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## Blak & Salty: reflections on violence and racism

Donna Moodie (Gomerói), Kelly Menzel (Ngadjuri), Liz Cameron  
(Dharug) and Nikki Moodie (Gomerói)

### Introduction

The Māori concept of *iwi* loosely translates as “tribe” and encompasses many different communities (Smith 2012, p. 139). Smith explores the utility of tertiary qualifications to *iwi* in the context of treaty settlements, but warns of the risk of poor quality or unethical research: “any sign that secret deals have been made, or the traditional processes have been overridden, can result in a halt to further work and a schism in the tribe” (Smith 2012, p. 221). However, in thinking through the implications of Indigenous governance of Indigenous education, Smith also notes how “the processes of consultation, collective meetings, open debate and shared decision-making are crucial aspects of tribal research practices” (Smith 2012, p. 221). The university then is a site of tension and risk, its purpose and modes of operation creating challenges for tribal governance and Indigenous Peoples’ political projects. Yet, simultaneously, the university provides an opportunity to elaborate and practice tribal governance within the confines of the colonial institution, allowing a degree of appropriation, revision and remix – a tribal methodology for institutional engagement that may enable new Indigenous futures, if not decolonization. However, in pursuit of greater cultural fidelity between Indigenous peoples and academic institutions, we experience the refractory imprint (Wolfe 2006) of practices that have incorporated the violence of settler-colonial racism. We speak back to this lateral violence as a collective of Indigenous women storying our own healing journeys, together, as both method and meaning-making (Smith 2012).

The historical behavior of researchers and research institutions is not unknown to us, and thus we bring our knowledge of this treatment as we enter tertiary systems – as students and as staff. We take up Smith's (2012) discussion of the ways in which tribal governance systems manage and take up the promise of research of tertiary education and extend that discussion to expectations of Indigenous relationality in the way Indigenous matters are arranged inside universities. For example, Indigenous student support centers or Indigenous Education Units (IEUs) have long been recognized as "a haven of understanding" (Page & Asmar 2008, p. 112) for our students. These units have, for a number of decades, provided a constellation of emergency, personal, financial and academic support in a culturally safe and relevant manner (Behrendt et al 2012). Indeed, these centers have been integral to improving completion rates for Indigenous students (Asmar, Page & Radloff 2011): "universities with more complex Indigenous support and research infrastructure demonstrate higher Indigenous student completion rates" (Pechenkina, Kowal & Paradies 2011, p. 64). Often IEUs include identifiably *Indigenous* governance structures and leadership strategies that center Indigenous cultural values, for example by employing Indigenous People in positions of power, hosting Elders-in-Residence or running healing and cultural programs. However, it is the case that we often find ourselves working outside of IEUs or within IEUs that do not have a high degree of cultural match between the governance structure adopted and the staff employed there. We suggest that culturally appropriate governance within universities, which attends to relationality, Country and wellbeing, is a well-recognized strategy to combat lateral violence (Gooda 2011a).

In this essay, we use an Indigenous Methodological (IM) approach from Kovach (2010a) to story our experiences and interpretation of Smith (2012), from our perspectives as Indigenous women engaging in Indigenous women's business in the Australian university sector. Culturally we represent an intergenerational view and a network of relationality that is often invisible in academia. We are provoked by questions that ask "what is Indigenous women's business inside the Academy?". Smith (2012) asserts that settlers (or outsiders) view the issue of contestability within Indigenous communities – internal or external to universities – as proof that infighting is rampant. Thus, we four Indigenous women discuss our experience of this outsiders' view. Smith (2012, p. 221) contends that some "insiders" tend to view outcomes, defending a lack of culturally appropriate processes, as driven by the academy and government agenda as "settlement at any cost rather than a reflection of traditional practices". This essay illustrates how multiple generations of Indigenous women *do* Indigenous

research in the white Australian academy and indeed questions *if* we can, in a way that respects our cultural specificities as Indigenous women, as Gomeroi, as Dharug, as Ngadjuri. Initially, Donna approached us and asked us to describe our experiences and address and explore issues such as internalized micro-aggression and lateral violence, often termed “mobbing” and “bullying”. In highlighting our experiences, we four Indigenous women bring our ideas together to support better processes regarding safe cultural spaces in the academy.

