Flipping the Table
Toward an Indigenous-led urban research agenda

Libby Porter and Lauren Arabena

Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Hub

24 May 2018
About the Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Hub

The Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Hub (CAUL) is a consortium of four universities: the University of Melbourne, RMIT University, the University of Western Australia and the University of Wollongong. The CAUL Hub is funded under the National Environmental Science Program of the Australian Government’s Department of the Environment. The task of the CAUL Hub is to undertake research to support environmental quality in our urban areas, especially in the areas of air quality, urban greening, liveability and biodiversity, and with a focus on applying research to develop practical solutions.

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 2  
Our journey ................................................................................................................................ 3  
Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 5  
Project framework and philosophy ......................................................................................... 7  
  Indigenous perspectives on engagement, inclusion and participation .......................... 9  
  Project principles .................................................................................................................. 11  
Urban research and Indigenous peoples: Current practice and evidence ....................... 12  
Standard practices in Indigenous Engagement ................................................................... 15  
Applying the project philosophy ............................................................................................. 20  
  Becoming informed by Indigenous methodologies ....................................................... 20  
  Undoing privilege: the role of non-Indigenous researchers ........................................... 21  
  Research Governance ....................................................................................................... 23  
  Research Purpose and Benefit ......................................................................................... 25  
  From procedural ethics to relational ethics ....................................................................... 25  
Conclusion .............................................................................................................................. 28  
References ................................................................................................................................. 29
Acknowledgements

This report has been produced on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, and we acknowledge Wurundjeri Country, and the Elders of the Wurundjeri people past and present who have cared for this Country for thousands of generations. As authors of this report, our lives have been sustained by Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung / Bunurong Country, and we acknowledge the life source that is Country to our own lives.

We acknowledge that the work we have done toward this report has been the work of a partnership with our Aboriginal and non-Indigenous partners, mentors and colleagues. As we did our work across parts of Melbourne and Sydney, we acknowledge the deep histories of these places and the contemporary communities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who continue to sustain Country, kin and community in these cities.

This journey would not have been possible without the guidance of the CAUL Indigenous Advisory Group, with special acknowledgement to Maddison Miller and Jason Barrow. Jefa Greenaway provided strategic direction and guidance along the way and along with Rueben Berg expert facilitation of the workshops in this project. Cathy Oke was instrumental in making the project happen and kept us motivated along the way. Kirsten McDonald and Safiah Moore at Arup supported the project with funds, workshops, time, access to staff, and expertise. We could not have travelled on this journey without the generosity and participation of Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council, and Willum Warrain Gathering Place.

This project was supported by the Australian Government’s National Environmental Science Program through the Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Hub; RMIT University Enabling Capabilities Platform; and Arup.
Our journey

Like all research, this project has been, and still is, a journey. We would like to acknowledge that journey and place the notion of journeying at the centre of this initial report that shares our early learning. In scientific research, we do not very often share the journey itself in research, instead focusing on ‘what was found’ at the end. In this project, we are informed by Indigenous ways of producing and sharing knowledge and this invites acknowledgement and recognition of how the journey itself is part of the outcome. We arrive at ‘findings’ from somewhere. The journey is what shapes how we have come to see and understand the ideas we have been addressing in this project.

The motivation for our journey began with a chance conversation within the CAUL Hub – would it be possible to put some resources into more open thinking about the relationship between the Hub research and Indigenous ways of knowing the city? The idea seemed a good one, and a rare opportunity indeed to be resourced with a relatively open agenda. In 2015 CAUL had prepared an Indigenous Engagement and Partnership Strategy, as required of all NESP-funded Hubs, and established an Indigenous Advisory Group (IAG). The early work achieved through IEPS and IAG was instrumental. There was appetite and interest in taking this even further, moving beyond and critically considering ‘engagement’. After many conversations within the Hub, we discerned a need to get to grips with some of the dilemmas of ‘Indigenous engagement and participation’. While engagement and participation were welcome, we were sceptical about whether such models can be fundamentally transformative. There was broad appetite for creating space to practice “flipping the table” on the assumptions that non-Indigenous people design research and then (sometimes) go and seek Indigenous input about pre-determined frameworks and questions.

Getting the funding in place, enabled the appointment for 12 months (part-time) of Lauren Arabena as Indigenous Research Officer in Urban Sustainability. Together, Lauren and Libby began to try and figure out what it meant to think about urban environments research from an ‘Indigenous-led’ perspective. We stumbled over our words and ideas, trying to find the best way to express what we were trying to do. We practised articulating to each other some of our values, and tried to describe to ourselves some principles that would guide our work together.

Our discussions, reading and yarns led us to question some of the ways that Indigenous engagement happens and why it happens the way it does. An early workshop we hosted at the AIATSIS National Indigenous Research Conference in 2017 helped shake out some assumptions that we had not until that moment sufficiently noticed. Indigenous-led obviously meant what it said, and our project retained all the features of not being ‘Indigenous-led’! We wondered how we might reframe the project to keep in view the importance of the questions we began with, but without presuming that simply asking those questions easily enables a different kind of research approach to emerge. Reaching out to many different Aboriginal organisations helped us sharpen our thinking and further questions. We did this to learn more about how Aboriginal communities define self-determining research practices and the necessary components of ethical relationships. We wanted to hear more
about actual experiences of conventional approaches to participation and engagement. In addition, we workshopped many of these issues with non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners.

In this initial report, we follow the rhythm and flow of this journey to share some of the early learning. This includes our thinking about Indigenist approaches to knowledge production and sharing, what role a project like this can play in such approaches, how to practice some principles that were emerging, why we became uncomfortable with conventional approaches to engagement and participation, and what we learned when we began to place all these ideas in conversation with one another. The spirit of this report is to put Indigenous voices at the centre of the work, and so we deliberately and explicitly have sought to draw from published work by Indigenous people. Where possible, we note the specific identity of each scholar, to practice ways of crediting knowledge holders and knowledge contexts in ways that more closely align with Indigenous worldviews. A draft version of this report was shared with the Indigenous Advisory Group co-chairs, Maddison Miller and Jason Barrow. Their feedback helped clarify where the report needed to be sharpened and made more accessible. In fact, this small section ‘Our Journey’ was written inspired by a conversation between Libby and Jason about practices of writing and communication. All part of the journey.
Introduction

In Australia, our major cities present important questions about liveability (health, food security), connectivity (place, culture), sustainability, biodiversity and productivity. What is often missing in consideration of these challenges by urban researchers and practitioners alike is the recognition that all cities, towns and regional centres in Australia are also Aboriginal Country. Prior to urbanisation, these were resource-rich landscapes vital for first peoples offering an abundance of food, shelter, and water and governed by complex economic, social and cultural systems and practices. These systems practiced Aboriginal knowledge systems that understood, formed and shaped Australia’s environment. Aboriginal knowledge systems consist of a deep understanding of place, connection to place and responsibility to place.

The systematic and forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that has occurred over the past two centuries has resulted in the fragmentation of valuable knowledge and a decline in environmental quality. Australian urban contexts are places where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face special challenges in accessing Country and the right to control aspects of Country. Cities have also been places of deep and ongoing socio-economic marginalisation. In the face of these problems, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems have continued and adapted. Cities and towns are vitally important in sustaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flourishing.

