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# Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing: A Theoretical Framework and Methods for Indigenous and Indigenist Re-search<sup>1</sup>

Karen Martin — Booran Mirraboopa<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

The myth of *terra nullius* implied that this country was uninhabited and *terra nullius* social policy supported by research enabled for the dispossession of knowledges of Indigenous peoples. It must be remembered that university curriculum, teaching methodologies and research endeavours have a history of development that contributed to this dispossession. Has the time come for change?<sup>3</sup>

Aboriginal writers Jackie Huggins,<sup>4</sup> Michael Dodson,<sup>5</sup> Rosemary van den Berg<sup>6</sup> and Lester Irabinna Rigney<sup>7</sup> argue that the quantity of research conducted in Aboriginal lands and on Aboriginal people since British invasion in the late 1770s is so immense that it makes us one of the most researched groups of people on earth. Natural scientists such as biologists, geologists and botanists have conducted research on Aboriginal lands to identify potential resources and, thus, economic value. Similarly, social scientists such as anthropologists, archaeologists, educators and psychologists have conducted research on Aboriginal people to establish our antiquity and humanity. Indeed, in some social science disciplines<sup>8</sup> we are over-researched, and this has generated mistrust, animosity and resistance from many Aboriginal people.

One reason for this reaction is that, until recent times, research conducted in Aboriginal lands was done without the permission, consultation, or involvement of Aboriginal people.<sup>9</sup> The same is especially true for research conducted on or about Aboriginal people generating what I call '*terra nullius* research'. In this research, we are present only as objects of curiosity and subjects of research, to be seen but not asked, heard or respected. So the research has been undertaken in the same way Captain James Cook falsely claimed the eastern coast of the land to become known as Australia as *terra nullius*.

This issue of *terra nullius* has been at the heart of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations since colonisation, and while over the course of some two hundred and thirty-plus years, representing some five generations of Aboriginal people, much has been achieved, much more remains to be done. The traditions of western research have recently come under scrutiny from Aboriginal academics, researchers and thinkers. This critique of western research programs has resulted in Aboriginal writers and theorists reframing western research experiences to develop our own research paradigms and programs. This paper discusses the Indigenist research framework<sup>10</sup> used in a research study with the people of far north Queensland. But first there are protocols to observe.

## **Background**

The protocol for introducing one's self to other Indigenous people is to provide information about one's cultural location, so that connection can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established.<sup>11</sup>

As in the above words of a fellow Quandamooka woman and in accordance with the customs of my people, I provide the following details:

My name is Karen Martin. I am the youngest of seven children in the family of George and Ruby Martin (nee Holt). My Father is a Noonuccal man from Minjeripah — the land, waterways, skies and spiritual systems of North Stradbroke Island. My Mother is a Bidjara woman whose ancestral land is the north-eastern area of Carnarvon Gorge, central Queensland. I am a Noonuccal woman with ancestral ties to Bidjara land and come from a tradition of artists, weavers, educators, storytellers, healers and law people. By qualification I am a teacher of young children and their families, and I have worked in various education roles where I developed policy and curricula and advice for education systems based on the expressed needs and aspirations of Indigenous people of Queensland. I have written and lectured in subjects of Indigenous studies at university, designed and conducted numerous professional development programs and cross-cultural awareness programs with clients ranging from the Playgroup Association to the Queensland Police Service and teachers of Aboriginal children. In 2001, I began a Master of Indigenous Studies by research at James Cook University, Cairns, north Queensland. I was awarded a scholarship by the Rainforest Cooperative Research Centre to undertake research relating to Aboriginal people of the wet tropics region of far north Queensland.<sup>12</sup>

In providing these details, I am claiming and declaring my genealogy, my ancestry<sup>13</sup> and my position as a researcher and author. The purpose is to locate myself firstly as an Aboriginal person and then as a researcher. As a researcher, this clearly presents the assumptions upon which my research is formulated and conducted. This also allows others to locate me and determine the types of relations that might exist. So, in providing these details, I am also identifying, defining and describing the elements of Indigenist research.<sup>14</sup>

### **Indigenist Research: Towards a Definition**

The strength of my Aboriginal knowledge and heritage has not always been recognised by others, particularly researchers. In the early to mid-1990s the Quandamooka people, like many other Aboriginal groups in Australia, prepared a claim for registration through the recently introduced *Native Title Act* (1993). Under this legislation, our rights as traditional owners were recognised for the first time since 1770, thus bringing some closure to the myth of *terra nullius*.