Mobbing and bullying occur in many workplaces, and academia is no exception (Twale & DeLuca 2008). Yet we suggest that the phenomenon of lateral violence at once includes mobbing and bullying and also goes beyond these behaviors to include a racialized dimension. These behaviors create imbalances and inequities and have ongoing ramifications that reiterate and reinforce the policies and practices associated with colonization. It is argued that both *internalized racism* and *intraracial racism* intersect with racism in academia and continue to reinforce colonial practices (Evans et al 2014). What does this mean for Indigenous women academics from our perspectives? And what of the disgruntlement and intolerance within Indigenous communities? We could consider this as possible evidence of the *tall poppy syndrome*, so common in Australia, which in this context might actively discard Indigenous People working with the academy as being seen as *gone white*, as *coconuts*, or “flash blacks” (Smith 2012, p. 138). Yet many Indigenous students, academics and professional staff see higher education employment as a career pathway, along with supporting and advocating an obligation to give back to community in order to make positive change (Behrendt et al 2012). This essay explores and defines culturally safe practices and process, based on our reflections on the role of the university in engaging with First Peoples. While our individual storylines capture individual experiences that encompass truth through experience, commonalities between us are evident.

## Positioning

We write as four Aboriginal women, a Gomeroi mother and daughter – Donna and Nikki; a Bohemian Ngadjuri woman – Kelly; and a Dharug woman – Liz. We come together with the collective aim of understanding the university as a site for the articulation of historical and contemporary Indigenous identities, to strengthen ourselves and each other, and to assert the role of institutes of higher

education in the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge. We have each negotiated universities as mechanisms for the reproduction of Western elitism, where we – and our programs of work – have struggled to survive in the face of overwhelming hostility towards our identities and knowledges (Smith 2012). We begin this essay with a discussion of lateral violence and proceed to relate our experiences within the Australian university system. In disclosing our personal experiences, we seek less to provide evidence of the existence or impact of lateral violence and racism, and rather more to assert the survivance and reinvention that higher education can support, when we are brought into a relational framework that creates cultural security (Gooda 2011b).

### Lateral violence

Lateral violence is often described as internalized racism, a phenomenon that occurs when oppressed peoples damage their own communities (Gooda 2011b; Royal Australian College of General Practitioners [RACGP] 2014). That damage may manifest as gossiping, bullying or shaming others in an organization or in the wider community, or in direct efforts to socially isolate or exclude other people. Families are often most at risk of extreme physical acts of violence, and this includes the risk of self-harm and injury (physical, psychological and spiritual) as a result of these experiences (RACGP 2014). Recent research suggests that “lateral violence is inescapable, intense and chronic within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities” (Clark & Augoustinos 2015, p. 24).

Clark and Augoustinos (2015) discuss the need for specificity in the use of the term *lateral violence* because of the risk of stigma associated particularly with the use of the word *violence* and persistent racist representations of Indigenous People as inherently volatile (and thus incapable and deviant). These authors conducted a qualitative research project with 30 Aboriginal participants on the prevalence, description and naming of the phenomenon of lateral violence. Participants in that project describe how the phrase allowed them to feel a sense of relief when their experiences could be interpreted using this language. The term *lateral violence* both includes and is more expansive than other descriptors often used in the research literature, like *bullying* or *infighting*.

More recently, Paradies (2018, p. 4) writes how lateral violence describes the intersection of both *intraracial racism* and *internalized racism* and is often focused on: “indigenous authenticity (e.g., skin color or cultural knowledge),

manifesting as innuendo, exclusion, insults, sabotage, undermining, scapegoating, backstabbing or failure to respect privacy”. Paradies (2018) discusses the result of a 2011 survey conducted by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) on Indigenous Peoples’ experiences of racial discrimination in Australia’s university sector. The report defined lateral violence as “the harmful and undermining practices that members of oppressed groups can engage in against each other as a result of marginalisation” (National Indigenous Unit of the NTEU 2011, p. 1). A total of 172 members completed the survey, which found that only 24 per cent of respondents had never experienced lateral violence (National Indigenous Unit of the NTEU 2011, p. 18). In contrast:

- 60.6% had experienced lateral violence in the workplace.
- 57.9% stated that colleagues at work were the main perpetrators of lateral violence.
- 8.6% stated that their employer attempted to address lateral violence in the workplace.
- Of this, 5.7% stated that their employer took positive actions to address lateral violence,
- 10.0% of respondents stated that their employers were somewhat successful in addressing lateral violence at work (National Indigenous Unit of the NTEU 2011, p. 4).

