching and researching in higher education access and equity-based contexts. I observed through my practices, and from my engagement with critical education literature, that widening participation policies often frame equity in remedial terms as 'reforming the student', without exploring the implications of dominant knowledge and pedagogy within the institution (Burke 2012). This led me to reflect on my own positionality and complicity in reproducing hegemonic knowledge.

[1] 'Indigenisation' of curricula is a contested and complex area of higher education policy and discourse which is beyond the scope of this article. Broadly I refer to it here as a suite of practices and discipline specific approaches towards cultural and academic engagement with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students that also include proposals for universities to 'develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teaching and Learning Frameworks that reflect the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge within curriculums, graduate attributes and teaching practices' (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew & Kelly 2012, p.14).

Developing reflexivity through a decolonial gaze

One of the methodological concerns I faced was determining how to satisfy the requirements of orthodox Western systems of scholarship in ways that avoid reinscribing White privilege (Alcoff 2017). I attempted to engage with this tension by situating my methodological framework within the field of feminist-social epistemology. The project is therefore shaped by a combination of qualitative and ideology-critical theoretical paradigms (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013). I drew on foundational work that challenges the epistemological hierarchies of dominant patriarchal, Western-based systems of research (Haraway 1988; Harding 1991; Lather 1991). Feminist epistemologies enable the researcher to engage with formations of gender, race and power around research, questioning whose research and in whose interests the research is being conducted (Skeggs 2004; Usher 1996). They make explicit that notions of neutrality – the idea that research can be 'value-free' – needs critical attention (Haraway 1988; Harding & Norburg 2005). This includes considering the contentions raised by decolonial scholars who have argued that the limitation of 'White feminism' (Lazreg 1994) – particularly in the way Whiteness remains unmarked – 'works to avoid an engagement with [an] Indigenous critical gaze on the white racial subject who constructs and represents the "Other"' (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 181).

Opening up questions of epistemic authority my methodology was informed by literature foregrounding structures of colonial power, voicing and silencing (Battiste 2013; Kuokkanen 2007; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). This literature examines

> the after-effects, or continuation, of ideologies and discourses of imperialism, domination and repression, value systems (e.g., the domination of western values and the delegitimization of non-western values), their effects on the daily lived experiences of participants, i.e. their materiality, and the regard in which peoples in post-colonial societies are held (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013, p. 45).

I drew on decolonial theory to examine notions of inclusive curricula and pedagogy, 'Indigenisation', social justice, and transformative education and discourses on reconciliation policies in Australian higher education institutions. This theory speaks to the challenges of deconstructing research and methodological practices that have historically positioned Indigenous peoples and their knowledges as colonised subjects: 'explored and exploited, researched and examined, assessed and investigated' (Kim Elston et al. 2013, p. 6) which are then 'coded into the Western system of knowledge' (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, p.45). A decolonial gaze was vital to the project through which I developed my analyses of the 'institutionality of Whiteness' (Ahmed 2012) and pedagogical engagement at the cultural interface (Nakata 2007a).

Decolonial thinking pays attention to the processes of 'Othering' and encourages methodologies that disrupt binary (for example traditional/contemporary) constructions of culture and knowledge systems (O'Hern & Nozaki 2015). It also takes seriously pedagogic strategies that acknowledge, challenge and relinquish White privilege in order to disrupt the race order and redistribute power (Moreton-Robinson 2000). It means identifying racial domination as not 'extrinsic' (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 183) to 'critical White anti-racist' subjectivities, but a fundamental element that needs to be reflexively critiqued. I tried to address these tensions and contradictions by establishing practices of reflexivity in my research.

Reflexivity as an integral element of methodology is tied to the epistemological questions and concerns of the research itself. How do students come to know? How can knowing practices be

shaped in more socially-just ways through pedagogical (and philosophical) orientations? Practising reflexivity is a way of apprehending the dilemmas of doing research in a White normative environment. It enabled me to work from a critical 'non-innocent' position (Lather 2007). By this I mean focusing on the situatedness of knowing and knowledge and the discursive practices of speaking with/listening to others (Alcoff 1991). Lather elaborates:

> the necessary tension between the desire to know and the limits of representation lets us question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysis, transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility where a failed account occasions new kinds of positionings. Such a move is about economies of responsibility within noninnocent space, a "within/against" location […] Butler's (1993b) work on iteration or subversive repetition is of use as a way to keep moving within the recognition of the noninnocence of any practice of knowledge production. Within/against, then, is about both "doing it" and "troubling it" simultaneously (Lather 2007, p. 38).