I was an executive committee member of the Quandamooka Land Council when research was being compiled as evidence to satisfy criteria for registration. We had to prove that we were indeed the traditional owners of the land in question by disclosing our genealogies, customs, traditions, beliefs and knowledges. The criteria was based on western, anthropological notions of ownership, affiliation and association to fulfil western legal requirements. I watched with interest and listened to the ways in which our knowledges, cultures and beliefs were collected,

analysed, interpreted and presented for this claim. Placing some faith in the concept of Native Title, I wanted to contribute to the collection of evidence. Although I was interviewed, I felt that my knowledge and experiences were measured against pre-determined categories of culture to which it was deemed I could provide no new or convincing examples. Since I did not speak the language, I had not grown up on the island, nor had I at that time, lived on the island, I was not considered a potential witness. My life, my knowledge and my reality as a Noonuccal, Quandamooka woman was inconsequential according to the western, anthropological and legal structures of Native Title research. I was not alone however, as other Quandamooka people shared the same concerns and frustration privately, and at community meetings. Others still, chose not to participate. I wondered how something that held much promise had actually taken more away. Thus began a quest to develop a framework for research with the ways in which we as Indigenous people view the world.

### **Paradigm Shifts and Indigenist Research**

This paper, then, is a preliminary finding of this ongoing quest to re-search and re-present our worldviews as the basis from which we live, learn and survive. It encompasses some of the experiences, beliefs, tensions, celebrations and exchanges that have occurred over time to myself and my people. More recently, it has been extended by pertinent discussion about challenges to western research from Maori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith,<sup>14</sup> and from Norman Denzin,<sup>16</sup> Lester Irabinna Rigney<sup>17</sup> and Errol West,<sup>18</sup> who have each written about the challenges presented to existing frameworks, structures and methodologies of western research. While the work of these writers has been instrumental for my own research, I will focus on the work of Lester Irabinna Rigney and Errol West because they are Aboriginal researchers and each contributes to developing an Aboriginal research framework. Lester defines Indigenist research as culturally safe and culturally respectful research that is comprised of three principles: resistance as an emancipatory imperative, political integrity in Indigenous research and privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenist research.<sup>19</sup>

For my own research purposes I questioned the central role of critical theory and the position of resistance espoused by Lester. My belief as an Aboriginal researcher is that I actively use the strength of my Aboriginal heritage and do not position myself in a reactive stance of resisting or opposing western research frameworks and ideologies. Therefore, I research from the strength and position of being Aboriginal and viewing anything western as 'other', alongside and among western worldviews and realities. I have therefore expanded Lester's principles to highlight this standpoint and the proactive, progressive and visionary purposes that both structure and guide my research. These principles are:

- Recognition of our worldviews, our knowledges and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival;
- Honouring our social mores as essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people;
- Emphasis of social, historical and political contexts which shape our experiences, lives, positions and futures;
- Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands.

However, the next activity in developing an Indigenist research framework is to explain its form and structure. As an example, in describing the Japanangka teaching and research paradigm, Errol West honoured the uniqueness of Aboriginal ontology and epistemology. This paradigm was presented within a work of art, a matrix that depicted the following dimensions: cultural, spiritual, secular, intellectual, political, practical, personal and public. Together, these comprised the Japanangka teaching and research paradigm. Errol explains:

The teaching and research paradigm I propose eliminates the need to seek knowledge of the quality of cultural universality in Aboriginal Australia ... What is left to establish are the fluctuations of intensity and the compelling orientations of a research action, in the connection of non-white methodologies and frames of reference, in the action of research.<sup>20</sup>

The works of Lester Irabinna Rigney and Errol West particularly inspired my efforts to develop an Indigenist research framework based on Quandamooka ontology and epistemology.