Nearly 80 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia live in urban areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017) and every place on the Australian continent, urban or otherwise, is Country. Therefore any urban intervention or inquiry occurring on the Australian continent is related to, and impacts upon, Country and Indigenous people in specific ways. Urban environments are places where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to make and practice connection to community, to culture, to place, and kin, as Eualeyai/Kamilaroi scholar Larissa Behrendt (2005) demonstrates. These are values that are central to Aboriginal cultures and embody the natural environment, the past and the future, people, flora and fauna and history and culture.

Palyku scholar Ambelin Kwaymullina describes Indigenous knowledge systems as holistic, valuing the connection of all things living within that system (Kwaymullina 2016, p.441). Being connected to culture and Country has major health and wellbeing benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people where there is a large gap in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. These reasons indicate the vital importance of understanding urban environments as always and already Country (for a definition see Rose 1996).

Yet despite this importance, the relationship between Aboriginal knowledge systems and practices, and the urban environment is rarely considered in Australian urban research and practice. A consequence of this missed relationship is that dealing with the challenges of complex urban environments has tended to exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from meaningful engagement about urban Country, and its related knowledge and governance systems in Aboriginal communities. Given the importance of traditional knowledge systems for appropriately managing the relationship between people and place, this may mean that urban environments are missing a vital and potentially transformative dimension to the challenges that face complex urban environments. It also means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as sovereign peoples, have been excluded from matters of fundamental importance to them.
We start in the next section by setting out the project philosophy and framework, informed by Indigenous philosophies and perspectives on research, knowledge production and sharing. Then, we examine the existing literature about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and urban environments in light of this Indigenous philosophical framework. The report then critically evaluates standard practices for Indigenous engagement currently used in research and urban/environmental practice and provides initial findings as to ways forward that are more closely in line with Indigenous philosophies and perspectives. We especially consider the role and work for non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners, and some of the more practical governance and ethics approaches that Indigenous perspectives toward research demand.
Project framework and philosophy

Indigenous scholars and thinkers around the world have been very clear on the impact of Western knowledge, research and practice imposed on Indigenous peoples. This is well summarised by Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her ground-breaking book *Decolonizing Methodologies*:

Western research has led to a continuing oppression and subordination of Indigenous Australians in every facet of Australian society (Smith 1999).

Smith’s work examines how academic knowledge is organised according to disciplines and fields of knowledge that are grounded in Western ‘ways of knowing’. The philosophies of western ways of knowing are inherently culturally insensitive and work to either exclude Indigenous knowledges or when included misrepresent and misrecognise those knowledges:

Western research simply interprets Indigenous knowledge from a Western framework, effectively distorting reality… [consequently] ‘research’ is one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary (Smith 1999, p.22).

We take this critique of western ways of doing research as a point of departure in this project and have therefore tried to find ways of practicing research that listens more closely and carefully to philosophies that Smith and other Indigenous scholars have shared. To do that, we have focused on the possibilities and challenges for practicing research that is nevertheless located inside a western University system. The conditions of our project, then, are not outside the operation of colonial power. Our purpose has been to: find ways to practice within those conditions that is more closely aligned with Indigenous philosophies, as well as naming and critically reflecting on when the conditions of that colonial power are most noticeable. We found it important as a first step to develop an Indigenous framework and philosophy from a reading of Indigenous scholarship about research methodologies.

A distinctive and important literature on Indigenous research and methodologies has been presented to western and scientific in recent decades (Deloria 1969; Little Bear 2000; Kovach 2009; Smith 1999; Denzin et al. 2008; Wilson 2008). Smith’s 1999 book *Decolonizing Methodologies* remains a landmark text in exposing how western research has caused significant harm to Indigenous people and to Indigenous knowledge systems. Plains Cree scholar Margaret Kovach’s *Indigenous Methodologies* (2009) then articulated the processes by which Indigenous knowledges are generated. Indigenous methodology has been defined as “research by and for Indigenous peoples, using techniques and methods drawn from the traditions and knowledges of those peoples” (Evans et al. 2009, p.894). Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson proposes key questions guiding Indigenous research methodologies and approaches in his 2008 book *Research is Ceremony*.

Together, these and other Indigenous scholars show the importance of the intersection between ways of being and ways of knowing in all research paradigms, and especially Indigenous approaches. Their purpose in communicating Indigenous philosophies in research to a wider non-Indigenous audience is often described as confirming a rightful place for Indigenous knowledges within the research community at the same time as challenging ignorance and misunderstanding. In this sense, a key goal as articulated by Yolŋu scholars Yinja Guyula, Kathy Gotha, and Dhâŋal Gurruwiwi in collaboration with Christie is to “make visible what is meaningful and logical in our understanding of ourselves and the world” (Christie et al. 2010, p.70).
Indigenous methodologies are based upon Indigenous systems of knowledge, which:

“tend to be holistic and animate, in that they assume everything is alive and everything is connected... In animate realities, where everything lives and therefore is in a constant state of movement, the process of knowing inevitably involves locating the self within the networks of relationships that comprise the world, and that also comprise the self” (Kwaymullina 2016, p.441).

This means that knowledge is relational. Knowledge does not exist ‘independently’ as units or things collected by experts, but is produced and shared through relationships between people, place and all living creatures (see also Hemming et al. 2010; and work from Mi’Kmaq scholar Battiste 2000). Knowledge is situated inside specific lawful relations with people and Country. It is not possible, in this philosophy of knowing, for any one person, or any one way of knowing, to explain the entirety of existence.

This philosophy has profound implications for research governance and process. Self-determination in research work is about determining and controlling ways of being (ontology) that will be relevant or central in a project; ways of knowing (epistemology) that will shape how knowledge is conceived and produced; tools and forms of producing knowledge (methodology) that create distinctive research practices; and the ethical and moral orientation (axiology) of the purposes, meanings, and uses of research (Wilson 2008).

By contrast, western knowledge systems assume that experts are individuals located in distinct disciplines and ‘data’ is disconnected from that context, and collected and analysed as if that occurred objectively (see contributions to Battiste 2000). We are not comfortable making a claim that in this project we have achieved the aspiration of doing research ‘from an Indigenous paradigm’. This is in part because the research team includes people with both non-Indigenous and Indigenous identities and positions. To claim that we are researching from an Indigenous paradigm seems to raise some unsettling questions. Can a non-Indigenous researcher ever make such a claim?

Does a researcher with Indigenous heritage but working in a western University / institutional context automatically practice an Indigenous paradigm? We think that the relationships between individual researchers, the specific context in which they work, and the wider paradigm create a much more complex picture.

Instead our purpose in this project has been to learn from and through Indigenous philosophies of research and critically reflect, through our research practice, on what it means to undertake research informed by Indigenous philosophies and that centre Indigenous self-determination. We have tried to practice research that is open rather than closed into a set of pre-determined problems, and that is undertaken in relationship. We have found it necessary to stand in a continuous and critical assessment of how western research institutions seek to do ‘engagement’ with Indigenous peoples. In this sense, the project has been alive to a central ethical principle of Indigenist or decolonizing research, being to “broker spaces beyond research models and methodologies of collaboration and participation as a means to address the inequities of research” (Martin 2006).