The research conducted by the National Indigenous Unit of the NTEU reinforces the landmark Social Justice Report released in the same year by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Gooda (2011b). The 2011 Social Justice Report included an extensive discussion of lateral violence as a phenomenon that affects colonized peoples particularly, emerging as it does from the challenge of maintaining a collective identity in the context of ongoing oppression.

The overwhelming position of power held by the colonizers, combined with internalized negative beliefs, fosters the sense that directing anger and violence towards the colonizers is too risky or fruitless. In this situation we are safer and more able to attack those closest to us who do not represent the potent threat of the colonizers (Gooda 2011b).

In the broader Australian context, a tall poppy is someone who is both successful and held in contempt by virtue of their success (Peeters 2004). Australian egalitarianism – as a cultural mode of interaction rather than political commitment to equity – manifests as an aversion to conspicuous success; or perhaps more specifically as an aversion to the sense of entitlement that leads

some to engage in egotistical or self-indulgent behavior as a result of their success (Peeters 2015). In education, sport and public life, high performance and enthusiasm are routinely denigrated, to the extent that the tall poppy syndrome and the inevitable “cutting down” that follows, have been described as Australia’s national sport (Peeters 2004, p. 12). If, then, “taking someone down a peg” or cutting down a tall poppy is such an established social practice, how might we understand the intersection of racism and colonialism that combine to create an oppressive system of disenfranchisement for Indigenous People in Australia? In the broader settler-colonial context of Australia, the act of “cutting down tall poppies” is the exercise of a powerful social norm that seeks to limit the expression of pomposity, braggadocio or conceited entitlement. Yet Indigenous Peoples’ experience of lateral violence – whilst similarly a powerful leveling social norm that aims to standardize behavior – includes both a racialized dimension and a manifestation internal to our communities that marks it as a fundamentally different phenomenon from the tall poppy syndrome (Clark & Augoustinos 2015).

Lateral violence raises the specter of violating an identity rooted in survival that masks the internalization of colonial stereotypes about Indigenous being and potentiality (Hallinin, Bruce & Burke 2005). For example, being labeled a *coconut*, or *flash*, can indicate a violation of a collective identity developed out of a need for safety in opposition to non-Indigenous Australia (Moodie 2014). Moving away from one’s own community to study or get a higher paying job can not only be seen as a threat to the cohesion of the family and community and a rejection of one’s own identity, it can also be seen as an investment in a society that condemns and denigrates Indigenous People (Sonn, Bishop & Humphries 2000). As such, statements about the ability of Indigenous People to succeed in particular domains, or the likelihood of poor employment prospects and comments on the disloyal, inauthentic nature of People who choose to engage in mainstream institutions seem to involve two movements: first, a critical assessment of the historical chances of success for Indigenous People in colonial institutions; and, second, an internalization of the dominant cultures’ negative beliefs and stereotypes regarding Indigenous People (Moodie 2014).

Regarding the first, neither the male life expectancy gap, nor the incidence of tertiary qualifications amongst Indigenous People are expected to close for at least another century (Altman, Biddle & Hunter 2009). Non-Indigenous people are four times more likely (24 per cent) than Indigenous People (5 per cent) to have attained a bachelor’s degree or higher (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2011). Given these objective circumstances, and the violence perpetrated against

Indigenous People by colonial paramilitary forces (Nettelbeck & Smandych 2010), the police (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody [RCIADIC] 1991) and the welfare and education systems (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC] 1997), the barriers preventing equitable outcomes for Indigenous People are historic, systemic and ongoing. This is not to overlook the substantial achievements of our Peoples, nor the work of those engaged in resurgence and self-determination. However, it is safe to say that any discussion of Indigenous identity and social norms within Indigenous communities must include a discussion of Indigenous history, which in Australia, as in most colonial nations, is one of violent dispossession and ongoing oppression (Moodie 2014). An assessment of the objective chances available to Indigenous People must acknowledge the reality of poorer outcomes, particularly with regard to incarceration and child removal. We can objectively state that some things are getting worse, not better (ABS 2018; Dean 2018).