### **Quandamooka Ontology: a framework for Indigenist research**

Given the above discussion, Indigenist research must centralise the core structures of Aboriginal ontology as a framework for research if it is to serve us well. Otherwise it is western research done by Indigenous people. Why insist on an ontology? It is through ontology that we develop an awareness and sense of self, of belonging and for coming to know our responsibilities and ways to relate to self and others. Barbara Thayer-Bacon refers to this as relational ontology and writes:

A relational (e)pistemology, which is supported by a relational ontology, helps us focus our attention on our interrelatedness, and our interdependence with each other and our greater surroundings.<sup>21</sup>

So, I draw upon the knowledges, beliefs, behaviours, experiences and realities from my own Quandamooka worldview and show how these become the framework for Indigenist research. In doing so, my authorship does not equate to absolute authority on all things regarding Quandamooka. I am articulating what many Quandamooka people, for centuries, have already expressed in words, technology, writing, dance, art and life. So while I shape this articulation, it is also informed and affirmed by using the words and writings of other Quandamooka people.

### **Quandamooka Ontology**

I now provide an overview of Quandamooka ontology through which I locate myself and describe the country that is Quandamooka. Quandamooka is the land, waterways, skies, spiritual and law systems of the Quandamooka people of Minjerripah (North Stradbroke Island), Moorgumpin (Moreton Island), Moreton Bay and part of the mainland. There are three clans who have traditional rights to this country: Noonuccal, Koenpul and Ngugi.

Minjerripah and Moorgumpin are sand islands and are part of a chain of such islands that are found along the south east coast of Queensland. This chain of sand islands is unique in the world. Some of my people and people from these islands

believe we have a common creator spirit and this links us as sand and saltwater people. This sets us in relationship to these people, their country and the Entities within this. One of our main creator spirits is Quandamook, a sea spirit that manifests as a dolphin. So Quandamooka literally means '*the place of the creator spirit Quandamook*'. Another creator spirit is Kabool, a land spirit that manifests as a carpet snake. A well-known and respected Quandamooka woman, poet, artist and educator, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, succinctly expresses our ontology in this way:

God gave our Yulubirribi (salt and sand people) nation nutritious food supplies and miraculous medicines and the ability for our people to utilise these gifts by listening to his messages for management from weather, flora, fauna, environment, heavens and each other. After creation, he then gave our ancestors knowledge to pass on through learned and natural expression the ways and means of existence without having to defeat his gifts. This expression is enjoyed by the Koenpil, Noonuccal and other nation's form of education for some hundreds of thousands of years.<sup>22</sup>

We believe that country is not only the Land and People, but is also the Entities of Waterways, Animals, Plants, Climate, Skies and Spirits.<sup>23</sup> Within this, one Entity should not be raised above another, as these live in close relationship with one another. So People are no more or less important than the other Entities. Dale Ruska, a Koenpul–Noonuccal man asserts:

men and women, no matter how high in status they thought they were, had no right whatsoever to decide over the fate of their country or their Mother Spirit. They were there since the time of creation, and our Dreaming or Dreamtime began a long time ago. We are somewhere in the middle of it now and there is a long time to come. Where we now put ourselves in the position of the God and we think we have the right to decide over the fate of our Mother Spirit, we are actually denying the future generations a human right, a blood born right, and we are taking away the Mother Spirit. And that means we are also taking away their spirit.<sup>24</sup>

The strength of our country can also be seen in the relationships between these Entities; hence, it is a truly relational ontology. All things are recognised and respected for their place in the overall system. Whilst they are differentiated, these relations are not oppositional, nor binaric, but are inclusive and accepting of diversity. These relations serve to define and unite, not to oppose or alienate. As saltwater people, the motions of tides, phases of the moon, movements of wind and sand each structure and inform our worldview. This continual movement of air, sand and salt water is arresting, cleansing and healing as much as it is harsh and contradictory. Oodgeroo explains:

We know if we respect the sea she will respond by giving to us her many foods. When the Noonuccal's sea spirit Quandamooka grows angry, she orders us away from her shores, and we wait until she has exhausted her anger and is calm and serene again, before we venture out on to her waters.<sup>25</sup>

Other times, the Entities restore what has become depleted. There is nothing like the caress of your senses when you lie on the warm, white sand and breathe the salt air. The sun warms your bones and you feel yourself merge into the sand. The she-oak will shift its branches in the breeze and sing and that's when you know you're being watched. Mirrigimpah<sup>26</sup> floats above, hovers, dips and hovers again.