I felt the tension of being both 'within/against' in terms of my research/er context and participants' accounts. I attempted to engage with this tension and recognise it as an important point of discussion on the irreconcilable nature of epistemological dilemmas. I also saw the possibilities of shifting subjectivities as Lather alludes to, by working in, but also critiquing the research process. I am located by/in multiple formations of power that allow me to challenge constitutions of knowledge, but also determine my 'legitimacy' as a researcher.

Shifting towards reflexive decolonial knowledge-making may include research practices that resist the 'natural identity' of 'double privilege': 'both white and leaders of research' (Puch-Bouwman 2014, p. 414). I therefore offer an account of Whiteness (as a legacy of colonialism) and the regulation of subjectivity to better understand the research process. I engaged with principles of feminist-social research by locating myself – and indicating the autobiographical aspect (Miller 1997) – in relation to the sociological questions of the inquiry. If I do not understand my own situatedness to the research context and my relationship to power, then I undermine the notions of feminist objectivity and partiality (Haraway 1988) and decolonising methodologies that call for self-reflexivity (Battiste 2013; Dudgeon & Walker 2015; Medina 2013). Medina's account of epistemic responsibility argues that 'responsible agency' requires taking responsibility for self-knowledge as well as social knowledge of the world. But in order to provide a realistic account of responsible agency Medina qualifies self-knowledge as contextual because knowing practices take place in social environments or pedagogical spaces, meaning they are 'lived, relational and embodied practices' (Burke & Crozier 2012, p. 6) embedded in systems of power. In Medina's 'thesis of cognitive minimums' (2013, p. 12) he states: 'Responsible agency requires that one be minimally knowledgeable about one's mind and one's life, about the social world and the particular others with whom one interacts, and about the empirical realities one encounters' (2013, pp. 12–13).

I also offer the following account in response to critical Indigenous studies (Kovach et al. 2014), acknowledging the epistemic responsibilities attached to the social production of knowledge. Positioning statements are important culturally to Indigenist-informed research (Kovach et al. 2014) and socio-politically to sociologists. They help to elucidate the social position subjects occupy and hence which bodies of knowledge and epistemic distortions subjects may (or may not) be able to identify, challenge and resist or fight against. Self-positioning enables better

understanding of how one contributes to and produces knowledge in relation to others (Medina 2013).

Positioning statement

My 'whys' as in 'why this research?' are rooted in the imperial White imaginary, the context that shaped me. This imaginary constituted the 'thick webs', 'the frameworks' that are 'proximate' (Freire, P & Freire, AMA 1994, p. 103) to the creation of my subjective experiences and to my subsequent (re)thinking towards decolonial theory. As part of my reflexive practice it is important to locate 'visible whys' this way, when Whiteness is so often invisibilised by hegemonic socio-epistemic spaces (Bunda et al. 2012). This is a crucial part of the methodology, for understanding how I and participants are located in systems of power (in terms of race, gender and class) and how this has a bearing on the questions I ask and the way I interpret and analyse the data. It means taking on 'the messy terrain the history of colonization left behind that we are all embedded in. I find *me* in the story, in the present manifestations of colonization (institutionally, culturally, socially and spiritually)' (Cary 2004, p. 70).

I provide a brief narrative account to locate myself in relation to the research, not so much to reveal 'me', but to show how we may arrive into a story that has been going on for a long time. So, this narrative is 'a version' because it 'will be disoriented by what is not mine, or what is not mine alone' (Butler 2001, p. 26). As I am not the only White woman who has tried to think and write within/about the discursive field of the postcolonial university my experiences are representative of a particular position.

Born to an Irish/Scottish/Anglo heritage I grew up on the homelands of the Awabakal People, a place 'we', the inheritors of colonial naming systems, call Newcastle. The dominant social structures of Newcastle, New South Wales, were formed through the working-class ethos of mining and steel making. Like most local communities built around extractive-industries dependent on extraction of land resources and diminishment of Country, the bulk of generated economic wealth went elsewhere. I have strong affective memories of teenage attempts at bravado as I moved within and between hyper-masculine White spaces of potential violence and threat that dominated my hometown. Those years are marked by adapting and surviving in a particular patriarchal, misogynistic social landscape with accompanying White supremacist logics, not of my making though I was part of its maintenance, an environment I had to equip myself to survive, through careful self-governance. The work and research I am drawn to is an attempt to make a counter-move against the social, embodied and material dimensions of gendered and racialised violence, the epistemic and ontological violence of 'the trouble' (Taylor 2020) that was constant in the lives of the city around me when growing up, and is still here today.