Second, the evolution within Indigenous communities of social norms that construct education as buying in-to, or compliance with, mainstream values involves a collective internalization of the beliefs of the dominant culture of Indigeneity as deficient (Moodie 2014). Sarra (2006, pp. 78–79) describes workshops, conducted as part of his doctoral research, in which he asked participants to relate words and concepts that describe how mainstream Australia views Indigenous People:

At every forum, the participants reported that mainstream Australia perceived Aboriginal people as alcoholics, drunks or heavy drinkers. It was also widely held that Aboriginal people were privileged or that, in some way, they “got it good”. Aboriginal people were regarded as “welfare dependent”, “dole bludgers” and “lazy people who wouldn’t work”. On every occasion, many considered that mainstream Australia used pejorative terms such as “coon”, “nigger”, “boong”, “black cunts” and “black bastards” in relation to Aboriginal people. These were the names my brothers and I were called at school.

In a study examining barriers and pathways to schooling and vocational education and training (VET) for Indigenous young People, Alford and James (2007) identify not only a lack of family support for Indigenous students, but also a perception held by non-Indigenous interviewees that Indigenous families were dysfunctional. Whether held by community members and teachers, or perpetuated in the media, stereotypes of Indigenous inability and disengagement exist and are entrenched. In conjunction with the historical experiences mentioned above, these contemporary racist attitudes form part of the world in

which a young Indigenous person is socialized (Paradies & Cunningham 2009; Sarra 2006; Wall & Baker 2012). The internalization of negative expectations of Indigenous People leads not only to the normalization of low academic achievement, but also to the belief that participation and excellence in mainstream institutions are antithetical to the cohesion of Indigenous communities (Moodie 2014). This obviously has significant implications for the development of career aspirations and an academic self-concept (Craven 2005). These norms and manifestations of lateral violence create yet another hurdle to overcome in the pursuit of wellbeing and cultural safety (Moodie 2014).

## Entering the university

Taking into account the discussion above, what then drew us in to universities, and how have our expectations met with reality? Donna posed us the following questions:

- Why did we want to work at university?
- What did we foresee or envisage as our employment?
- Were our expectations fulfilled?

**Kelly** I always wanted to work in a university. I was 26 when I won my first academic job. I was so excited. Like stupidly excited and enthusiastic to be the best I could be. I left a full-time, permanent position working in community for a 9-month contract, with the aim of learning as much as I could and making myself indispensable. I was asked to stay on. Although I am not sure it was because I was indispensable, rather I was cannon fodder, because I never had the opportunity to fulfil any potential. I tried to engage with the more experienced scholars in my school. I wanted to learn from them. I would ask them if we could work on things together. They would say yes. I would arrange a meeting to discuss project ideas or mentoring support. The people I invited would not show up to the meetings. This happened regularly. I still do not know the lesson I was supposed to learn from that. In the end, all I ended up doing was teaching. All the units to do with culture, Indigeneity and rural communities (because apparently that is where all black people live) fell to me, and it kept being piled on. Until I burned out. I was excluded from engaging in any scholarly activity within the school. I witnessed this happen to other young women who joined the school. I also saw young non-Indigenous men being fostered through the ranks. They were supported, mentored by the senior women in the school and

invited to join projects, from the day they commenced. I did not realize this actually occurred in real life. I thought it was the stuff of textbooks and of past times, until I saw it first-hand.

**Liz** I entered university through chance and a sequence of unplanned events, rather than having set goals of a career pathways. After undertaking post-graduate studies in Indigenous social health I applied for a professional position that led to an academic role in later years. Since then I have worked at four universities.