You no longer know yourself as a 'person', you've become an Entity amongst other Entities. Through a relational ontology, the connections are restored, relatedness reciprocated and maintained.

We also have a strong relationship with the Skies and Stars, because, while they share their knowledge of imminent storms and guide us on our travels, they are our library of stories, information, knowledge, entertainment and news. The Skies are a major part of the worldwide web of the southern hemisphere. Oodgeroo, writing in her former English name, shares with us that:

There is something unflinching and breathtakingly beautiful about a sunrise — and this was especially true of a sunrise over Stradbroke Island. The fantastic, indescribable light that brightened the sky always made me feel I was in the presence of the Good Spirit. The colours would appear in the sky as if from nowhere and blend together as the sun peeped over the horizon. It was like a great rainbow rolled up in a huge ball, covering the eastern sky. This spectacle never failed to move me.<sup>27</sup>

But not all of our island exists this way. Our island sits at the mouth of the Brisbane River, which is the main watercourse for Brisbane, the capital city of the state of Queensland. The salt water and winds wash sand through channels between Minjerripah and the island of Moorgumpin (Moreton Island) into the catchment area of the Brisbane River. Brisbane is known to be the largest capital city in the southern hemisphere in terms of geographical size. So the river gets very busy, very polluted and very tired, and so does the country and so do the Entities. Sand mining has distorted and destroyed almost two-thirds of Minjerripah and a whaling station on Moorgumpin in the early to mid-twentieth century contributed to the near extinction of the whale population. Invasions and incursions from tourists, feral weeds and animals all contribute to the sicknesses of each and every Entity. In the people it causes sickness of our physical, mental and spiritual health. Oodgeroo<sup>28</sup> forewarned:

Stradbroke is dying. The birds and animals are going. The trees and flowers are being pushed aside and left to die. Tourists come to soak up the sunshine and bathe in the blue Pacific, scattering as they go their discarded cans and cigarette packets and bottles and even the hulks of cars. Greedy, thoughtless, stupid, ignorant man continues the assault on nature. But he too will suffer. His ruthless bulldozers are digging his own grave.<sup>29</sup>

### **Quandamooka Worldview Constructs: Indigenist Research Theory**

Having outlined dimensions of Quandamooka ontology, I now outline how this informs a theoretical framework for Indigenist research. Essentially, this describes three main constructs and their processes: first, establishing through law what is known about the Entities; second, establishing relations amongst Entities; and third, enacting ways for maintaining these relations. Elsewhere, I identify these as Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing.<sup>30</sup>

### *Ways of Knowing*

The time of learning in the Aboriginal world never stops. It goes on and on. As soon as the children are able to sit up, they are taught to observe the reptiles, animals and birds and to draw them in the sand. In this way they learn to recognize every creature in the bush. And they learn, too, how to imitate their calls and cries.<sup>31</sup>

Ways of Knowing are specific to ontology and Entities of Land, Animals, Plants, Waterways, Skies, Climate and the Spiritual systems of Aboriginal groups. Knowledge about ontology and Entities is learned and reproduced through processes of: listening, sensing, viewing, reviewing, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualising, assessing, modelling, engaging and applying. Ways of Knowing also entail processes that allow expansion and contraction according to the social, political, historical and spatial dimensions of individuals, the group and interactions with outsiders. So this incorporates the contexts as well as the processes. It is more than just information or facts, and is taught and learned in certain contexts, in certain ways at certain times. It is therefore purposeful, only to the extent to which it is used. If it is not used, then it is not necessary.