A 'natural' environment – embedded with colonial legacies of androcentric Whiteness – is maintained in part through formal education. In school, like many of the participants in my research, I received a generalised education 'about' Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. I watched films in primary school in which Aboriginal peoples were anthropologically constructed as subject/object of the colonial gaze (see Nakata 2007b). On classroom walls the world map displayed a pink Australia, the colour of the British Empire. My undergraduate years further entrenched an imperial imaginary. The university I attended in Sydney was named after the early colonial autocratic administrator, Lachlan Macquarie, and my college accommodation named in tribute to Australia's longest serving pro-British social conservative, Robert Menzies. Throughout my arts degree I do not recall encountering any Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander scholars teaching courses or included on any of my reading lists. These acts of erasure

resonate with my research, as I now undertake studies exploring how pedagogies reinforce (and also resist) subjugation of marginalised epistemes and racialisations in epistemic practices.

In my working life I have been a teacher in adult education for over twenty years in an increasingly neoliberalised environment. Neoliberalism privileges settler-state performative demands over the critical transformative work of decolonisation (Jakobi 2019). Through my teaching experiences in equity and access settings I grew aware of multiple discourses associated with 'equity' students and students who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples: discourses of reconciliation, self-determination and resurgence, and discourses of deficit. I have felt deficit framings and the shame of misrecognition (Burke 2017) too, having taken an alternative pathway into university – similar to some of the students I now teach in university access programs. I am aware of the damage of deficit framings and the challenges of working to transform pathologising discourses (Burke & McManus 2009). In making these observations I am applying a particular form of feminist re/presentation that draws on critiques of hegemonic patriarchal discourse (Leathwood & Read 2008). Masculinist traits such as 'the independent learner' position 'shame' as 'lack of confidence' and are 'seen as detached from histories of gendered, classed and racialized misrecognitions' (Burke 2017, p. 436).

Relationship to Indigenous Knowledges

Indigenist research paradigms (Battiste 2013; Blair 2015; Martin 2008) and critical feminist approaches in the field of higher education studies (Ahmed 2012; Burke 2012; Leathwood 2006) emphasise relationality as a core concept of ethical practice. Drawing on this, I aimed for ethical research as constructed in shared/dialogic processes (Freire 1972), in relationship with and to the social (and ontological) environments from which the data is drawn (Wilson 2008). My research approach, then, is a process of entering into a set of relationships with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, ideas, histories and experiences. My work is also a relationship of people and their thoughts, experiences and knowledge of Indigenous systems. It is a relationship of country – created on Country – the land of the Awabakal people (Lloyd et al. 2012; Wright et al. 2012). It is a relationship of history, how education in Australian universities has been shaped by colonisation. Relationality is a key principle to how I theorise subjectivity and discursive spaces and understand my methodological approach.

When I write about Indigenous knowledges, I have an epistemic responsibility (Medina 2013) to educate myself about Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. My purpose (and position) is not to 'explain' but to provide a discussion of Indigenous (and discipline) knowledges, as 'part of an ecology of knowledges' (de Sousa Santos 2014, p. 193). I am mindful of providing informed critiques and to avoid slipping into dichotomies of Indigenous/Western contrast, where the contrast might become valorisation/demonisation. In my work I try to develop a dialectical understanding of the relationship between bodies of knowledge, whereby different knowledge traditions are formed and positioned in complex relations to each other. Sullivan (2006) writes about the contradiction of the conscious intent to honour Indigenous knowledges and cultures as reasserting White habits of ownership. Habits of ownership are a legacy of an imperial gaze that essentialises and diminishes the complexity and contemporaneousness of Indigenous knowledge systems (Connell 2007; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Sullivan (2006) is not saying that non-Indigenous peoples should not learn about other knowledges and traditions, but it is important to maintain an ethical criticality to avoid reinscribing asymmetric relations of domination and control. I try to counter the asymmetries of colonising structures by producing work in which Indigenous knowledges and standpoints are recognised as 'distinct form[s] of analysis' (Nakata 2007a, p. 11) – the way other knowledges are distinct and central to knowledge creation in the academy.