Perhaps more importantly, we have come to wonder whether aspiring only for Indigenous-led research rather lets non-Indigenous researchers off the hook. What is the role of non-Indigenous researchers conducting their work on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Country? For as Hemming, Rigney and Berg assert in relation to research on Ngarrindjeri Ruwe/Ruwar (country/body/spirit), all such research has impacts and carries the responsibility for considering how caring for lands and waters are “important platforms for any just or ethical research” (2010, p.92). Therefore, we have come to consider a more useful framing as research practice towards becoming better research allies with Indigenous people.
As Cree scholar Michael Hart and his colleagues have identified, this “requires constant vigilance, critical reflexivity, self-examination of one’s motives, and the ability to tolerate discomfort and one’s personal pain at one’s complicity in colonial system” (Hart et al. 2017, p.341). In this next section we apply that ethic of vigilance and critical reflexivity to the way that western research institutions and governments currently approach Indigenous engagement and participation practices.

**Indigenous perspectives on engagement, inclusion and participation**

Research undertaken in Western paradigms, in non-Indigenous research institutions bears enormous epistemic privilege. Researchers see themselves, and are seen by others, as “potential knowers on an open epistemological territory [that awaits] anyone with the desire to explore” (Jones & Jenkins 2008, p.481). In this way, university-based teaching and research is predicated on the unspoken and assumed “possibility of and entitlement to an accessible and shared terrain of knowledge” (ibid, original italics). In other words, researchers carry around an often implicit sense of entitlement to knowing and being knowers.

As a consequence, when the call is finally heeded for researchers to pay better attention to Indigenous peoples, a first impulse is to seek to draw Indigenous knowledge and worldviews ‘inside the tent’. Models of participation and inclusion allow Indigenous people to share their knowledge and worldviews, participate in western research, and collaborate as partners.

The signs that western research institutions are finally heeding this call, one that has gone unheard for decades, is positive. It is at least better than western researchers assuming they can take, own and use Indigenous intellectual and cultural property for research purposes without consent, partnership or participation. Yet models of engagement and inclusion need some further unpacking. For they seem unable to undo the strong and entrenched relations of power that are always at work. Many Indigenous scholars globally have roundly criticised moves within western institutions that present themselves as resolving Indigenous claims and assertions because these are often experienced as new rounds of colonial rule. Work by Māori scholar Brad Coombes, Delaware and Cherokee scholar Jay Johnson with non-Indigenous scholar Richie Howitt argues forcefully that “collaborative approaches are not immune to claims of neo/colonial excess” (2014, p.846) and so all such moves within non-Indigenous institutions should be subject to continuous scrutiny.

Indeed, the desire by non-Indigenous researchers and research institutions for collaboration is often an “unwitting imperialist demand” (Jones and Jenkins 2008, p.471). That demand entices a range of what Jones and Jenkins call “discursive postures” toward Indigenous peoples and knowledges. The most obvious posture is one that tries to dissolve the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges and worldviews through communication and dialogue. Much has been written about communicative practices in settler-colonial settings where the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in those practices will never be equal for example by Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and colleagues (2012), Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2007) Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014), Tanganekald, Meintangk Boandik scholar Irene Watson (Watson 2002). Regarding difference as something that can be dissolved through communication (see also Porter 2010) sounds good in theory, yet downplays the ways that structural relations of power not only enable but sustain the privileged position of western knowledge, even in those more empathising practices.

To understand this better, we can look more closely at engagement practices. Indigenous people and perspectives are invited ‘inside’ western research institutions. This supposes the ability of western researchers and institutions to grant a hearing to voices usually suppressed, erased or ignored. Once ‘inside’ Indigenous people are asked to share their knowledge, as if knowledge were a commodity held by individuals that can be exchanged in a straightforward way. Indigenous
philosophies are unlikely to see knowledge, and the politics of its sharing, in this way. The desire to ask people to share their knowledge might further entrench privileges of entitlement: that non-Indigenous researchers can and should be able to access Indigenous knowledges. Underlying questions about whether or not knowledge can be shared, the conditions of its sharing and future use tend often go un-asked in such scenarios.

Looked at in this way, inclusion and participation cannot de-privilege the power of western scientific approaches. The presumption in western science that knowledge is a distinct set of things – units, items – that is held by individuals remains. More deeply, the question remains whether non-Indigenous researchers are able to even hear and comprehend in an authentic way. In other words, Indigenous people may choose to generously speak and share, but if non-Indigenous people cannot authentically hear what is being shared – because their hearing is so limited by their privilege – then it is questionable whether Indigenous voices are really able to speak at all. The presence of goodwill is not enough, because “deafness of the colonizers to indigenous speakers is one of the necessary conditions of a colonized society” (Jones and Jenkins 2008, p.478). The strong urge and desire by many non-Indigenous researchers (here Libby would include herself) to consider Indigenous perspectives comes from a concern about the silencing of Indigenous voices. Yet silence is not necessarily there to be filled, especially by non-Indigenous research (Kwaymullina 2016, p.440). Moreover, the urge to redress silence can often be a patronising move:

Research that took the once-radical step of ‘giving voice’ now patronises and silences those whose voice is quite capable of self-expression (Coombes et al 2014, p.849).

This point brings us to the central concern of Indigenous-led research about the privileging of Indigenous voices, knowledges and practices. This demands much more than simple ‘inclusion’. To privilege Indigenous worldviews requires suspending or holding to one side western worldviews and ways of knowing to tame their dominance. To centre Indigenous worldviews requires recognising that non-Indigenous power and privilege are not at all straightforward even to recognise, much less undo. Many Indigenous scholars have described the impact of western science on Indigenous peoples as epistemic violence – or a form of violence wielded through knowledge and experienced as an assault on cultures of knowing (Kwaymullina 2016; Tuck et al. 2014; Smith 1999; Smith 2005; Nakata 2007).

Yet there are even further complexities in the question of privileging Indigenous voices, practices and knowledges in this project. As Kwaymullina has summarised:

The complexities for Indigenous scholars includes the need to resist being made complicit in our own exploitation, negotiating the responsibilities we carry to our communities and the institutions where we work and dealing with exclusion in the academy in all its forms including at structural and epistemological levels (2016, p.438).