However, in this system, no one person or Entity knows all, but each has sets of knowledges to fulfil particular roles. These roles are gender specific and directed by life stage. For example, introducing our young to country is a responsibility of adults, particularly that of women towards children, but it is also a responsibility we fulfil for ourselves in expanding our relations. Uncle Bob Anderson describes his Ways of Knowing as a Quandamooka, Ngugi Elder:

Age does not denote Eldership. There are no application forms posted when a certain age is reached. People are observed and their activities noted in much the same fashion as when children are undergoing their transition to maturity. Later in life when it is felt that their minds are receptive to understanding their role in adult society, they will be invited to become a member of the Elders group not an Elder in their own individual right but for what they can contribute to society as a group.<sup>32</sup>

So there are varying types of knowledges, having different levels that have to be operational for group function. This keeps the Entities known to and in a network of relationships. Without this knowing we are unable to 'be', hence our Ways of Knowing inform our Ways of Being.

### *Ways of Being*

We are part of the world as much as it is part of us, existing within a network of relations amongst Entities that are reciprocal and occur in certain contexts. This determines and defines for us rights to be earned and bestowed as we carry out rites to country, self and others — our Ways of Being. These are indelibly driven by our ontology through our Ways of Knowing and serve as guides for establishing relations amongst the Entities. Our Ways of Being are about the rights we earn by fulfilling relations to Entities of country and self. Oodgeroo explains, 'All living things, be they mammals, birds, reptiles, insects or trees are our sisters

and brothers and therefore we must protect them. We are their custodians. We not only share with them, we also guard them'.<sup>33</sup>

Our Ways of Being evolve as contexts change. For instance, relations change amongst people at particular times, such as movement from one life stage to another, or with the birth or death of a member. Relations amongst Entities are also affected in the same way, hence the passion and determination behind protection of the Land, Waterways, Skies, Spirits and all Entities.

Where once our Ways of Being were exercised within our country and with other known groups, since colonisation we engage often with many Aboriginal people and groups. This is certainly so since the times of physical dispossession, compulsory schooling and work. In these instances, we immediately set about establishing identities, interests and connections to determine our relatedness. Pat Dudgeon and Darlene Oxenham call this 'kindredness'<sup>34</sup> and Simon Forrest names it 'connectedness'.<sup>35</sup> Aileen Moreton-Robinson, a Quandamooka woman, calls this relationality defined as:

one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation and social memory.<sup>36</sup>

Indigenous women's relationality encompasses principles of generosity, empathy and care that connote ideals of respect, consideration, understanding, politeness and nurturing.<sup>37</sup>

In these circumstances we draw upon what we know and have been taught from our Elders and family members as proper forms of conduct. Through this, our Ways of Being shape our Ways of Doing.

### *Ways of Doing*

Our Ways of Doing are a synthesis and an articulation of our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. These are seen in our languages, art, imagery, technology, traditions and ceremonies, land management practices, social organisation and social control. Again, these are life stage, gender and role specific. For example, women have responsibilities and rites to fulfil as nurturers and men have responsibilities and rites to fulfil as protectors. Our Ways of Doing express our individual and group identities, and our individual and group roles. Our behaviour and actions are a matter of our subsequent evolution and growth in our individual Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. We become tangible proof of our ontology and its construction of our Ways of Being and Ways of Knowing. That is, we are able to show (Do), respectfully and rightfully (Being) what we know (Knowing). Oodgeroo explains:

Our people did not cut down trees for paper, nor did they mine metals for pencils, typewriters, computers, printouts, phones, facsimiles, photocopiers etc etc. They successfully sustained our people and environment as they talked, sang and danced the knowledge on to the young, while others used bark, branches, sticks, stones, ochres, fire and smoke for communication. To many, these methods are preferable for the environment ... These methods were shared amongst the many nations through clan gatherings, family gatherings, message stick carriers, story tellers, songs, dance and paintings.<sup>38</sup>

Although our worlds are now historically, socially and politically imbued with features of western worldviews and constructs, we never relinquished, nor lost the essence of, our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being, and this is reflected in our Ways of Doing. Vince Martin, a Noonuccal man asserts:

Well, we were brought up to share, no matter what it was. And that's still the custom these days. You can put modern life in to all those changing attitudes. Some people want to go back to the old ways, some want to go ahead. It's spreading the culture in certain ways. But you'll find the majority of these people on this island have never really lost their culture, it's just done a different way. That's the only difference.<sup>39</sup>

To represent our worlds is ultimately something we can only do for ourselves using our own processes to articulate our experiences, realities and understandings. Anything else is an imposed view that excludes the existence of our ontology and the interrelationship between our Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing.