In my project I aimed to keep these principles at the forefront of my research questions and analyses. I considered how my methods of engaging with student and academic participants could encompass discussion of Indigenous knowledges. Through dialogue and observation I tried to draw out participant perceptions of policies of Indigenisation and dominant pedagogies in order to situate the discussion in relation to epistemic power. For example I was interested in gaining more insight into the learning spaces of the participants. As I conduced observations I asked, what are the symbols of knowledge and power in these spaces? Are Indigenous symbols of knowledge and power represented? Is acknowledgement of Country visible? I examined teaching materials in terms of positionality wondering who created them, what kind of resources and epistemological perspectives informed them. I considered how students were encouraged to interact and think about these materials. Overall, I was examining whether 'the paradigms of valid knowledge [are] shifting' (Quinn 2000, p. 5). Observations helped me to understand the discursive elements that construct White normative higher education and shifts towards ethical spaces of decolonising.

Holding pedagogical spaces of discomfort

As I developed my methodology I reflected on the implications of epistemic power for the non-Indigenous researcher. If 'new knowledge' is produced through all the benefits of White privilege, what really changes? How can White subjectivity be negotiated in ways that resist colonialism's legacies? Cary addresses these questions as an Australian academic working at a Canadian university:

> I do recall my discomfort on numerous occasions when talking with first nation people in the university setting how they generally saw me as an outsider and therefore not as dominant as a white Canadian. Yet, I am white and I always already carry colonial/colonising power. That was one of my first realisations that as a foreigner I had different spaces to 'talk about race' but it also meant that the history of genocide and racism I carried with me as a white Australian was erased. This was dangerous stuff – I could be a radical and not have to carry my own subjectivity around with me! (Cary 2004, p. 73)

I realised I needed to engage with critiques of White allyship (Aveling 2013) and reflect on uncomfortable questions and meanings of White subjectivity.

As part of the research experience I attended a number of conferences related to the field. I found the quality of discussion and argument to be valuable and academically rewarding. But I also resisted some of the notions of Whiteness/Blackness put forward that subscribe to a type of homogenisation (all White people are privileged) and essentialised constructions of Indigeneity (connected to culture and 'purity' discourses). These notions seem to set up rigid categories of experience that post-structuralist feminist theorising challenges (Burke 2012, 2002; Skeggs 2004; Weedon 1997). I was interested in how racialised positions were stated and enacted. Many presenters who self-identified as White, introduced themselves as 'White settler invader' or 'oppressor'. I was confronted by the 'ethical violence' (Butler 2001) of these categories. To me this approach limits the transformative possibilities (and responsibilities) of dominant positions. I use the concept of '(un)settler' (Hokowhitu 2020a, 2000b) to broadly contextualise Australian society and political landscape and to locate structural/power relations upholding institutions. But I do not apply the term 'settler' or 'invader' to individual subject positions as I feel it misses the nuances of intersectional subjectivity and diminishes the critical value of the argument. I argue that theorising 'settler-colonialism' needs to explore emerging and alternative subjectivities to dichotomies of 'coloniser' and 'colonised' in order to be useful to and

productive of significant meaningful reconciliation (Carey 2015). In terms of higher education, the various locations in intersectionality must be acknowledged and form the basis of 'sound pedagogy' (Nakata et al. 2012) otherwise (neo)colonial, essentialising subject positions are reinforced (Carey & Prince 2015).

I deliberated on how I could resist deterministic thinking yet also acknowledge the reproduction of subjugated knowledges and the deep histories of anger, pain and shame. Distress and discomfort indicate the complexities of the politics of the field. I realised that reflexivity is an important practice but can be deeply painful. Even acknowledging these emotions was fraught: 'I feel guilty for being "upset" … I feel indulgent … yet I can't ignore the "upsetting" side of this research' (from my field notes, 9 October, 2017). I was aware of the politics of taking ownership of trauma thus recentring Whiteness and discourses of 'White fragility' (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016). However, feminist epistemologists have long recognised emotion as an important ontological element of knowledge-making (Jaggar 1989). Discomfort was ever present in my fieldwork. Academic participants mirrored some of my own uncertainties about doing this research. They expressed exasperation, frustration: 'How do we do this?' (psychology lecturer). Students also expressed frustration sometimes with me and the research process: 'I kind of wish you were a psychology student so that you would understand. We're educated into that environment' (Evelyn, third-year psychology student). I found myself implicated through the way participants interpreted my position. Sometimes I was a confidant, a threat, a nuisance, an ally, a student, a peer/colleague. Perceptions of positionality opened up challenging moments. Some participants perceived an affinity with my 'Whiteness' and expressed racist views, perhaps feeling that because I am White that then I too held those views. This is another layer to the methodological story that speaks to experiences of research subjectivity. Researcher and research participants are co-created:

> We are collectively caught in an intricate, delicate web in which each action I take, discursive or otherwise, pulls on, breaks off, or maintains the tension in many strands of a web in which others find themselves moving also (Alcoff 1991, p. 21).