This invites further consideration of the responsibility that processes and projects such as this one hold toward that which they seek to privilege. Put another way, the work of privileging is likely insufficient. Attention must also be paid to the ways in which voices, practices and knowledges become enrolled in the service of research and practice agendas. It would be, for example, precisely the antithesis of what scholars such as Moreton-Robinson, Nakata, Kovach, Smith, Wilson and Kwaymullina are calling for if Indigenous voices were ‘privileged’ in research that served to further undermine their rights. Large institutions like Universities or other research agencies can often (unwittingly perhaps) fuel this problematic dynamic. The contemporary desire in such institutions to address Indigenous structural exclusion are often the systems that cause significant harm when they simplistically invite Indigenous people to be included without considering the wider and deeper questions of how the privilege and dominance of western knowledge is sustained (Moreton-Robinson 2004).
Project principles

The story of this project in relation to these vital concepts is one of challenging and being challenged. In the final report we will set out, and reflect on, how we approached the work. For now, it is helpful to state some working principles that we found useful to articulate as we tried to navigate the complexities of practicing this project:

1. create and hold spaces and processes for respectful relationships with diverse Aboriginal communities;
2. collect and collate evidence about standard forms of engagement and at the same time challenge these practices through our praxis;
3. find and practice ways of navigating these dimensions within a University institution and a wider funded research program and critically reflect on the tensions arising.
Urban research and Indigenous peoples: Current practice and evidence

Urbanisation has always been an important and central process for the settler-colonial project (Porter 2013a; Porter & Yiftachel 2017; Grandinetti 2017; Ugarte et al. 2017; Penelope Edmonds 2010; Jacobs 1996; King 1990; S. Jackson 1996; Jackson et al. 2017). Cities have been key places where the dispossession of land and the removal and marginalisation of Indigenous peoples has been most profound (Jacobs 1996; Jackson et al. 2017; S. E. Jackson 1996; King 1990; Pauline Edmonds 2010). Some of the major consequences are that Indigenous people have very minimal access to land in cities, particularly when those cities take up their own Country, and the development of a (wrong) view that there is no essential relationship between urban environments and Indigenous peoples, lands and lives becomes normalised. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are rendered ‘out of place’ in urban environments (Fredericks 2013). This helps explain why urban research in Australia has been so silent on the relationship between urban environments and Indigenous values, culture, law, knowledge and placemaking.

It is rather a paradox to say that such a silence exists. For there is in fact an enormous research and evidence base ‘about’ Indigenous people who live in urban areas across many disciplines and fields. The following table provides a selection of some of the most recent literature by theme that has an explicitly urban focus.

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<td></td>
<td>(Alaazi et al. 2015; Walker &amp; Barcham 2010; Walker 2003; Walker 2006; Blomley 2013)</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population and demographic change</td>
<td>(Biddle 2009; Prout &amp; Biddle 2015; Biddle &amp; Prout 2014; Taylor 1998; Taylor 2006; Taylor 2013)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Hill 2012)</td>
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<td>Social exclusion</td>
<td>(Walter 2016)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Sookraj et al. 2012; Wendt &amp; Gone 2012; Hartmann &amp; Gone 2012; Brussoni et al. 2016; Waa et al. 2017; Lipus et al. 2018)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity, gender, art</td>
<td>(Quayle et al. 2016; Yamanouchi 2010; Ottosson 2014)</td>
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<td>Category</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>(Navin et al. 2012)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>(Browne-Yung et al. 2015)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Children and youth</td>
<td>(Grace et al. 2017; Young et al. 2017; Briggs 2017)</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Elliott et al. 2012; Smith et al. 2016; Bigon &amp; Hart 2018; Mulyasari &amp; Sihombing 2017; Cobbinah et al. 2015; Bang et al. 2013; Bang et al. 2014)</td>
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How then can we say there is a ‘silence’ given this large number of studies?

We say ‘silence’ to demand closer interrogation of the way Indigenous people are invited into urban research. When ‘Indigenous’ appears in urban research, in some of the above work for example, it is often in forms that creates Indigenous people as problems in relation to specific topic areas such as health, housing, education and demographics. Hence, urban research tends to emphasise Indigeneity as a way of being deficient in terms of lack of housing, poor health, low education outcomes or social exclusion. Like the ‘Close the Gap’ policy regime, the material injustices or inequalities experienced by Indigenous people come to be made knowable and ‘fixable’ through western ways of determining what counts as a ‘gap’, and which knowledges and policy mechanism can be marshalled to fix that gap. This is not to deny the existence of such inequalities and injustices – these are very real and materially present in many Indigenous people’s everyday lives. It is instead to trouble the presumptions of knowledge and knowing upon which such research can come to rest.

Recent work has begun to consider this different relationship between urban environments and Aboriginal peoples and knowledges. In 2016, the Monash Sustainability Institute prepared a report sponsored by the City of Melbourne considering the possibility of applying Aboriginal knowledge to urban sustainability aspirations and challenges (Monash Sustainability Institute n.d.). Working from the principle that Aboriginal worldviews share strong foundational principles with the aims of sustainability, and therefore may be intrinsically important for thinking about how to manage key urban sustainability challenges.

To notice this body of research work as ‘silence’ concerns a deeper reckoning with cities as already Indigenous places. This has been a clear call from Indigenous scholars for a long time who have worked to reveal the important intersections of urban life with Indigenous identity, land, community, law and history (an excellent example is Tony Birch’s recent article in The Conversation):
https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-recovering-a-narrative-of-place-stories-in-the-time-of-climate-change-95067). This is a different way of framing the relationship between Indigeneity, and the sustainability of Indigenous futures, and urban environments. Instead of deficit, need or service-provision, the principles of self-determination and sovereignty are front and centre.
Standard practices in Indigenous Engagement

Recognition by non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners of the need for Indigenous engagement in urban research is relatively new. It partly emerges from broader shifts in Australian Indigenous policy toward recognising the central importance of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Of course, Indigenous research, knowledge production and sharing has been practiced for tens of thousands of years and so the claim that Indigenous place-based knowledge might be somehow ‘new’ for urban research highlights, more than anything else, the failure of non-Indigenous society to properly value that knowledge. That said, the quest for engagement can be situated in some important shifts of protocol.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) stipulates ‘free, prior and informed consent’ as a central pillar of the self-determining rights of Indigenous peoples (see for example Articles 19 and 32). Often this core demand of UNDRIP is interpreted as creating shared policy-making exchanges. In the area of housing, research has found that “policy is seen as most effective when it takes place on a shared terrain of social, political and economic exchange, established through negotiated relations of mutual cultural understanding and respect” (Habibis et al. 2013).

While few cite UNDRIP specifically, one response of government departments, research and policy advocacy institutions has been the preparation of engagement practice guidelines. Often these create drivers for engagement, requiring non-Indigenous researchers or policy-makers to undertake consultation at various points in policy and research processes.

In an evaluation of approaches to Indigenous engagement in the natural resource management sector, Hill and colleagues (2012) developed a typology of engagement models. We interpret their typology as a continuum, following Mclean and colleagues (2016), and find it useful to present it as a visual diagram:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous control</th>
<th>Agency control</th>
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<tr>
<td>Indigenous governed collaboration</td>
<td>Indigenous-driven co-governance</td>
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<td>Agency-driven co-governance</td>
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<td>Agency governance</td>
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According to “Engage Early”, the Federal Department of Environment’s most recent practice guideline, Indigenous engagement is defined as “Any process that involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in problem solving or decision making and uses community input to make better decisions” (Australian Government 2016). Like other practice guidelines in the sector, broad practice norms for engagement are then stipulated that define what ‘involvement’ might mean.

Some common themes emerge from an analysis of a selection of such guidelines. There is a strong emphasis on building trust through respectful practices and processes. ‘Respect’ is rarely overtly defined, but the kinds of language used to describe what might constitute respectful practice includes: listening; acknowledging the existence and intellectual property of Indigenous knowledges; acknowledging and accommodating different ways of working or different values in relation to
outcomes and processes; avoiding tokenistic involvement to achieve meaningful participation; allowing time and providing resourced support for involvement.