### **Indigenist Research Methodology**

For Indigenist research to be recognised by the western research academy it must also identify its methodology. But western research is a western practice and, as such, it is not a feature of our own world, so a research framework that is entirely Aboriginal is not possible. So Indigenist research occurs through centring Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing in alignment with aspects of western qualitative research frameworks. This alignment or harmonisation occurs in both the structure of the research and in the research procedures. Of these, eight are identified in this discussion of Indigenist research. These are: research assumptions; research questions; literature review; research design; conduct; analysis; interpretation; reporting and dissemination.<sup>40</sup> These procedures and processes reveal the ontological and epistemological foundations upon which research methodology occurs. It is interesting to recall that Errol West, too, identified eight structures that comprise the Japananka research paradigm. The following discussion articulates this alignment and harmonisation in terms of the research study I am conducting.

#### *Research assumptions: to re-set through research*

A researcher's worldview both informs and shapes the assumptions and parameters for undertaking research activity. Within Indigenist research these assumptions are grounded within matters pertaining to the protection and preservation of our country and its Entities and the protection and preservation of our Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing. Another assumption is the emphasis given to the relational nature of our worlds and lives. This relatedness is core and permeates every aspect of every procedure of the research.

#### *Research question: to re-claim through research*

For the Indigenist researcher, research questions centre on the Entities of a location, or country. Research questions will emphasise different aspects of a

phenomenon and seek solutions to issues we prioritise. In my current study the research questions seek to establish how the Burungu people of far north Queensland regulate the behaviours of outsiders, and how I will regulate my own behaviour as an Aboriginal outsider and researcher.

*Literature review: to re-view through research*

The Indigenist researcher first seeks out primary sources of the research location. These will invariably be sources produced by People and by other Entities in the context of country. The purpose is to establish the state of relations amongst the Entities that can only be achieved by being there. A re-view of primary sources such as photographs and audio-visual media also forms the sources in Indigenist research and contains evidence of their Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing. The Indigenist researcher then 'reads' these sources for relevance to the research question.

Primary and secondary sources by non-Aboriginal people should also be reviewed, keeping in mind the cultural assumptions, standpoints and biases of the author.

*Research design: to re-frame through research*

Research design is embedded in theoretical framework and reflects the assumptions, standpoint and values of the researcher. For Indigenist researchers, design is contextual and accords recognition to the way relations are maintained between and amongst Entities. For example, research design considers how the relations amongst individuals, families and community members exist in spite of their geographical distribution. While there might be a primary research site, Indigenist research tends to be multi-sited. For example, while Buru is the main site, other localities within the Cairns and Mossman areas also are significant.

The ability to design research that celebrates a relational ontology requires flexibility and reflexivity that is more than a matter of matching methods of data collection to the research question. Flexibility in design reflects the extent to which the researcher is prepared to show respect in understanding that research is not a priority in times of crisis, grieving, celebration, ritual or maintenance of relations amongst Entities. This is the cultural safety and cultural respect Lester Irabinna Rigney commands.

Reflexivity in research design affords the 'space' to decolonise western research methodologies, then harmonise and articulate Indigenist research. Reflexivity is a process that allows us to work from Aboriginal centres and ensure we work with relatedness of self and Entities. Reflexivity challenges us to claim our shortcomings, misunderstandings, oversights and mistakes, to re-claim our lives and make strong changes to our current realities. Being reflexive ensures we do not compromise our identity whilst undertaking research.