I considered emotionality as a necessary element for humanising decolonising processes (Battiste 2013). If I sidelined distress and discomfort, whether in relation to myself or participants, then I would limit feminist interpretations of qualitative research that refuse the mind/body divide of masculinist objectivity. Making visible and acknowledging the affective aspect allows discussion of the politics of shame and processes of misrecognition (Burke 2015). It opens a space for reflexivity, moving away from invader/invaded binaries and the possibility of re-making postcolonial subjectivities.

I understand that feelings of guilt and shame, in the context of this study, reveal complicities with structures and histories of epistemic and ontological violence (Ahmed 2005). As a White woman committed to social justice, I feel that very painfully. When I discuss the (re)production of Whiteness and race privilege in pedagogical spaces in my analysis there is a layer of emotionality embedded in the text. Alongside the distress however, there needs to be a 'non-violent ethics' (Zembylas 2015, p. 174) that propels the research/er towards a position of empathy and understanding of how subjectivity carries 'troubled knowledge' (Zembylas 2015, p. 172). So, when engaging with participants in my study and writing my analyses I tried to critically engage with 'the trouble' (Taylor 2020) that emotionality points to, as a way to both acknowledge and value the difficulties of transformative practice/thinking.

Closing comment

I found feminist-informed decolonial scholarship useful for discussing and recognising the ways difference is necessarily built into the work. Decolonial theory counters some of the limitations of postcolonial critical theory for homogenising non-Western experiences. It helped me to understand that this work is not just about subjugation of the Global South, it also informed my thinking and questioning about the nature of oppression and liberatory education. It prompted me to ask: what are the aims of decolonial work and who does it serve? Decolonial thought informed my methodology and my reading of the literature and data and how I positioned my arguments and discussion of 'the Other'. For example, I was reflexive about finding tools to unpack the strands of the argument to avoid oppositional polarities. I did not want to reproduce polarised thinking by always looking for examples of oppression and not resistance or agency. I needed theoretical resources to encourage reflexivity and learning to 'see' racialisations and epistemic injustice in knowing practices, but to also recognise spaces of reordering and remaking. For this I drew on analytical frames advanced through feminist, Indigenous and Black scholarship in the fields of critical Black, Indigenous Studies and feminist-social epistemology (such as the works of hooks, Battiste and Dotson). These theoretical positionings address struggle in terms of race but also intersect with multiple systems of oppression (Crenshaw 1991). They represent resistance to reproductions of (un)settler-colonial dehumanisation of Indigenous (and other marginalised) peoples, but also offer 'expanded' understandings of anti-racist, anti-patriarchal struggle.

Conclusion

This article focuses on my own identity as White researcher and the privileges this gives me in reproducing/challenging colonial power in higher education and beyond. By considering the methodology of an underlying study on Indigenisation practices in a specific location (two degree programs at a regional Australian university) I attempt to open up a space of critical reflexivity to consider some of the tensions and dilemmas of doing research as a non-Indigenous scholar in the field of decolonising education. In doing so I hope to bring attention to researcher situatedness within/against post-colonising systems of knowledge and power (Moreton-Robinson, 2013) and address directly the 'intrinsic' racial domination and politics of 'critical White anti-racist' subjectivities (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 183).

I approached this research with a need to find critical purchase in a field with histories of subjugation through White (un)settler epistemic and ontological violence. I saw myself – as researcher – in this theoretical journey through multiple subjectivities: implicated in but also resisting of 'always already colonizer/colonized' (Cary 2004, p. 69) qualitative differentiation. I needed a way to negotiate the politics of location. I therefore tried to craft a methodological approach drawing on post-structuralist intersectional feminism that speaks to 'subjects formed 'in-between' or in excess of, the sum of the "parts" of difference' (Bhabha 1994, p. 2). Understanding subjectivity as always in a state of change, as discursively produced and relational, underpinned my analyses of self and participants and the multiplicity of my/their positioning.

The theoretical and methodological approach outlined here helped me to negotiate questions of how to do research on decolonising higher education without shutting down difference, but also coming to some sense of solidarity and understanding. I learned the importance of being clear about my own social location as researcher, which by extension makes clear I am not making knowledge claims for 'bodies of knowledge' or 'groups'. This again opens up possibilities of

difference in perspective and epistemic orientation which can be usefully applied to further studies on decolonising/Indigenising the institution.

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