

Doing Decoloniality in the Writing Borderlands of the PhD

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This paper takes us into the Writing Borderlands, an ambiguous in-between space borrowed from Anzaldúa's concept of Borderlands, where we as PhD students are in a constant state of transition. We argue that theorising from a decolonial position consists of not merely using concepts around coloniality/decoloniality, but also putting its core ideas into practice in the 'doing' aspect of research. The writing is a major part of this doing. We enact epistemic disobedience by challenging taken-for-granted conventions of what 'proper' academic writing looks like. Writing from a universal standpoint — the type of writing prescribed in theses formats, positivist research methods and 'proper' academic writing — has been instrumental in promoting the zero-point epistemologies that prevail through Northern artefacts of knowledge. In other words, we write to de-link from the epistemological assumption of a neutral and detached observational location from which the world is interpreted. In this paper, we discuss the journey we take as PhD students as we attempt to delink and decolonise our writing. Traversing the landscape of the Writing Borderlands, different features arise and fall. Along the way, we come across forks in the road between academic training and the new way we imagine writing decolonially.

■ **Keywords:** decoloniality, writing, feminism, Borderlands, doctoral research

Resisting in the mundane
 Mischievous
 Simple acts
 In the giant revolution within
 Microscopic gesture in your eyes
 Mammoth effort in my everyday rebellion
 How to belong without conforming?
 Conforming to what?
 What does it mean anyway?
 Be-(long)-ing
 (Con)-form-ing
 Long forming of being
 I want to be at home
 But my home is made of sand
 About to collapse any minute
 The oppressive wind
 of norms and expectations
 is dangerous
 My home is fragile
 But it's also

A bit like a turtle shell
 I can move it
 I can take it with me
 To where the breeze of liberation makes me smile
 In this sense my home is strong
 Resisting in the mundane
 In the giant revolution within

The Writing Borderlands

Eyes clenched shut, pen gripped tightly in her hand, the woman whispered the words once more: 'long forming of being'. Her eyelids fluttered open and she found herself sitting on the ground, writing, in an unfamiliar place, an in-between place. All around her was growth, trees standing sentry, flowers and weeds bursting their

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way out of the ground, and vines wilfully stretched from tree to tree. The ground welled with fertility and creative force. Clouds loomed, heavy with the promise of torrential rain, suggesting to the woman that the place where she found herself was not going to be comfortable territory to dwell in.

From where the woman sat writing, she could just make out glimpses of different buildings on the horizon; buildings that bordered the space she was in, informed the space, were part of the space and at the same time were separate. The first building was made of sandstone pillars built on the foundations of Enlightenment thinking; concrete walls steadfastly holding in the people who lived within, prohibiting those on the outside from entering. This institution, the Academy, was mostly filled with books and papers written in clear, objective 'academic' writing; a style taught to generation upon generation of students. The next building, connected to the academy by a stone archway, was one built by women for women, a sign out the front proudly proclaiming that it housed gender and women's studies. This building was itself a site of contradictions, with many schools of thought housed within. Histories of white middle-class women speaking universally for the experiences of all contrasted with contemporary presents where a multitude of voices and experiences of being woman claimed space within the building; shouting for Feminisms, rather than a single Feminism (Mohanty, 2003). The types of writing in this building were as vast as the experiences of the women within — some dismantling with pens and pick hammers the concrete walls that the building next door had forcefully erected around their concept of academic writing. The third building was newly constructed. The people and ideas housed within worked all day drawing cartographies of knowledge and mapping the geographical location of the academy; disrupting claims to neutrality and universality. The decolonial theorists were interested in how coloniality and Western modernity had irrevocably transformed the power and knowledge institutions in lands across the world, instating hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, religion and class (Grosfuguel, 2008). But from the woman's point of view, the scholars housed in this building didn't always do, or write, in a way that opposed neutrality.

From the woman's position here in this strange, creative, fertile space, the prescriptions around writing in a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) started to come into focus. Many of the people living in those buildings were asking her to write in a particular way: plan your chapter outline. Get to the point. Signpost. Transfer the original knowledge you had discovered from yourself to others; another brick in the wall surrounding the academy. Know what you are going to write.