*Research conduct: to re-search through research*

In this phase of the research, conduct is still driven by our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being, to know and to observe protocols and respect relations and earn

rights to continue the research. Aileen Moreton-Robinson<sup>41</sup> warns against methodological erasure whereby the methods for data collection ignore and perpetuate power imbalances of research expert and Aboriginal research subject. Therefore, data collection methods entail following codes for communication and protocols for interacting that require different behaviour in different settings. This varies according to setting, gender, life stage and roles of the People and Entities.

Methods such as storying and exchanging talk are most often used amongst People but methods for interacting with other Entities (eg Animals, Weather, Skies) are equally necessary. This requires fieldwork that immerses the researcher in the contexts of the Entities and to watch, listen, wait, learn and repeat these processes as methods for data collection.

#### *Data analysis: to re-visit through research*

Since the assumptions upon which research is based vary according to the worldview of the researcher, the criteria, categories and themes devised for data analysis will further entrench this worldview. Using the Entities as principle data sets, a thematic analysis<sup>42</sup> is employed to uncover the perceptions, relationships, activities, strategies and processes as these relate to the research questions.

#### *Data interpretation: to re-connect through research*

In a voice-centred approach to interpretation, data interpretation accords respect to the country and Entities in allowing these to tell the patterns within their own stories, in their own ways. It may also require the Indigenist researcher to watch and wait with patience as the interpretations and representations of these patterns emerge. This may occur as dreams, or in the form of words and pictures seen in our daily lives, which, generally, are not expected to carry messages. The task of interpretation is to maintain these micro- and macro- relations of research as processes for re-connecting the patterns revealed in analysis. It has less to do with capturing 'truth' or drawing general conclusions, than the re-connecting of self, family, community and Entities that can be claimed and celebrated.

#### *Reporting and dissemination: re-presenting through research*

Within Indigenist research, reporting is culturally regulated through respect of protocols to others, such as asking permission, using preferred language, terms and expressions, with the ultimate aim of maintaining relations. So reporting and dissemination of research is to re-present the research to the participants and to maintain their relatedness to the work. This relatedness permeates all aspects and procedures of the research.

In my postgraduate research studies, I am working with the Burungu, who are a clan within the Kuku Yalanji nation of far north Queensland. I am not working with my own people and I am ever mindful that I behave in ways that serve to identify relations and maintain relatedness. As a result I developed a set of research protocols that consists of a number of statements by which I have agreed to abide. These protocols are part of the research findings and strongly reflect the relational ontology, epistemology and methodology employed through the

Indigenist research framework. The protocols are stated in a one-page document that identifies seven succinct statements where I agree to: respect Bubu<sup>43</sup>; Buru<sup>44</sup> laws; Buru Elders; Buru culture; Buru families; and Buru futures. I also have listed a number of ways in which I will demonstrate this respect<sup>45</sup> and, finally, have outlined ways for the Burungu people to address misbehaviour on my part. This includes contacting my Elders and senior family members as well as the staff of James Cook University. The protocols have been distributed to key research participants and described at a community meeting. I have also distributed them to Quandamooka community organisations as an act of accountability and for maintaining relations.

### **Conclusion**

This discussion of Indigenist research is by no means complete, but is, rather, part of my life's work. I am often amazed by the levels of trust that I have established with the people with whom I am conducting my research; I attribute this to using a research framework of which a relational ontology, epistemology and methodology are necessary conditions. I am indebted to the Burungu, Buru Entities and so many others because without them this research study and its discussion of Indigenist research would not be possible. So for me, working with another group has in fact re-newed a deeper understanding of relatedness and the importance of relations.

The prospect of further developments that confirm Indigenist research as a paradigm in its own right is exciting. While it signifies the challenge to western research that Victor Hart and Sue Whatman<sup>46</sup> presented in the introduction of this paper, it is equally about our continued assertion to take control of our lives and protect ourselves, our lands, our past, our present, and particularly our futures.

In closing, I share some more of the words of Oodgeroo Noonuccal, who left not only a legacy in her words and her art, but has provided the means to traverse the terrains of research, yet remain related and whole. Without these writings and art, my research would not be the same. She proclaims:

to our father's fathers, the pain, the sorrow,  
to our children's children, the glad tomorrow.<sup>47</sup>