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BOOK REVIEWS

PLEASE KNOCK BEFORE YOU ENTER: ABORIGINAL REGULATION OF OUTSIDERS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS

Karen Lillian Martin

Post Pressed, Teneriffe, QLD, 2008, vi+168pp,
ISBN 978 1 92121 437 0

Reviewed by Dennis Foley

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This is an interesting book for Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers both for its writing style and Indigenous approach to knowledge; it is a very important addition to Indigenous post-colonial approaches to knowledge. The inclusion of poetry and reflection however I found detracted from the content. This text left me divided; my spirit and heart supports its methodological approach and cultural content, the rational part of me rejected its "academic-thesis" format.

It may appear relatively insignificant but why do scholars who turn their doctoral dissertations into a book leave in the academic talk; the terminology that confirms you are reading their thesis. A thesis should be one thing, a book is something else. The two are written for two different audiences and should remain so as separate texts (Marantz, 1980). I found it difficult as an academic to have the book continually remind me that it was a "thesis". The cognitive response is that the reader is forced to analyse it as such. The layout is standard thesis, introduction and background, literature review and so on. The result is a tardy approach to "book" writing when the contextual discussion has so much promise. The thesis is unfortunately limited by a somewhat superficial literature review and methodological argument. The author included some gems of knowledge such as West, Rigney, Nakata, Moreton-Robinson, Huggins and others. Yet there are many names absent from the reference

list. Names that are synonymous in the forging of Australian Indigenous thought; knowledge systems that were not born, rather they were hatched through our early educators who obtained recognised "Western" qualifications in the 1960s and 1970s when the Indigenous word was only being partially accepted in education circles. Nakata (2007) writes of the "cultural interface", yet it is the early Indigenous Australian scholars that laid the academic foundation forging a cultural interface and we must acknowledge them in our work for we stand on their shoulders. I felt that Martin missed this golden opportunity to present an Indigenous academic argument within the coloniser's framework depicting the struggle thus providing a literature review that was historically grounded. Auntie Kath Walker's (Oodgeroo Noonuccal) very words ring in my own ears concerning the succession of knowledge and the place our early qualified educators have in the process of retaining Indigenous knowledge within the constructs of colonisation. Tripcony is briefly mentioned, but not her seminal works, nor Budby, Bourke, Hughes, Duncan, Evelyn Webb, May O'Brien, Ted Penny, and many, many others whose work builds the foundation for Nakata's argument and indeed Rigney, Moreton-Robinson, Huggins and others.

Arguably, Aboriginal epistemology is "allowed" or "tolerated" within the walls of academia only because of the battles that our Aboriginal predecessors fought. Many in this struggle never obtained a PhD so to have this terminology of the "thesis" repeated, mixed in throughout the beginning of the text detracts from the valuable content that is within "the book".

At the author's expense my research higher degree students have been able to learn from Martin's oversight which is the beauty of Indigenous knowledge circles, of how our epistemology is not static, it is a journey. Perhaps my views will be seen by some as unnecessarily critical and I accept that this is a personal opinion, however as a thesis this work fell short in addressing the literature that could have been reviewed, but in Martin's defence "how long is a piece of string?" Has she undertaken a work set within strict parameters different to my comprehension or the perceived guidelines that other Indigenous supervisors would suggest, or did non-Indigenous supervision direct a journey that was narrower? As a reviewer we need to question these possibilities, the "what if".

I am always concerned in Aboriginal writing of the potential infiltration of writing styles that emphasise sympathy or the exoticness of the specimen, the zookeeper's prize. Martin does not display any of these flaws in what is otherwise an accomplished work. The strength of the author's research journey and cultural understanding is initially illustrated when Martin researches in rainforest country (p. 32) (and followed up in more detail in Chapter 5). As the author is a saltwater woman she finds herself working in rainforest country within freshwater lore. This is a research scenario that the untrained Indigenous or the non-Indigenous researcher would not even consider to be an issue. Geographically, culturally and spiritually Martin is the outsider – an alien, the dispossessing academic yet she empathises with the participants and the land in a way that many non-Indigenous researchers cannot (or possibly do not) understand, and this is brought to the readers attention early in the text (thesis). Martin illustrates the interface – the dilemma and how she approaches this where the outsider becomes perched on (or immersed within) the division that is the researcher who by the research framework is the dispossessor and the Indigenous researched – the dispossessed: "... these dilemmas highlighted the multiple and complex dimensions inherent in being an Outsider who is both Aboriginal and also a researcher" (p. 32). Martin by the use of the rainforest example provides a subtle comparison of the academic rape in her own lands.

For the readers' information, Stradbroke Island (Martin's homeland) suffers many social problems, perhaps the ugliest of which is the destructive tit for tat argument of who is a traditional owner and who is not. Nearly two hundred years of forced removal, mission mismanagement, cross-marriage, restricted living, several land claims (some possibly ill informed), numerous non-Indigenous "academic" experts, mining royalties, alleged payoffs, and short-sighted government funding together with numerous programmes without positive outcomes has exacerbated social division. Martin has not addressed the repercussions and divisions within her society as this work tackles a larger issue that is applicable to most if not all Indigenous peoples and I applaud her for this position. Martin's work is about moving on in a positive manner, deconstructing research consequences which are in reality mirrored in poor research undertaken in her own lands. No doubt this is a contributing factor as to why her community currently faces so much internal bickering which justifies the need for such academic questioning.