But she did not know what she wanted to write just yet, only that some of these ideas felt different to what was longing to be written from within her. She wanted to write as:

a way of . . . pushing back forgetfulness, of never letting oneself be surprised by the abyss. Of never becoming resigned, consoled: never turning over in bed to face the wall and drift asleep again as if nothing had happened; as if nothing could happen. (Cixous, 1991, p. 3)

Coming to Dwell in the Writing Borderlands

I remember my first semester as an undergraduate student. The initial academic demands of a university degree scared me. But being typical me, I was determined to do well. I attended all available workshops in academic skills and I soon started to learn the mysterious knowledge of academic writing.

I initially found the whole concept quite bizarre, writing in the third person as if I was not part of the text. At the time though, I did not quite know how to voice my uncertainties about what academic writing meant. And my priority was to do well; to make my parents proud; to prove to myself that I was capable of striving in an academic environment. And so I learned, and I wrote, and I was soon producing essays and reports, all in the third person. I convinced myself that this writing was as it was supposed to be. The years went by and I continued to be trained in this tradition of formulaic evidence-based writing. After a while I simply accepted it. Nobody told me that there were any other options.

To use the language well, says the voice of literacy, cherish its classic form. (Trinh, 1989, p. 16)

'You write well', my Honours supervisor said, looking over a draft as I first began research. I understood that writing was a process of revision, of incorporating feedback, polishing sections and taking a step back to see how the whole thing fit together. That in the same way that one might carve a sculpture out of a block of wood, words could be poured onto the page and then chipped away at, smoothing off sections until something beautiful emerged.

I suppose the ability to write academically was not the issue.

True, but [she needed to be] aware when you cross railroad tracks for one train may hide another train. [Academic writing] is a means of subjection, a quality both of official, taught language and of correct writing, two old mates of power: together they flow, together they flower, vertically, to impose an order. (Trinh, 1989, p. 16–17)

A few years later during my Masters, I took a couple of research method courses. I learnt the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods. At the time, I did not realise that the courses were taught within positivist Eurocentric frameworks. I did not know at the time that any other way was possible. Things changed once I entered PhD territory.

She needed to give up the notion that there is a 'correct' way to write theory. (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvi)

Then in a PhD, the conversation moved to how students might find their voice. Use first person, so that the reader could recognise it was not a robot that had done the research, but a living breathing person. I was told I should make an original contribution to knowledge. ‘Yes!’ I thought, excited at the possibilities that this new way of writing might make space for recognising the role of the humans so intimately involved in the doing of research:

What would it mean, she asked herself, to write about people as objects of research; to ask if they are telling the truth; to define them through pre-determined, validated, reliable constructs; to measure people as if she were able to know them and their ways of being in the world? Were words such as ‘problem statement’, ‘research questions’, ‘research design’, ‘data’, ‘data collection’, ‘data analysis’, ‘validity’, ‘reliability’, ‘systematicity’, ‘triangulation’ (as in Adams St Pierre, 2014, p. 10) complicit in research as a tool of the coloniality of knowledge? How did this tool inflict violence on Others by claiming to know who they were and how they thought?

All of these questions started appearing in my head. I felt uneasy and confused about the expectations of gazing at people who I would write into my research. And then I felt constrained, because I did not have any ways of expressing these emotions and thoughts. Trying to mould these questions about writing into the only way I knew how to write academically felt contrived.

She was slowly becoming more aware of writing’s relationship to power. She had been taught that people acted in certain, determinable ways, and that her job as a researcher was to find these ways and write them down. Instead, she began to learn that ‘how [she] was expected to write affects what [she] can write about’ (Richardson, 2001, p. 877). She learnt that any ‘claim to truth is also a claim to power’ (p. 877). She considered how people became ‘the researched’ when she wrote them down as such.

One day I stumbled upon a strange object hidden on a library shelf, and opened it out of curiosity. From Pandora’s urn, overwhelming and exciting possibilities appeared. The feminist and decolonial texts that came out of the urn taught me that other ways of creating and expressing knowledge were possible. Diverse ways of knowing and being were able to occupy a space in academia. There was room for people who write differently. Or was there? After opening this urn full of treasures, my way of looking at academic writing and its relationship to research turned upside down.

As she started to read and write with the works of feminist writers, she found bell hooks (1994, 1997) and Trinh Minh-ha’s (1989) writing were soaked through with positionality, teaching her more than any obligatory statement buried in the methodology section of a thesis. Reading Laurel Richardson’s (& St Pierre, 2005, p. 959) work made her question whether she wanted to produce texts that were destined to be tossed aside, or write knowledge that would refuse to let go of the reader, and the reader of it. Gloria Anzaldúa (1990) opened her up to the possibility of beauty in a poetic academic text.