For example, the National Environmental Science Program guidelines (2014), prepared by the Federal Department of Environment and governing all of the Program’s funded environmental science research including CAUL, stipulates 5 pillars:

1. Building trust
2. Respectful interactions
3. Upholding rights
4. Mutual understanding
5. Enduring partnerships

The Victorian Catchment Management Authorities guidelines set out similar principles in a slightly different way, as shown in this diagram:

Source: (Victorian Catchment Management Authorities n.d.)

These principles are translated into a series of commitments, to:

- integrate Aboriginal engagement into all aspects of projects and programs
• actively support CMA staff to engage Aboriginal communities and build partnerships
• appropriately plan, service and support Aboriginal engagement strategy
• provide meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal communities to contribute
• work transparently and respectfully with Aboriginal communities and establish clear roles and expectations

Many of the guidelines produced by research organisations and research leadership / funding agencies (such as NESP, CSIRO) use such language. They include aspirational statements about respect, trust, partnership and co-benefits as key principles for practicing Indigenous engagement.

Our purpose in this section is not to rehearse these well-known dimensions of Indigenous engagement. Instead, our purpose here is to invite critical reflection informed by Indigenous theories and scholarship. In this sense, we take Hart and colleagues (Hart et al. 2017) definition of colonialism from an Indigenist perspective where colonialism is all of “the processes by which the beliefs, values, and practices of the colonizing group are imposed on Indigenous peoples” (p.333).

Commonly, the language used in guidelines and principles positions Indigenous people as both holders of different and unique knowledges that can make an important contribution to scientific (western) knowledge. As the NESP guidelines state: “the deep connection of Aboriginal Australians’ with land and water and their enduring history with the landscape means they are able to bring unique and valuable perspectives and knowledge to enrich and holistically inform a range of scientific research” (p.12). For CSIRO, the purpose of engagement is to “achieve greater Indigenous participation in CSIROs research and development agenda and activities” (CSIRO 2018). This is also acknowledged in the urban context, where the Monash Sustainability Institute report notes “how significant the contribution of Aboriginal environmental philosophy could be to the success of sustainable cities” (Monash Sustainability Institute n.d., p.15).

They also tend to position Indigenous people as potential receivers of enhanced ‘capacity’ by being included in western research institutions through employment targets, fee structures, research agreements, co-authorship arrangements and other mechanisms. Thus, the NESP strategy wants to move ‘beyond consultation’ through “deeper engagement and participation activities which help embed cultural perspectives, build Indigenous capacity and establish partnerships between researchers and Indigenous communities” (p11).

These principles and aspirations are welcome. However, they are unable to displace the power of western knowledge and practice but instead might work to reorganise and reinforce the privilege of western researchers as the ones who can ‘learn about’ by ‘learning from’. In this way, Indigenous knowledge becomes an additive or supplement to scientific knowledge: the hugely problematic “add Indigenous and stir”. Western researchers maintain their position of entitlement to become knowers of a shared Indigenous world-view or perspective.

At the same time these approaches locate deficits in capacity with Indigenous people. Capacity deficits are identified in terms of lack of employment of Indigenous research staff, or lack of fee transfer to Indigenous community organisations. While jobs and income are of course important and positive to pursue and achieve, the deficits in capacity of western knowledge systems and western knowers are much less the focus for redress (see for example Porter & Barry 2016a; Howitt et al. 2013). In the same move, western knowledge is re-institutionalised as an untroubled, coherent, universal and apolitical knowledge into which Indigenous knowledges are invited (i.e. to be ‘shared’).
A common way that non-Indigenous research institutions have sought to do this work is through what Kovach describes as the

“emergence of non-Indigenous ‘Indigenous knowledge brokers’. This group is comprised of non-Indigenous scholars who are reputable within Indigenous communities and can be called upon by other non-Indigenous scholars” (2009, p.172).

While this might be comfortable and efficient, it “sidesteps the relationship-building aspect that gives credibility to the involvement of non-indigenous scholars in Indigenous research.” (Ibid).

Kovach charges non-Indigenous scholars with the task of working through this particular problem.

In research governance, there is a more overt recognition of the importance of self-determination in research activities. This is best communicated by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (GERAIS) (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2012). Working more explicitly in the UNDRIP framework, the GERAIS establishes key principles that begin with the principle of self-determination, and that Indigenous peoples are diverse and unique with innate rights and responsibilities regarding culture, cultural artefacts, knowledge, law, and place and these rights must be respected. The GERAIS principles provide guidance as to the key actions:

- ongoing consultation and negotiation;
- obtaining full free and informed consent;
- striking formal research agreements;
- enabling Indigenous control over all aspects of the research;
- ensuring the research does no harm; and
- orienting the research toward results that will specifically contribute benefit to Indigenous communities.

One dimension rarely discussed is what motivates non-Indigenous researchers toward working with Aboriginal people and communities. For the challenge mounted by Indigenous methodologies “reaches the heart of the enterprise to question the very purpose of research” (Coombes et al. 2014, p.845). The motivation to ‘help’ should immediately signal a paternalistic urge, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are of course capable of making their decisions led by and for, community. Non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners should not presume they are ‘needed’, and should watch carefully and self-reflexively for the desire to be ‘needed’. Contemporary research institutions are creating Indigenous engagement requirements, models and tools for their researchers, but these tend to be designed and implemented through the market and output-oriented incentives that typically drive contemporary University research activity. In this way, standard practice guidelines and models of engagement tend to replicate what Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and colleagues have identified as “moves to innocence”: the “strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all” (Tuck & Yang 2012, p.10).

To conclude this section, we think it is useful to contextualise this discussion in the light of some interesting emerging initiatives. The Victorian Government passed legislation recently that was developed in consultation with traditional owners, the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrung) Act (Vic) 2017. Notably, this is the first Act of the Victorian Parliament to include Woiwurrung language and was introduced to Parliament by Elders in their language. The Act establishes the Birrarung Council as a key consultative body for the planning and decision-making of the Birrarung (Yarra) and this Council has significant traditional owner representation. In New South Wales, local Aboriginal Land Councils are quite often significant landholders in some urban areas,
albeit under fairly constrained conditions. Increasingly, Land Councils are looking to urban
development and planning as central for their ability to manage their estates for wider benefit. The
Queensland Government passed new planning legislation in 2016, that states the protection of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and culture as a central purpose of planning. While it is
as yet unclear how that purpose will be operationalised, it would seem to mean that Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander interests and values must be considered in all land use and management
interventions. Finally, in Western Australia, there is significant planning work underway by Yawuru
people in Broome over their lands much of which is in the urban area. In Perth, the Noongar
agreement appears to have compelled the West Australian government to include Noongar people
in a number of different planning and environmental governance mechanisms, which may herald
some potentially interesting new initiatives and possibilities.
Applying the project philosophy

In this section, we draw on Indigenous scholarship and philosophy to think about how to critique, rethink and reconfigure these standard practices of ‘Indigenous engagement’. This is specifically written for non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners.