The book contains a cultural message that is cleverly achieved with the overlapping of language, identity, especially the author's self-identity, applying this to land and interweaving the words of local

entities especially the words of Aunty Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal). Without detracting from Martin's work this is a technique developed and later used to maximum effect in Veronica Arbon's (2008) text *Arlathbirnda Ngurkarnda Ityirnda; Being-Knowing-Doing: De-colonising Indigenous Tertiary Education*.

My interest in the text increased around page 51 when the literature review discusses critical race theory. This is where it gets meaty. She writes that critical race theory focuses on race and racism and the representations of racialised subjects: it is the use of epistemologies informed by identity and culture that enable critical race theorists to see understand and move beyond positions of inclusion and exclusion, it allows them to occupy transcendent positions and the capacity to work out of different sets of relationships to self and others. There are different relationships not only to the self and others, the relationships to knowledge are also different. They detect the corrupting erosive devices of Western ideologies and theories to interrogate disrupt and transform research. With shared understandings and common experiences they forge libratory epistemologies – and address issues of voice and narrative in research, critical theory demands critique of how racialised relationships between the researcher and the researched are perpetuated. The denial of agency, gives focus on how whiteness is centred and normalised, racialised.

Constructed around this inclusivity of the racialised the naming of one's own reality (Martin), not including "others" but transforming their own agency (and action?), this offers little in reconstruction. The result is the development of ethnic research paradigms truly grounded in ethnic epistemologies; *first* by critiquing of the other and its effects for radicalised "others", *second* by understanding how "othering" is constructed to benefit whites.

On page 52 Martin explains whiteness studies; simply you have to understand the power and privilege in which race and whiteness shape oppression theorising subjectivity and agency in terms of race and whiteness. The risk is that whiteness studies could re-centre white researchers renewing their privilege. Thus critical whiteness studies emerged re-asserting the need to interrogate whiteness as a racialised and institutionalised construct of a given context, in Australia this interrogation must occur as a dialogic and self-reflexive relationship where Aboriginal sovereignty and dispossession is the reference point. She goes on to state that in Australia this demands a different understanding of race and racism, many Aboriginal scholars assert different relationships to knowledge (p. 53) at the very least they seek Aboriginal agency, but Aboriginal agency is the ultimate goal. This is

based in the inalienable rights and relationships of Aboriginal peoples to country thus dialogue from around the world has emerged in terms of Indigenous post-colonialism. I feel this is the central theme of Martin's work as she goes on to say, the core premise of post-colonial studies is to interrogate colonialism in all forms challenging existing colonial structures and holding them to account; validating Aboriginal knowledge and realities.

Martin clarifies decolonisation and Aboriginal research on page 53 often defined in terms of its processes and goals rather than by a definitive summation explanation. The Aboriginal scholar's discussion of the nature of decolonisation informs the purpose, processes and contexts in which it is applied. Aboriginal post-colonialism highlights the different needs of Aboriginal peoples as researchers because of the recognition of different dimensions (standpoints?) which are the need to decolonise, and the need to build capacity (p. 61).

My students both Māori and Aboriginal have benefited by Martin's application and explanation of critical race theory however this text is much more. The Quampie Story and Quampie Methodology Chapter 4 (pp. 91-103) provides an understanding to the reader of the matrix – the complexity that is Indigenous epistemology and methodological approach. Chapter 4 is compelling reading as Martin provides an insight into research phases that are defined by non-Aboriginal expectation, convention and tradition and Aboriginal expectation, conventions and tradition. Each phase is defined by Aboriginal ontology, epistemology and axiology and refined in terms of non-Aboriginal traditions and expectations (p. 103). Take your time over this important chapter as Martin's writing style is that of a lady. I am afraid I would have been a tad more confronting in some explanations.

Chapter 5 lets the reader journey into the application of Martin's theory, the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji's regulation of outsiders. Outsiders have been studying, invading, colonising and travelling since the 1860s however the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji have always regulated their agency. Martin weaves her journey into one of explanation.

So *Please Knock Before you Enter* could be summarised as a journey discussing agency, what it means to three different groups, the Indigenous researcher the non-Indigenous researcher and most importantly the subject, the Indigenous.

... the thesis posited by this research study is their agency has been exercised and is attributed to the simple but profound respects for and regulation of relatedness. With relatedness as the premise and impetus, there is no such thing as Outsider, or Other, but Another (p. 149).

No outsider, or other, but another. We talk of reconciliation, what a thoughtful contribution to understanding Aboriginal research, the connotations of *another* is inclusive with reciprocal respects, so knock before you enter, and read this book for its wonderful content and Martin's journey.

To quote Martin again in quoting Aunty Kath (Oodgeroo Noonuccal) in the conclusion (p. 148):

now she is happy
because she can always talk with the tribes
whenever she wants to

An apt conclusion, or a commencement to a thought provoking text.

■ References

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FORGETTING ABORIGINES

Chris Healy

University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2008,
1+250pp, ISBN 978 08684 0884 2

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I commenced reading *Forgetting Aborigines* in Berlin, which, once I started reading, struck me as an entirely appropriate place to start. Berlin is a city which both forgets and remembers. The locals call the small golden cobblestones inscribed with names of murdered German Jews "trip over stones" (Stolpersteine). In fact Berlin underlines the adage of Healy, what he calls a truism, "there is no remembering without forgetting" (p. 35). In the introduction Healy explains:

It's important to insist that *Forgetting Aborigines* is attempting to think about both remembering and forgetting, because there is never one without the other. At the most basic level, the selective recognition of some things rather than others, and the discerning organisation of those elements so that they can be made present, requires forgetting.