And when she first stumbled on work by Donna Haraway, she realised that this might be what Elizabeth St Pierre (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p. 971–972) had meant when asking ‘What else might writing do except mean?’ Writing could move her deep in her belly, could ask her to think differently about the world she inhabited, and could fill her with hope that she might be able ‘to find an absent, but perhaps possible, other present’. (Haraway, 1992, p. 295)

With much excitement, I picked up my pen and started writing, determined to do something different. But my excitement did not last long. The Academy told me ‘start again’, ‘this is not academic enough’, ‘this is not at the level of PhD work’, ‘the writing should not be about you’. At times, I made the decision to produce writing that I knew would tick the boxes and get me over the line. But I was starting to think about decolonial epistemologies, and what they might mean for how I wrote my research. I was thinking about the systems of power and ways of knowing and being that remained after colonial administrations had left (Grosfuguel, 2008) — or in Australia, still remained. I wanted to challenge the *status-quo* and what was perceived by many to constitute rational thought. But I continued to write in a formulaic manner, slipping in small poems and stories whenever I dared. I felt like I was cheating myself, but my writing got me over the line.

... she felt oppressed and violated by the rhetoric of dominant ideology, a rhetoric disguised as good “scholarship” by teachers who are unaware of its race, class and gender blank spots. It is a rhetoric that presents its conjectures as universal truth, while concealing its patriarchal privilege and posture. (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxiii)

A keyword emerged from this process of discovery, refusing to dissipate: tensions. I found myself in a tense space, and realised that I needed to acknowledge and work with the tensions that are the essence of what I am attempting to do. I write within a colonial institution, seeking to fulfil the requirements of a PhD. Coloniality has a strong grip on how I am able to write, think and classify; on the types of logics available to me. Yet, I knew it was impossible to write neat black and white work in this space.

She tried to work out what it might mean to de-link from colonial systems of knowledge production (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012), how she could decolonise her writing act. She asked herself how she could claim to be researching from a decolonial position if she wrote from a standpoint that reified hierarchies of researcher and researched, or hid its own standpoint. Just like her, those who claimed to write from such decolonial positions were part of a Western academy with its feet firmly planted on the horizon of ‘modernity’ (after Mukandi, this issue). This academy had the power to produce and circulate academic knowledge that is seen to be authoritative. The academy had the power to decide what was considered as truth, and who could legitimate it. She pulled on her boots of bravery and surrounded herself with people who would support a different way of writing research; a

way that recognised story, emotions, messiness, relationships, tensions.

But doubts continued to haunt me. I want to be published! I want to be considered for a future academic career. I need to finish this PhD, and what if the examiners do not take my work seriously; or what if my work is not considered a substantial contribution to knowledge and is instead judged to be parochial, to be culture instead of science (Mignolo, 2009). What if those in power decide this was not rigorous scholarship?

This was the moment when, with all of these tensions and contradictions swirling in her mind, she found herself in the Writing Borderlands; a space inspired by the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa. The Borderlands, an ambiguous in-between space, is in a 'constant state of transition . . . it's not comfortable territory to live in' (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.3). She realised she did not quite belong to any of the buildings that bordered the space where she was. But she also began to understand that she was not completely outside of any of them either . . . one foot here, the other there; multiple influences on her thinking-writing-doing. Dwelling in the Writing Borderlands meant that she needed to address the inconsistencies of her positioning. She was being continually pushed and pulled by multiple and often contradictory forces from the various epistemologies and ontologies that surrounded her. But those forces create a tension that holds the possibility for transformation in educational spaces (hooks, 1994, p. 41). The in-betweenness of the Writing Borderlands highlighted the complexity of writing research in this space, a space where transformation can occur. (Anzaldúa, 2009b, p. 187)

With one foot here and one foot there, I began to see that theorising from a decolonial position to me means more than using concepts of coloniality/decoloniality, but requires me to enact the core ideas in the 'doing' of research. How we write is a major part of this doing.

She began to engage in epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009), challenging taken for granted conventions of what academic writing looks like. She began to de-link from the Western epistemological assumption of a zero-point positionality. Her new viewpoint allowed her to see that this zero-point - conventional academic writing – was only pretending to be a neutral and detached observational location from which the world is interpreted, but really was geographically connected to the people who claimed their ways of knowing to be superior (Mignolo, 2009). From the Borderlands, she could see that that prescribed theses formats, positivist scientific research methods and academic writing are all part of this system of knowledge. She looked at the green fertile space that surrounded her and throbbed with the force of possibility and potential. With pen and paper in her hands, the buildings on the horizon firmly in sight, she sat down once more and started to write.