Becoming informed by Indigenous methodologies

When we approach research and research problems we do so already shaped and attuned by our socialization – we will see possibilities, opportunities, and methods for doing things in some places and not even realise that we choose these because of our deep acculturation. Conversely, there will be many dimensions we cannot see because we are steeped in ways of knowing that cannot see them. Cree scholar Margaret Kovach puts it beautifully: “we know what we know from where we stand. We need to be honest about that” (2009, p.22). Or as Coombes, Johnson and Howitt put it: “the context for research writes our research into being just as much as research makes contexts knowable” (2016, p.850). The responsibility this raises for non-Indigenous researchers is to commit to explicit and sustained effort to become informed by Indigenous methodologies and theories, or as Kovach says: “start from where you are… and return to the teachings” (2009, p.22).

As outlined earlier, Indigenous scholars have distilled, defined and refined central characteristics, contexts and principles of Indigenous theories of knowledge and methodological approaches. This is not to make them ‘available’ for non-Indigenous researchers to simply ‘use’ in a simplistic sense. Indeed, “there is no pre-determined, singular or authorised suite of [Indigenous] methods” (Coombes et al 2016, p.851). We remain unconvinced that non-Indigenous researchers can ethically and even practically undertake research from within Indigenous methodologies and theories. Indigenous theory is located in a specific cultural context and emerges from organic community-based processes that are the product of the cultural epistemic foundations of an Indigenous worldview (Kovach 2009). Non-Indigenous people come from a standpoint that cannot and is not ever structured by the same experiences and perspectives as Indigenous people – by definition they cannot ‘come from’ an Indigenous standpoint.

That said, non-Indigenous researchers can locate themselves as committed to and learners from Indigenous methodologies and philosophies. And non-Indigenous researchers are responsible for doing the essential work of finding ways to be in lawful, sovereign relationships with Indigenous law. Commitments to Indigenous social and political theory, as Tuck and McKenzie have identified are not “peripheral points or extra considerations, but [are] foundational” (2015, p.636). Through such commitments, non-Indigenous researchers can support the creation of more space for Indigenous epistemologies within University-based research. This demands always remembering that such spaces are created within ongoing (colonialist) relations. Creating and holding spaces within mainstream research institutions for Indigenous epistemologies cannot transcend those relations. The space between decolonizing efforts in research and Indigenous communities is not straightforward and fraught with uncertainty. For example, as Kovach (2009) teaches, even within those spaces we still tend to write (for example in this report) which privileges a particular way of producing and sharing knowledge. And we often speak with the language of ‘concepts’ and ‘frameworks’ which tend to privilege thought over feeling, relation or kin. Appreciating how a particular kind of knowing and knowledge is made into the ‘norm’ and then privileged in western research helps illuminate other ways of knowing, such as the knowing that comes from our hearts, souls, and spirits as emotional beings (Hart et al 2017). Put differently, this is not a simple matter of repackaging methodologies, but instead of deep work forging new relational ethics between non-
Indigenous research and researchers with Indigenous philosophies and communities. This will entail being open to approaches to knowledge where “ethics becomes method; data become life; landscape becomes author; participants become family” (Coombes et al 2016, p.850).

A considerable and rich literature exists that can assist both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to develop a closer commitment to Indigenous methodologies. Eve Tuck in her work with McKenzie (2015) describes an approach of ‘critical place inquiry’, which centres place and the situatedness in that place of knowledge, politics, practices and materialities. This enables a more serious commitment to and engagement with Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies of land and belonging. The field of health research has generated significant advances where researchers actively partner with Indigenous communities, such as the prevalence of Kaupapa Māori approaches in health research in Aotearoa-New Zealand (Drawson et al. 2017). Murri scholar Bronwyn Fredericks has offered “pathway” as an Indigenous research method and metaphor that utilizes concepts of the “the mountains, winds and orientation” (Fredericks 2007) to provide a structure to a research study.

Indigenous philosophies and methodologies often share key principles with other critical research approaches such as feminist, critical, community-based and participatory research. Drawson and colleagues’ work (2017) suggests that community-based participatory research with Indigenous communities helps by prioritizing community needs from the research and integrating knowledge and action for mutual benefit. The *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* situates Indigenous epistemologies as forms of critical inquiry and pedagogy (Denzin & Lincoln 1994). But this does not mean, authors in the handbook argue, that Indigenous epistemologies are the same as feminist, critical, interpretive forms of inquiry that emerge from non-Indigenous thinkers and paradigms. Many Indigenous scholars (such as Smith 2000; Smith 1999; Bishop 1998; Battiste 2000; Nakata 2007) have critically appraised the way that critical social theory itself perpetuates colonialist presumptions by essentialising Indigenous people into marginalised ‘others’ who has to be spoken for. Instead, non-Indigenous scholars seeking to be in dialogue with Indigenous scholars and approaches requires a particular ethics of humility, respect and reflexivity where scholars commit to understand and live with the consequences of their research actions (Smith 1999; Denzin et al. 2008).

**Undoing privilege: the role of non-Indigenous researchers**

The work of reconfiguring urban research and urban environmental practice does not and should not rest with Indigenous people alone. This is not an ‘Indigenous’ problem, it is a problem of settler-coloniality. We all have a role to play in this work (see Hart et al 2017).

One dimension of the role of non-Indigenous researchers is to begin to cultivate an ongoing attitude of critical reflexivity about who we are, where we stand in the research and the ways in which our standing is supported as privilege in mainstream research domains. As this project has been focused on detailing, this entails different and deeper work – potentially harder, more profound and certainly more unsettling – than ‘including’ or ‘engaging’ Indigenous people in their research projects. For the modes of inclusion we have demonstrated are one of myriad dynamics that work to reproduce colonial relations.

Instead, “settlers have to ensure that their actions do not reinforce colonial oppressions, such as when they claim they are doing ’what is right’ for the colonized” (Hart et al. 2017, p.334; see also Land 2015 on this point.) Evading pain, ignoring complicity in colonialism and reproducing colonialist
systems of power and knowledge are what Tuck and Yang have famously called the “settler move to innocence” (2012, p.10).

Actually practicing this involves some sensibilities and reflexivities that are not easy to describe and cannot be contained in a set of guidelines or recommendations. Here, we simply flag some of the aspects, and ideas discussed in the literature. At the centre is always the principle that our actions as non-Indigenous people should be oriented to upholding Indigenous people’s self-determination (Hart et al 2017, p.334). As Wuthathi/Meriam lawyer Terri Janke puts it, “Respectful research, in relation to Indigenous peoples, requires engaging with and through new modes of interaction that begin with the recognition of that which the colonial project has long denied: the inherent sovereignty and humanity of Indigenous peoples” (Janke 1998).

The literature encourages non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners to engage more critically with the histories of their own disciplines and professions. Finding out what role one’s discipline and chosen profession has played in the theft of lands and lives from Indigenous communities is one step. Another step is to consider our disciplines or professions as specific cultural standpoints in themselves ‘Culture’ and cultural knowledge is not only the preserve of Indigenous people. Science is cultural too. This is particularly challenging and unsettling work. It requires becoming comfortable with the discomfort of cognitive dissonance which inevitably occurs when one’s own history and knowledge perspective is so profoundly upended.