Initially, I felt disoriented and overwhelmed by the policies, procedures and academic language. I felt inferior. I was astonished to find few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics engaged in teaching and research, and a noticeable absence of senior leadership roles. I witnessed many Indigenous units being taught by non-Indigenous academics that led me questioning cultural standards. I became aware of the inequities surrounding Indigenous academic workloads and Community Engagement activities compared to other peers who did not experience such overwhelming and demanding roles. I found there was little understanding or recognition of student and extended kin support needs and no comprehension from other senior university executive staff on the holistic nature of service provision. Yet, personally connecting with Indigenous students is essential for their success. On par with cultural protocols, introductions and negotiating kinship connections provide more meaningful exchanges, yet are often in direct conflict with university processes, as taking the time to deeply know students is not encouraged or made obvious by dedicated time allocation in workloads. It is argued that knowing students allows for a deeper richness of connections to flow into the learning environment, as diverse cultural understandings can be used as examples and case-related studies. Perso and Hayward (2015) state that knowing individual students is imperative in considering large numbers of diverse cultural groups, each with different languages and cultural customs, as a means to prevent stereotyping Aboriginal people and culture (Harrison 2011). Such engagement is largely undocumented and therefore “invisible” yet immense (Page & Asmar 2008).

**Nikki** I didn’t want to work in a university until well after I started my PhD. I had been building a career in the public service until a health issue forced me to reconsider entirely what my working life looked like. I didn’t know at that point that I had severe endometriosis, but it had begun to take quite a toll on my body

with fatigue and pain that was diagnosed as all sorts of other things. So until my late twenties I was focused on working in government and community, to put into practice everything I learned in my undergraduate degree. But after a few years in the public service I was approached by my honors supervisor with an invitation to apply for a PhD scholarship. It seemed like a good way to further my career and have a change of pace to focus on my health.

Through my candidature I had a sense of how hard it was to find permanent, full-time academic employment and even towards the end of my PhD was still focused on returning to government. I was offered a short contract teaching Indigenous Studies whilst I finished my thesis and still remember coordinating classes, lecturing and writing whilst actively looking for jobs back in government. It wasn't until I had submitted my thesis, been awarded the doctorate and had a permanent, ongoing teaching and research position in a university that I allowed myself to think this might offer a stable future.

In many ways my experience of universities has not been typical. I have enjoyed immense privilege and security that I do not see available to many other academics – either Indigenous academic staff or non-white people and women or gender diverse early career researchers. In part, this is because a large slice of my childhood took place in universities whilst Donna attended as a mature-aged student and single mum. So I knew many academics growing up and I got to know the feel and function of a university from an early age. I always knew I would go to university, maybe even do a PhD, but I didn't know I would end up working in them. The value of a tertiary education for our mob is clear, and the great privilege of working inside a university is clear, but there is a large cost to be paid if the work is disconnected from our communities and our expectations of cultural fit between our home and work are not met.

## Cultural safety

The idea of *cultural safety* appears variously as a research mode and methodology, as a condition for identity, and as management strategy in higher education. According to Rigney (1999, p. 116), Indigenist research has been defined 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”. The landmark Social Justice Report (Gooda 2011b) later discussed how *cultural safety* and *cultural security* offer antidotes to lateral violence by creating

opportunities for personal growth and achievement and then the entrenchment of those opportunities in policy and procedure. As Mick Dodson noted in his 1994 Wentworth Lecture, Indigenous Peoples' relationship to our own identities is mediated by our relationship to the past: "the repossession of our past is the repossession of ourselves.... Our peoples have left us deep roots which empowered us to endure the violence of oppression. They are the roots of survival but not of constriction. They are roots from which all growth is possible. They are the roots which protected our end from the beginning" (Dodson 1994, p. 23).

In a university context, *cultural safety* is often described as synonymous with *respect*, *sensitivity* or *competency* (Universities Australia & Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council 2011). We separately consider how our workplaces offer cultural safety or security by responding to the question:

- Do you feel that the university, faculty or school that you work in is overall a culturally safe environment?

**Liz** No. I have continually witnessed "Aboriginal matters" being seen as "the problem" with a tendency to ignore, push aside or reject claims of safety. I have seen senior staff run in fear over Indigenous issues, seeing us as a "problem" through suggestive "here we go again" gestures. I have witnessed a great deal of passive racial victimization in "saving" the poor black fella that Tatum describes as "white superiority to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander livelihoods" (1997, p. 11).