With one foot here and one foot there
I write, the doing of the research
A PhD written in the Borderlands
Contesting prescribed formats

Experimenting with form
Not for the sake of it.

My pen is a political object
Writing in this space a privilege.
My hand heavy with ethical responsibility
Questioning logics
Attempting to re-write logics

I de-link
Holding pen & paper in my hand
I write back to the voice from above
Epistemically disobedient
I say NO
“Away with your pretenses of neutrality and detachment”

I question
Knowledge produced in place and time
Hiding under a cloak of claimed universality
Of white patriarchal coloniality
Objectively written
in the language of scientific so-called truth

The writing of this Borderland PhD
Is not neat, not straightforward
Never definite
Always somewhere
Written from the body
Through the body
Drenched with discomforts
Eternally becoming

With one foot here and the other there
My story becomes yours
And yours mine
Different positions that merge
Uncomfortable
Searching . . .
We think, theorise
But we speak a strange language
We want to strip away the imposed masks
The accepted masks
Concerned with the way knowledge is written

Resisting Academic Writing: A Writing Story

We (Fabiane and Ailie) co-wrote *The Writing Borderlands* as a presentation for the South–South Dialogues, held at the University of Queensland in 2015. This bricolage piece explores some of our thoughts, concerns, resistances and desires around the processes of writing in a PhD. Fabiane is a *mestiça* (Portuguese word meaning woman of mixed ethnicity) migrant from Brazil. She is a PhD candidate looking at how refugee-background students make sense of academic success during their schooling in Australia. Ailie is a white, non-Indigenous Australian PhD candidate, who is writing research about how (mainly non-Indigenous)

preservice teachers position themselves and come to know (in) the Indigenous education landscape in Australia. This piece was a collaborative reflection on our shared and different experiences in learning to write in academia, and was written out of and through friendship — and indeed strengthened our friendship through writing.

The piece that you have just read is a reflection on our wanderings around the Writing Borderlands. We write as both ‘I’ and ‘she’, mixing the autobiographical with theorising about our own lives and experiences. As hooks (1997, p. xxii) does, we use ‘she’ to step outside of ourselves and create distance between ourselves and our memories. We needed to create space to think about what it means to be working in the Borderlands, because we take seriously Anzaldúa’s call to start by theorising our own lives. In doing so, however, we recognise the role of writing in the production of theory: we have given up the notion that there is ‘a “correct way” to write theory’ (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvi). Indigenous scholars have long grappled with this issue: for the Academy to recognise stories, both community and personal, as continually refined theoretical ideas (e.g. Brayboy, 2005, pp. 426–427; Kovach, 2009; Sium & Ritskes, 2013; Smith, 2009, p. 145).

For us, the Writing Borderlands is about considering that how we write — particularly, what is usually constructed as good academic practice — maintains positivist traditions of research that reduce the worlds of others into determinable and predictable patterns of behaviour. Academic writing, while taking different forms in various disciplines, usually follows set formats and is built with particular linguistic structures and discursive frameworks. Doctoral advisors are explicitly encouraged to support their students in becoming fluent speakers and writers of academic language. Even when research writing is constructed as a discursive activity that ‘involves a sophisticated set of social practices’ (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p. 11), it is seen to constitute ‘a particular genre, which has patterns and conventions that can be learned and interrogated’ (p. 12, emphasis our own). Having a particular genre, as discipline- and degree-bound as it may be, suggests from the outset that there is a limit to how different one may write or be in the Academy. The particularity of these genres is seen to have evolved through the communities of practice into which the doctoral candidate is initiated through writing:

Part of the work of doctoral study is to be inducted into disciplinary CoPs [communities of practice] in order to learn their accepted ways of thinking, speaking and writing. It is not uncommon for the first response of the doctoral researcher to be a feeling of inadequacy or a rejection of texts and traditions . . . By persisting, they become part of their specific scholarly community and this is marked by the facility with which they speak and write as ‘insiders’ . . . as the discipline’s way of thinking, writing, doing and being become more and more ‘natural’, these specialized terms tend to disappear from view. (p. 22)

We would argue that as doctoral students become part of their respective communities of practice and the strangeness of terminology begins to ‘disappear from view’, their writing identities can be subsumed into the academic discourse in which the work is situated. The ‘thinking, speaking and writing’ at the start of the passage almost unwittingly mutates into ‘thinking, writing, doing and being’ by the end: the way we write in the academic world is ontological. The geo- and body-politics (Mignolo, 2009) of research writing is concealed by the accepted discourses of academic disciplines.