Reflexive awareness also requires non-Indigenous people to recognise that Indigenous people routinely experience forms of oppression and racism that non-Indigenous people will most likely be completely unaware of and unable to access. Research is never unhooked from the everyday realities of Indigenous (or indeed anybody else’s) life (see Mclean et al. 2016). This is how privilege works. And so sometimes, our actions in seeking partnership or engagement might not be possible or might end up re-emphasising those problematics. There are moments of distinct choice, then, about whether or not to seek partnership and when it is appropriate for the non-Indigenous community to shoulder a larger share of the burden of anti-colonial work.

Knowing the history of your field in relation to Indigenous people might also require thinking well outside the box. Non-Indigenous researchers may think that there is ‘no Indigenous knowledge’ about a specific field. This is likely untrue, and is a reminder that much Indigenous knowledge will not be shared in academic journals or through practitioner networks. The fact that as non-Indigenous scholars or practitioners we are not exposed to Indigenous knowledges does not mean they do not exist.

There are some basic practical and everyday things that can emerge from the cultivation of such sensibilities and reflexivities. One is being prepared to challenge and change organisational cultures. This means that reflection on one’s own practice, discipline and position cultivates a wider recognition of colonialist processes and their perpetuation in day-to-day business. The rhythms and imperatives that drive University research often create pressures and resulting behaviours and practices that significantly constrain decolonising approaches (see McLean et al 2016). Being prepared to challenge that perpetuation and seek to change it, is one area of practice for non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners. This might involve finding ways within standard organisational practices to subvert the status quo and the systems of privilege that perpetually centre non-Indigenous way of knowing and doing. It could also involve actively mentoring Indigenous scholars and finding ways to support the development of Indigenous-led projects and proposals. This might best be thought of as making space at the same time as getting out of the way
(Harrison & Mclean 2017). Finding and creating such spaces is not easy and requires as Cree scholar Michael Hart with colleagues identify “a complex negotiation of multiple contexts and accountabilities” (2017).

Equally, there are many actions and practices that are much more subtle and everyday for non-Indigenous practitioners and researchers. Perhaps the most important is doing the work required of relationships. Usually, there is no funding to do relationship-building work and neither is such work recognised in any University or industry metric or ‘key performance indicator’. It is long, slow and sometimes challenging work to build respectful, humble relationships over a long period of time.

Developing positive relationships is critical to Indigenous research methodologies and approaches (see Drawson et al 2017, Wilson 2008, Smith 1999, Kovach 2009). If there is one thing that non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners must learn is that trust and relationships are must be at the core of practice. As Kovach observes, “those who try to sidestep the relational work will be forever frustrated by Indigenous knowledges, research, and methodologies” (2009, p. 172).

Relationship is the space into which Indigenous people can define and determine what a research agenda should look like. It is through relationship that non-Indigenous scholars can come to be better informed by and appreciative of Indigenous knowledges, cultures and perspectives. Relationships, in this sense, are place-based, and involve Country, kinship and community as vital dimensions of research relationships (Woodward & Marrfurra McTaggart 2016). Yet there is no one type of relationship and of course relationships grow and live across and through time (Jason Barrow, pers comm May 2018). Relationships are not prescribed, but practiced and lived.

It is also because as Wilson writes, the purpose of research itself for Indigenous philosophies is to “bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves” (2008, p.137). It is in relationship – thinking and working together, we come to appreciate more deeply each other and each other’s ideas, opening up a renewed sense of our respective responsibilities as well as new possibilities.

We would also argue that it is through relationship that non-Indigenous people can cultivate a more attuned reflexivity about privilege. This is not possible until we begin to ‘walk in another’s shoes’ (Umemoto 2001).

Being in relationship closely links to other more practical dimensions of research governance, research benefit and research ethics, each of which we discuss below.

Research Governance

One of the problems with ‘inclusionary’ or engagement-based approaches is that control of the research process tends to rest with non-Indigenous researchers and organisations. If the deployment of Aboriginal knowledges is not controlled by the holders of that knowledge, then this is the antithesis of the principle of self-determination.

Consequently, researchers and practitioners need to give deep and sustained consideration to research governance. This, too, only comes through relationship and the close negotiation of governance arrangements. The principles of ownership, control, access and possession are central
(Hart et al. 2017; Drawson et al. 2017; First Nations Information Governance Centre 2016; Hemming et al. 2010). Kovach (2009, p.145) defines these as follows:

Ownership: assumes that a community owns cultural knowledge and does so collectively. Therefore community consent, as well as individual consent, is needed.

Control: assumes that First Peoples have the right to control all aspects of the research process, from the formulation of research frameworks, to data collection, to management and dissemination.

Access: means the right of Indigenous people to retrieve and examine data

Possession: means the actual possession of data. This is the mechanism through which ownership can be asserted

The principles and recommendations for research practice in the Australian context are set out in the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (GERAIS 2012). The language used is slightly different, but the intent is broadly similar. Respecting Indigenous knowledge and rights is not only a matter of attitude and approach, but is practically applied through appropriate governance measures that enable Indigenous knowledge holders to own, control, access and possess their own knowledge. This includes controlling the terms of its sharing and use. The question of control is fundamental and raises some potentially confronting challenges for non-Indigenous researchers, because it requires ceding control (Worby & Rigney 2002). Given the normalised assumption that researchers control the essential parameters of their research, this is likely to be confronting for non-Indigenous researchers to actually put into practice.

In practice this means that researchers need to develop specific ways of working. The GERAIS document provides important signposts and recommendations in this regard. It is important that researchers appreciate that applying these principles will likely have significant implications across the aims and objectives, methodologies and communication strategies of research projects. Sometimes, it might mean the outputs planned cannot be achieved, or need to be achieved in different ways.

One example is offered by work undertaken by Hart and colleagues (2017). As Indigenous knowledge-holders controlled the data analysis process, the project shifted from undertaking thematic coding of interviews, as is often standard in qualitative research paradigms, to using sharing circles. This helps demonstrate that centring methods of sense-making that are steeped in Indigenous law/lore not only ensures that the data collection and analysis is culturally safe but enhances the validity and ethics of the project (see also Drawson et al 2017). Similarly, achieving final results and outputs might take a lot of time and commitment to processes determined and led by Indigenous partners.

A common way to practice these principles is to strike a formal research agreement with Indigenous partners (see GERAIS 2012, Principle 9). This can help clarify at an early stage the respective roles, expectations, responsibilities and processes. This is by no means the ‘first step’ of relationship building, for the essential elements of trust, reciprocity and mutual benefit and respect must come first before the more practical concerns. Research agreements might be best thought of as a ‘roadmap’ (Jason Barrow personal communication May 2018) that help guide the relationship.

Increasingly, the question of research governance is coming to be discussed in the Australian context as data sovereignty (Kukutai & Taylor 2016). This recognises that control of the collection, analysis,
dissemination and use of knowledge is a matter of sovereignty not merely a matter of procedural ethics.