**Kelly** No, I do not think the wider university is culturally safe. I am almost hyper-vigilant when I step outside of my safety zone. Because I have experienced the feeling of being attacked, thus forced to defend my professional conduct and the performance of the students (which I discuss further below) I find I always keep my wits about me. Having said that, I do not always feel unsafe in the wider university, but I have certainly come to learn where is safe and where is not.

I have made an interesting observation during my time at the university. I was originally recruited to work in the wider university, but I moved into the Indigenous space after 18 months. My colleagues knew I was Aboriginal (the only Indigenous person on staff) but it was not until I moved into the Indigenous space that I noticed they began treating me differently. Nurses are always prepared to micro-manage and scrutinize each other, but it was not until I moved that I began to feel a deep sense of distrust from staff in the wider

university school. The dynamic changed so significantly that I felt and still feel as though I am not believed, my abilities are not trusted, my knowledge is not trusted, my expertise is not trusted and that I somehow work in a lesser environment.

**Nikki** I think there are spaces inside universities that tend to be more culturally safe than others, and that I'm lucky to know many colleagues who understand the challenges of being *blak* (Munro 2020; Thorner et al 2018) in a white colonial institution. But I often struggle with the idea that universities could ever be truly culturally safe. Universities in Australia do not have the same history as in the United States with tribal colleges or historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Simultaneously, the idea of self-determination in Indigenous education that we've been permitted to hold is particularly anemic. The idea of an Indigenous university has never been seriously entertained in this country yet is established in Canada, the United States and New Zealand. Our right to determine our own education systems is recognized internationally and exists within the countries Australia compares itself to. So when I think about what *would* be culturally safe, I think about institutions that are designed within Indigenous cultural systems, to hold and grow Indigenous knowledges, and teach Indigenous students. That's the benchmark that actually exists, so how could we ever expect a white, colonial institution that has been built on the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and knowledges to ever take the place of self-determined Indigenous institutions?

## Mobbing

Mobbing is a form of group behavior and in the workplace is defined as "a malicious attempt to force a person out of the workplace through psychological terror, unjustified accusations, humiliation, general harassment and emotional abuse" (Shallcross, Sheehan & Ramsay 2008, p. 57). Workplace mobbing is a type of bullying behavior where perpetrators work together collectively to cause psychological, sexual and other forms of injury (Mulder et al 2013). The damage is done through malicious gossip, rumor, hearsay and unfounded accusations. Perpetrators are generally part of the dominant group and targets are often isolated and blamed as the one at fault (Branch, Ramsey & Barker 2012). The intent of workplace mobbing is often to destabilize another employee or to force them out of their workplace or job. Perversely, perpetrators often accuse *their*

victims of being bullies, as those perpetrators realize the benefits or security of claiming a victim status (Shallcross 2019). Shallcross (2019) suggests that victims of workplace mobbing are often high achievers, whistle-blowers or change-agents. We respond to the question:

- Have you seen or experienced “mobbing”?

**Liz** Yes. I have seen this in a variety of settings and have had my own personal experiences. I have witnessed underhandedness, deceitful activities and undermining within a black space. My experiences of mobbing include sudden isolated feelings where distinct groups give you the silent treatment, or being given no opportunity to communicate (*silenced*) and shut down. Vindictive and disruptive attacks lay prevalent in Indigenous centers that Denenberg and Braverman (2001, p. 7) refer to as a “concerted effort by a group of employees to isolate a co-worker through ostracism and denigration”. From a personal perspective, this has also included indirect secretive character assassinations and direct criticisms where I was left questioning my abilities and capabilities. Davenport, Schwartz and Elliott (2002) refer to such scapegoating and personal targeting as being forms of intimidation through persistent hostile behaviors to undermine one’s integrity. One of my particular challenges involved the secretive nature of such behaviors as publicly the attackers frequently appeared to be cooperative employees (Lee & Brotheridge 2006).