While we have begun with a focus on the role of doctoral writing, a quick read-through of many academic journals within the field of education (although not all, with some noticeable exceptions such as *Qualitative Inquiry* and *Creative Approaches to Research*) demonstrates the dominance of a hegemonic form of academic writing. The Writing Borderlands writes back to the push to conform to certain types of academic scripture, the long forming of this way of being throughout our educational and academic lives and the ways in which we resist this conforming. We draw on feminist writers who have long questioned the act of writing academically and what it can do: it can connect or disengage community to the academy (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvi), it can maintain hierarchies of power (Trinh, 1989, p. 17) and it can help us to imagine new possibilities for the present that we live in (Haraway, 1992, p. 295).

We argue for a strong connection between taken-for-granted practices of academic writing and coloniality — especially in relation to knowledge production. But what is meant by *coloniality* and *decoloniality*? To begin, decoloniality refers to a ‘family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as a fundamental problem in the contemporary world’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 2). Coloniality, according to Grosfuguel (2008, p.8), refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a direct result of colonisation and continue to deeply influence knowledge production, subjectivity, the economy, relations of authority and sexuality well beyond contexts of colonial administrations. The deeply embedded colonial mindsets that are at the core of coloniality are globally still very much alive and powerful long after most colonies have become independent. These mindsets relate to stratified and hierarchical ideas of humanity or lack of humanity; concepts of cultural ‘superiority/inferiority’; justifications of ‘worthiness’ based on race and the concept of ‘non-Western/Southern/Eastern’ cultures as ‘primitive’ and unable to ‘think’ (Mohanty, 2003; Quijano, 2007; Mignolo, 2009). Maldonado-Torres (2007) explains that coloniality is philosophically grounded on the Cartesian formulation of *cogito ergo sum*, ‘I think therefore I am’. Colonised people across the world were not seen as knowers or able to rationalise, and thus, were considered less than human. Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 252–253) suggests that ‘the absence of rationality is articulated in

modernity with the idea of the absence of Being in others'. This notion, together with the 'scientific' division of people according to races, were crucial contributions to the development of coloniality of being and knowing as we experience them today.

Although binary divisions such as 'us' versus 'them' and 'barbarian' versus 'civilised' were present before the European colonial expansion, what made coloniality uniquely powerful was its global dissemination of and through 'scientific' knowledge. The creation of a number of academic disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and biology provided the 'scientific' grounds for the hierarchical divisions (race/gender) that form the intellectual basis of coloniality (Connell, 2007). The study of the non-European and the data created by these discipline were used to justify European 'superiority' and the non-Europeans' 'primitiveness'. In this manner, the ones who think from 'the West' and 'the North' (the humans) become the centre of global knowledge production while the 'Others', the colonial subjects (the less than human), become their source of data (Mignolo, 2011). Backed by economic, political and technological dominance, 'the West' had and has the power to produce and distribute globally academic knowledge that was/is viewed as neutral, authoritative and scientific. 'The West' had/has the ability to decide what can be considered knowledge, who can legitimate it, and how it is to be written.

An important point to take from this discussion is that academic research has been a fundamental element in the establishment of colonialities of being and knowing. And we want to take this discussion further yet, and argue that academic writing, as a form of knowledge expression and production, was and continues to be implicated in coloniality. Academic writing has been instrumental in the construction and distribution of positivist colonial logics, with its oppressive and exclusionary parameters that continue to guide how we classify, categorise, what we write about and most importantly, who 'can' write. Thus, the enactment of decoloniality in research practices is also intrinsically connected to the academic writing act. For us, epistemic disobedience and writing walk hand in hand. Still we want to differentiate between decoloniality and decolonisation, and as such situate our claim as to what it does or does not have the power to do. Tuck and Yang (2012) insist that decolonisation is not a metaphor, and must always focus on the root issue: (de)colonisation is and has always been about land. While decoloniality remains strongly tied to the materiality of decolonisation, its focus is on the patterns of power and mind frames (coloniality of being and knowing) that originated from colonialism but are still very much present today.