Research Purpose and Benefit

In Indigenous methodologies, the “process of research is more than the production of new knowledge” (Drawson et al 2017). There must also be significant benefits to Indigenous communities, practices, and knowledge holders. These benefits might be about capacity, healing, knowledge, skills and employment or finances. They might be both intangible and tangible. Defining benefits, who should receive them, and how they might be perceived is a matter of self-determining control. Indigenous partners get to say how benefit will be defined and where benefits will flow.

Critically answering the question ‘who benefits’ from research can help unpack and genuinely appraise where benefit lies (Wilson 2008). This renders research accountable in specific ways, enabling Indigenous knowledge holders to keep researchers accountable, as Kovach (2009) articulates, on why THAT research was done and why in THAT way. Moreover, she states that if the purpose is not about challenging the colonial paradigm then it is probably part of the colonial paradigm.

Research conducted in relationship with Indigenous communities, or led by Indigenous people themselves, will be much more likely to generate knowledge of benefit to Indigenous communities. Research that is conducted ‘on’ a community tends to benefit the researcher. When research is conducted with the community, and under relationships of strong and accountable governance where Indigenous partners control the terms of the research, then both parties can benefit (Baccar & Lemelin 2012). Research that recognises and builds on the strengths and resources of community is much more able to integrate knowledge and action for mutual benefit (Drawson et al 2017).

From procedural ethics to relational ethics

Clearly there are myriad ethical issues that will always be present in research between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people. These issues will be critical even when strong relationships exist, and even when the research is being conducted according to Indigenous methodologies and purposes. Indigenous ethics can of course never be limited to a set of procedural rules but are instead about “knowing who you are, the values you hold, and your understanding of how you fit within a spiritual world” (Brandt-Castellano 2004, as cited in Kovach 2009, p.146). We appreciate this important point. In this section we focus not so much on Indigenous ethics, but on the specific dimensions of relational ethics where non-Indigenous researchers come to engage with Indigenous communities and knowledge holders.

This contains but is much more than ethical conduct in relation to the procedural ethics instituted and governed by University or other institutional ethics boards. While these are necessary and important they are themselves hooked into social and institutional structures that perpetuate and sustain western presumptions about the production and sharing of knowledge. From the perspective of western procedural ethics requirements, ethical conduct is viewed as an aptitude and skillset of researchers, governed by procedures. As long as researchers have the right intentions and accepted procedures in place to govern their conduct, ethics is deemed to be ‘covered’. Yamatji-Nyoongar scholar Margaret Raven has critically analysed this approach and discerned a typology of research
actors (gatekeepers, guardians and gatecrashers) in relation to the assumptions such actors hold about Indigenous knowledge (Raven 2010).

Conventional western ethics frameworks tend to position researchers as ‘objective’ experts. and the power to “determine what should be researched and who should be ‘consulted’ in Indigenous research projects” (Hemming et al. 2010, p.97) rests with named investigators. Moreover, procedural ethics oversight misses a more fundamental point from Indigenous perspectives, which is that “ethical infringement is an extension of the settler-colonial project” (Kovach 2009, p.142). Thus, the ethical relationship extends well beyond simply whether or not a participant consent form was correctly filed and is instead concerned with fundamental assumptions about where the ownership of and right to share knowledge rests. The individualist orientation (Kovach 2009, Hemming et al. 2016) to knowledge embedded within western approaches presumes the right of a researcher to access and use knowledge. The collectivist orientation (Kovach 2009) of Indigenous knowledge holding and sharing would suggest a very different set of ethical requirements (see also Mclean et al. 2016, p.22).

University ethics procedures tend to perpetuate, rather than resolve these issues. In the final report from this project, we will include a reflective analysis of our own experience navigating this project through a University ethics process as a way of highlighting the tensions and issues that arise.

Many Indigenous organisations and communities have their own ethical expectations and requirements of researchers. Some of these are formally instituted through organisational and representative bodies. Others are negotiated in relationship and inhere in the philosophies and purposes of distinct Aboriginal peoples. Researchers should not assume that the absence of a formal-looking ethics or agreement-making procedure means an absence of ethical philosophies. It is through relationship and negotiation that such matters can be aired and agreed. And it is incumbent on researchers themselves to be aware of and informed about Indigenous cultural and intellectual property.

There are many excellent examples available for non-Indigenous researchers to educate themselves about the central tenets of Indigenous ethical principles. The Woor-dungin model from communities based in Victoria is one of relationship and self-determination, identified in three principles as expressed by Peter Aldenhoven, a Nugh man and practitioner from Quandamooka: “Walk with us, two ways learning, self-determination” (see: http://www.woor-dungin.com.au/the-wd-model/). Aboriginal Land and heritage Councils often have specific expectations and protocols for researchers making an initial approach and working out whether or not a research project fits with community aspirations and values. Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Cultural Heritage Council, based in Melbourne, for example have a set procedure for cultural consultations involving all external requests for projects and proposals, that is governed by Wurundjeri Elders (see https://www.wurundjeri.com.au/).

Some of the larger Land Councils have very well-developed and explicit ethics procedures. The Larrakia people of the Darwin region have a published protocol which establishes Larrakia law/lore as the reference point for visitors to Larrakia Country. This protocol requests that visitors acknowledge that a body of Larrakia knowledge exists and that there is no automatic invitation to share in or learn that knowledge. This acknowledgement gives rise to a series of cultural obligations under the guidance of Larrakia people (see http://larrakia.com/about/protocol/). The Kimberley Land Council has its own Research Ethics and Access Committee that has established a set of aims and supporting policies. Researchers working with the KLC and in the Kimberley region are expected to adhere to the research protocol. This defines intellectual property and traditional knowledge according to distinct law/lore and defines the rights and obligations of Aboriginal people in the
Kimberley. It also establishes clear protocols of confidentiality, consent, ethical practice and the use of knowledge. To work in the Kimberley, researchers are required to submit their proposal to the KLC for ethics approval (see https://www.klc.org.au/research-facilitation-ntsu/).

These examples of self-determination in practice can offer some insights for non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners about some of the values and expectations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold toward research, research practices and research institutions.
Conclusion

The issues covered in this report are not abstract – they live in the everyday practices and contexts we inhabit and recreate. No matter our intentions and great efforts, where they exist, to Indigenous-informed / Indigenist research, it is vital to acknowledge that our efforts as non-Indigenous people take place in a continuing colonial paradigm.

It will never be sufficient to say how important being respectful is, without thinking carefully and constantly about what it will mean to practice being respectful in our every behaviour and decision. It will never be sufficient to appoint an Indigenous researcher and develop partnerships with Indigenous communities without appreciating the myriad ways that Indigenous people will continue to experience racism, epistemic violence, be constrained by structural disadvantage and be silenced. We cannot transcend and solve these issues simply by being inclusive, open, tolerant and nice. The colonial paradigm within which our work takes place – even when it is decolonising work – is structured through a myriad of dynamics that will always work to reproduce and reconstitute colonial relations (Hart et al 2017).

In this interim report our purpose has been to set these difficult and complex issues in a framework informed by Indigenous philosophy, practice and methodology to enable non-Indigenous urban researchers to consider how to become better research allies.
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