I have listened to many stories of Indigenous staff continuously being exposed to a historical legacy of internalized mobbing, that has resulted in poor health and wellbeing. Other responses include a desire to leave the organization as they felt there was a workplace disease. Richardson and McCord (2001, p. 2) state that the resulting consequence of mobbing “destroys morale, erodes trust, cripples initiative, and results in dysfunction, absenteeism, resignations, guilt, anxiety, paranoia, negativity, and marginal production” and a loss of professional reputation. It is well recognized within Indigenous academia that the more one advances their career, the more likely they will be targeted from other Indigenous individuals and groups. This additional individualized pressure is not recognized nor supported by universities, leaving the individual battling it out on their own. Universities are also recognized in using scapegoating as a means to quickly solve the “Indigenous problem”. Westhues (2003) describes how, at an organizational level, scapegoating provides a tension release for universities by focusing the stress and blame on the target instead of examining and redressing the wrongs perpetrated against workplace mobbing. This results in the offenders

more often facing no consequences. Interestingly, Namie and Namie (2009) further argue that the silencing of witnesses helps assure the permanence of the offender within the organization and the scapegoating continues towards others.

**Kelly** I have experienced mobbing. In one particular situation, I was reprimanded by a manager for not doing something she directed me to do. Now, I know I must not be the easiest person to manage. I am loud, slightly bolshie and I do not always do what I am told, however I had a perfectly rational reason for not doing what she had directed me to do, but that was apparently irrelevant. As part of the “punishment” she allotted, she directed me to stand up in a management meeting and publicly apologize (atone) for my “failure to follow a directive and my poor performance”. She also instructed me to go to each of the executives and privately apologize for my indiscretion. I knew what she was doing. I understood at an intellectual level what was happening to me but I felt there was nothing I could do about it. I weighed up the pros and cons of not following her directive, but I believed the backlash of not doing it would have far outweighed any feeling of satisfaction I would have gotten from standing my ground. I felt as though my employment was at stake and, at that time, I was the only income earner in my family. I did not feel as though I had the luxury of protecting my ego from a public shaming. So, I apologized. It felt terrible. I felt sick, powerless, and full of shame and embarrassment. Not one of the management team or the executives ever questioned this.

**Donna** I have experienced mobbing. In fact, it was mobbing “upwards” that included Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and two men. The head of the Indigenous Education Unit (IEU) was quite unwell. This should not have been a problem, however. As their health deteriorated, this person became to rely more and more on personal assistants, administration staff and professional officers. Academic staff became the target. Gossip, rumor and innuendo became the staple conversation, particularly amongst the “smoking” group who would spend quite a lot of time talking with each other outside. I was privy to these conversations at first, but became ostracized when I called the group out for targeting another professional officer and a couple of non-Indigenous academics. These people had total access to the head of the IEU, and it was made quite clear who was in favor and who was out of favor. Those of us who were the aim of these vitriolic conversations noticed that the head of the IEU was actually believing the gossip and many of us were called upon to explain these rumors, which were untrue. Then came the micromanagement and intense scrutiny on

time spent in the office. It was obvious where this was originating from and it was the upward motion of this mobbing that was then strategically forced on the target of the mobbers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics and professional staff. For many of us it became too much and we moved on to other academies. Many who endured became quite unwell with diagnosed stress symptoms. Some just could not leave and many were eventually “performance managed” out. After much collateral damage this university did however take up the issue of “mobbing”, and the human resources department instigated a policy to create awareness of what actions and behaviors constituted the behavior. And unlike some other academies that I have been employed at, at least this university conducted “exit interviews” for those of us who chose to leave.

It seems to this writer that these universities only act when the IEU haemorrhages staff or issues become public or legal options are taken up. And then many questions are not asked by senior management. It seems to me that it is easier to let the divide and conquer mentality rule. In many instances and in my experience our own people use the tools of the colonizer with potency. This needs to be called out. We are calling on all academies, institutions and universities to understand what is continuing to occur in the post-colonial turn and create opportunity and policy positions that insist on respectfully engaging with blak staff to make safe the lives of blak academics and professional officers, and those of our colleagues who are non-Indigenous who walk with us.

## Indigenizing

Historically in colonial discourse, research was “done” on Aboriginal communities and presented our families and communities 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*” (Martin 2003, p. 203).