As PhD students thinking about writing, we have started exploring the ways in which writing is socially and historically constructed (Richardson, 1990, p. 119), as well as how it is used to conceal what Mignolo (2009) refers to as a zero-point epistemology, a point-of-knowing that

claims to be universal and superior to other ways of knowing. Writing — and writing academically — is a way of constructing a particular view of the world through vocabulary, grammatical, syntax and rhetorical choices. These choices create and bestow value and meaning, rather than being an 'objective' and 'true' representation of 'reality' [and as Richardson (1997, p. 45) does, we use apostrophes to remind ourselves that these words are also constructed, rather than 'realities']. Writing is a depiction of the world/s we live in, and the ways in which we write serve to create only one of many ways of looking at this world.

What today is seen to be 'valid', 'scientific' writing or academic writing as we have termed it, can be traced temporally and geographically to particular origins. Pre 1600s, European language was evocative, vivid and filled with allegories and metaphors. Yet, as European administration and commerce became more formalised, language was recast as needing more 'precise codes' (Levine, 1985, p. 2). Seventeenth century philosophers drew on mathematics as inspiration, with Descartes imitating deductive mathematics to produce more 'clear and distinct' ideas, and Hobbes suggesting that if human nature were as quantifiable as geometry, then immortal peace could be achieved (Levine, 1985, p. 2). This logic dictated that quantifiable and unambiguous behaviours and language would not only allow a better 'distillation' of ideas, but could also achieve tangible human outcomes. Arising out of this argument for the language of science to be clear and without passion came the term 'social science', introduced by the Marquis de Condorcet, and argued to be capable of determining and conveying truth and certainty, if only the language were clear enough (Richardson, 1990, p. 120). The 'social science' in question was to be a science, one devoted to the study of humans and human nature, but founded on the positivist scientific assumptions about the nature of knowledge (Levine, 1985, p. 3). 'Arts' and 'Science' were divided into two distinct domains by the 19th century, each with their own types of languages to serve different purposes. However, even the language of science is caught up in the use of literary devices and as Richardson (1990, p. 120) writes:

Given to science was the belief that its words were objective, precise, unambiguous, non-contextual, non-metaphoric . . . [Yet] all the social sciences, for example, have prescribed writing formats — none of them neutral or historically fixed, all of them value-constituting, and all of them narrative choices.

The language we use when we write is not value free, even when we think it is. The words we use are always derived from different ways of looking at and being in the world, and constitute particular types of worlds for the reader. It is this type of thinking that we are both using in writing our PhDs, wanting to resist the scientific writing that claims enlightenment (as if the world were just waiting for researchers to go out and discover it, much as colonial explorers have claimed to before) and that tries

to fix peoples, epistemologies, ontologies, axiologies and cosmologies into fixed categories, pinning them down on paper to preserve them. We are aware of the way that writing has always been complicit in colonialism, beginning with early travellers' tales of Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2009, p. 2, 9), and seek to find other ways of telling stories that do not fix and limit the people we work with into colonial ways of knowing (e.g. Smith, 2009, pp. 66–67). Writing outside of the standard academic mould becomes one way of resisting these forces.

As we discussed the tensions of trying to write differently to a standard academic style, we drew on Anzaldúa's (1987, 1990, 2009a, 2009b) concept of Borderlands. Living in the Borderlands means living on the frontiers of societies, yet never quite being part of them, as defined by race, gender, class and other signifiers that are at once socially constructed yet also contribute to our identities and our experiences of being in the world. Displacement, pain, discomfort and the creative forces that these positioning(s) foster are central to Anzaldúa's theorising. Living in the Borderlands is not comfortable, yet dwelling in these spaces is vital to contribute to radical new thinking. This piece envisions our PhD experiences as living in a form of Writing Borderlands: neither totally 'Science' nor 'Arts', fitting into neither of these socially constructed categories completely (Richardson, 1990).

It is interesting to note that despite most of Anzaldúa's oeuvre being produced before the term 'coloniality' had even been coined, she is often cited by decolonial writers as an example of the enactment of decoloniality. During her lifetime, Anzaldúa created a substantial body of work that challenged prescribed/taken for granted forms of theorising and academic expression. She wanted to delink from oppressive epistemologies, she wanted to create knowledge her own way:

I wanted to do it my way, using my approach, my language. I didn't want to do what Audre Lorde describes as using the master's tools; I did not want to ape the master. I wanted to write in a mestiza style, in my own vernacular. . . . We, writers of color, verified for the European theorist the fact that theirs was not an exclusive school of thought. After all, they were not only just talking about themselves, they were also talking about colored people. (Anzaldúa, 2009b, p. 189)

It is also important to point out here the question of context. Australia and the academic context where we position ourselves are clearly far from and different to the US/Mexico border context where Anzaldúa developed her theories. However, we see Borderlands as a rich and multifaceted metaphor that works well to frame the argument we are developing in this paper, especially the idea of a writing style that dwells in-between 'Arts' and 'Science'. This writing act is influenced by the multiplicity of knowledge and ways of being that surround us but is not bound completely to a clearly defined space.

Mixing into the idea of Anzaldúa's Borderlands is Nakata's conceptualisation of the world, and particularly academia, as formed by 'complex and contested knowledge terrains' (Nakata, Nakata, Keech, & Bolt, 2012, p. 120). As we inhabit the Writing Borderlands in our work, we are also locating ourselves in landscapes connected to knowledge systems, and we recognise the multiplicity of epistemologies in the world around us. Furthermore, Nakata's arguments about the need to recognise Islanders' 'agency as a people of knowledge' (Nakata, 2010, p. 56) comes to mind: knowledge cannot be abstracted from the people who produce it. As we became aware that we dwell in the Writing Borderlands, we thought about how different types of knowledge are connected to the people who have created and passed these on. We see the Borderlands as not devoid of life, but as a place always already inhabited by many: Indigenous, feminist, people of colour, queer and other thinkers who have all written against the grain of conventional academic practice.

Mignolo (2009, p. 162) argues that 'it is not enough to change the content of the conversation, [but rather] to change the *terms* of the conversation' (emphasis in original). Changing the terms of the conversation requires calling into question the control of knowledge, focusing on the knower, rather than on the known: 'to go to the very assumptions that sustain locus of enunciations' (p. 162). Using a decolonial framework, we sought to call into question how academic writing is a tool complicit in the sustaining of colonial knowledge. The practice of academic writing upholds and safeguards the position of those who have traditionally been considered *knowers* — in the Australian context, those of European heritage, those not of the working class, males, non-Indigenous people. In challenging these assumptions of traditional academic writing practice, we are working towards spaces for multiple knowledges to be expressed in academia and in education. Instead, we ponder how what is often taken for granted as the 'good academic writing practice' is instead an artefact of the Global North; a tool that has been complicit in documenting the lives of others from the standpoint of a zero-point, all-knowing, universal epistemology while claiming transparency.

Thinking Back: A Dialogue

Sitting in a university café, Fabi eats a salad while Ailie awaits a coffee. Around them, students and academics eat their lunches and drink their drinks, discussing work, study, politics, life. The waiter brings over a coffee and the women return to their conversation about the piece of writing that they are finishing up for a special issue of the *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

Fabi: With the editing there were only a few little things, like Borderlands needs to be in capital letter and I think you need to specify that you mean non-Indigenous Australian, not just non-Indigenous.

Ailie: Well, look at that.

The women both smile whilst Ailie circles the notes Fabi has written onto a printed draft.

Ailie: You highlight the limitations of my thinking and that's part of why we work together . . . because working together means that we are made aware of things that we don't know otherwise.

Fabi: It highlights things that you don't notice, you know what I mean; like sometimes you need someone else to bring it up.

Ailie: Yeah, you have not just pointed out to me how I take for granted Australianess as a norm, but we both reached a conclusion that this reflects how our positionalities shape our thinking. That's what working together means - having the dialogue about why it's important.

Fabi: It's also a balanced power relationship where you are not afraid to say what you actually think.

The two women looked at each other for a second, and then laughed.

Ailie: OK, did you get a chance to have a look at the stuff I sent you on friendship as method (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) and friendship as research (Mackinlay & Bartleet, 2012) at all?

Fabi: Not yet.

Ailie: When you get a moment, I think you might enjoy it. It's an interesting feminist framework to theorise the centrality of relationships to our work. Our relationships to each other and those we work with help us to realise the goals of our research better. *{Ailie stops talking as she searches in her bag for a printed article. Laying it on the table between them, she opens to a dog-eared page and keeps talking.}* What happens is research methods become underpinned by the same processes that friendships entail: 'conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability' (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 734). I suppose here the difference is using a more collective autoethnographic approach, we are the participants, and the methods are even more organic.

Fabi: Because the friendship pre-dates the research. If you think about it, this is what we are doing everyday, and is what has drawn us together to do this research.