We four Indigenous women researchers challenge this dominant discourse. We are Indigenous women and cannot be anything other than Indigenous women. This is our standpoint. Moreton-Robinson (2013, p. 340) states: “Indigenous women’s standpoint is ascribed through inheritance and achieved through struggle. It is constituted by our sovereignty and constitutive of the

interconnectedness of our ontology (our way of being); our epistemology (our way of knowing) and our axiology (our way of doing)." Thus, our ways of being, knowing and doing include the way we research and the way we manage information. This has been taught to us by our ancestor creators and our Elders, and enables us to navigate the space between two worlds whilst maintaining our connection to Country and cultural practices. Indigenous women's standpoint acknowledges Indigenous women's experience and knowledge as it relates to dominant, white patriarchal paradigms. Due to varied levels of oppression, Indigenous women's ways of being, knowing and doing are affected by individual experiences along with collective, shared experiences of colonization that have emerged "under social, political, historical and material conditions that we share either consciously or unconsciously" (Moreton-Robinson 2013, p. 340). Martin (2003, p. 206) argues: "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."

Further utilizing an IM approach is holistic and guided by an Indigenous Knowledge Paradigm. As a paradigmatic approach to research, IM influences the types of methods of data collection, and how the data are interpreted and analyzed (Kovach 2010a). The perspective of the *relational*, the way in which two or more people or things are connected, is an important aspect in IM. In Western methodological frameworks the relational is viewed as biased and therefore not included in the research. In contrast, "Indigenous methodologies embrace relational assumptions as central to their core epistemologies" (Kovach 2010a, p. 42). An IM perspective views the world, things both seen and unseen, holistically. It is about the whole, entire research process, not simply data collection and analysis (Kovach 2011). Kovach (2010a p. 42) suggests that IM must proceed from an Indigenous belief system, which in turn "has at its core a relational understanding and accountability to the world". Indigenous Methodologies proceeds from Indigenous epistemologies and often prioritize orality, or oral transmission of knowledge, as well as collectivist traditions (Kovach 2010a). It is located in and based on respect, reciprocity and collectivity (Martin 2003). Subjective information is valued and the contextual aspect of the data, the place from where it comes, is valued (Little Bear 2000).

It is our desire to conduct our research in the most culturally safe way possible, and we offer our stories here as a demonstration of IM and of Indigenist research. Indigenist research must be undertaken in a culturally safe, respectful, and competent manner. Further, Indigenist research must privilege the voices of Indigenous Peoples, and be a site of political resistance, integrity and moral

responsibility (Rigney 1999). This is what we aim to do. All of this supports Smith's (2012) call to disrupt the rules of the research to move towards practices that are more respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful and no longer the racist practices and attitudes, ethnocentric assumptions and white, patriarchal exploitative research that has been conducted in the Western academy.

## Conclusion

We came together to write and reflect on our experiences of lateral violence and cultural safety in academia to help us heal together, to story and survive together (Smith 2012). Our vignettes tell stories of different encounters and responses, modeling Bishop's (1999, p. 5) "diversities of truth", yet each contributes to a collective narrative in which we each have an important and valued voice. Our experiences can be violent, traumatic, ambivalent, hopeful, but because we tell our stories together, we are able to make meaning of our histories together, and see possible futures for collaboration, community and survival.

We began by asking what is Indigenous women's business in the academy? We conclude by suggesting that our task is twofold. If lateral violence emanates from the racism that exists in the very air we breathe, then combating racism in all its forms – new, old, internal, institutional or interpersonal – must be our first priority. Second, creating spaces and practices in the academy that have a high degree of cultural fidelity with Indigenous Peoples who exist/resist in these spaces requires an ethic of radical inclusion from the institution. An agenda of radical inclusion prioritizes not only the teaching and research function of universities, but Indigenous aspirations as defined by Indigenous collectives both inside and outside the institution.

Our experiences of lateral violence in the academy prompt us to consider the ways in which Indigenous governance practices are supported in university environments. As universities begin to cede space and authority to Indigenous People and knowledges, appropriate resourcing becomes critical to give life to institutional policies and procedures intended to deliver cultural security. Yet, as Gooda (2011b), Dodson (1994), Martin (2003) and Moreton-Robinson (2013) all suggest, our healing and our orientation to the future is based on our roots in the past. From these roots we grow and re-emerge and re-(de)-fine our Indigeneity and our obligation to each other, and we take up Smith's (2012) call to tell our stories well, thus moving beyond and healing from many types of violence experienced in our communities and workplaces.