Ailie: Exactly. Tillmann-Healy (2003, p. 733) draws on Patricia Hill Collins to consider how friendships and an ethic of care might even be considered a movement away from colonisation.

Fabi: Maybe we can think about friendship as method as the way we come together and enter into a new type of dialogue, one that wouldn't be possible if we were to be

working alone. And I think that in a way, this idea is similar to Lugones' concept of coalition (2003). She talks about people working together, negotiating levels of intimacy and understandings as they connect to resist against multiple oppressions within "the walls of very strictly guarded, normed, repressive domains" (2003, p.1). I see academia and academic writing as this strictly guarded domain. And I see us writing together as a coalition.

Ailie: Tillman-Healy (2003) talks about research as friendship in terms of allies too, which fits this idea of coalitions. Particularly when friendships cross cultural, linguistic, race, class, sexuality or other boundaries, they have the ability to become powerful political acts. I think that's a really relevant idea to how we have worked together. We were both interested in the idea of writing differently in a PhD . . . and not just in terms of 'I like to write differently' but as a political act. We were both questioning the ways that writing has been used to subjugate and oppress some knowledges and to promote others. And our different backgrounds meant we brought our own perspectives and we don't need to agree on everything, but it's about the places that we do intersect. The places in-between.

Fabi: Exactly. But I mean look at us sitting here, discussing decoloniality over coffees and lunch! Can we even claim to be 'doing' decoloniality? What is that anyway?

Ailie: I agree . . . we can't pretend that we're not incredibly privileged to be sitting in a place like this university. But really, what other choice do we have? To turn away from considering coloniality would be to deny responsibility. That's something Maldonado-Torres talks about in his 2007 paper: denying responsibility is the coloniality of being.

Fabi: You know, we are doing something political here, and it's about recognizing the privilege of our positioning. Whether we're claiming decoloniality or not.

Ailie: This in-between space of the colonialities of knowing and being are interesting. I think a key idea is the ways we can know through writing. If you think of a type of inquiry that produces knowledge through writing, like Richardson and St Pierre (2005) write about, then we are also accepting that different ways of writing produce different types of knowledges.

Fabi: Yeah, because I've read things that are questioning the coloniality of being and about different ways of being in the world but they are doing all of these questioning while conforming to colonial norms of academic writing . . . but I think we also need to be careful not to claim a position of superiority or thinking that what we are attempting to do is better than other things. I think that's a dangerous position.

Ailie: You just need to take one look at how 'academic' a large part of this paper itself has become! There's such a

strong pull to revert back to this more traditional form of academic writing.

Fabi: I was thinking about this the other day actually. Have we used “Science” to explain ‘Art’, rather than dwelling in-between?

Ailie: We are trying to do this thing that’s different, but to some extent, we have ended up doing the same-old. And it’s also a dangerous position to be in to think that what we are doing is new because it’s not.

Fabi: It’s not.

Ailie: It’s been done before (Trinh, 1989; Anzaldúa, 1990; Richardson, 1997; Lugones, 2003; Mackinlay, 2015).

Fabi: It’s been done forever but it’s still marginalised within academia.

Ailie: Yeah, not in the mainstream, it lives in the fringes.

Fabi: In the Borderlands. By the way, when we talk about the Borderlands we dwell in the Borderlands we don’t walk through the Borderlands.

Ailie: Have you highlighted the bits where I wrote ‘walk’?

Fabi: Yeah, I’ll send it to you. Because it’s like, if you are in the Borderlands, you are not just like aww I’m here sightseeing but I might move to another place [laughs]. We could still walk together in the Borderlands but not through. We could walk in, we could walk around, but really I think that the verb that goes with Borderlands is to dwell.

Ailie: Why?

Fabi: Because it’s a place that is part of being.

Ailie: To have a home.

Fabi: It’s kind of this in-betweenness and that’s where our home is . . . we are constantly navigating and negotiating enunciation in these contradictory spaces, it’s like being in the ‘cracks between worlds’ (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 7). Maybe it’s the cracks between the institutional buildings where the woman found herself writing. It really makes me think of that Anzaldúa (2015, p.7) quote: ‘We’re not quite at home here but also not quite at home over there’. And it’s in this in-between home that we dwell, certain of the impossibility of safe spaces.

We’re stormy, and that which is ours breaks loose from us without our fearing any debilitation. Our glances, our smiles, are spent; laughs exude from all our mouths; our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing; and we’re not afraid of lacking. (Cixous, 1976, p. 878)

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