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## A REVIEW OF LOUISE GWENNETH PHILLIPS AND TRACEY BUNDA'S "RESEARCH THROUGH, WITH AND AS STORYING"

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**Abstract:** This is a review of *Research Through, With and As Storying*, a book that explores how Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars can engage with storying as a tool that undoes conventions of research and gives voice to the marginalised in the academy.

**Keywords:** Research and story; call and response; Indigenous research methodologies; Indigenous ways of knowing; storytelling

I acknowledge the unceded sovereignty of Indigenous peoples of this country.

I acknowledge the important cultural space that exists here despite the attempts to erase it.

I acknowledge the historical and contemporary exclusion of Aboriginal people from cultural institutions as experts/participants. (Baker & Tur 2019)

In *Research Through, With and As Storying*, Phillips and Bunda (2018) offer readers and each other a *call-and-response* (McKittrick 2015), using storying as a process of making meaning in research. Katherine McKittrick's (2015) *call-and-response*, refers to her conversations with Sylvia Wynter's extensive work *on being human as praxis*, as an intuitive dialogue. McKittrick (2015, pp. 1-9) describes *call-and-response* as an approach she and Sylvia Wynter engaged in analytically, creatively, and intellectually to theorize discursive regimes of the production and invention of the 'human'. Phillips and Bunda (2018) offer a similar technique as part of a storying process. Tsing and Ebron (2015, p. 684) also refer to the use of *call-and-response* in writing and research responding to stories and music performed by cultural workers. Tsing states:

Stories stick with me when I catch their rhythm intertwined with my own astonishment. Such writing-in-rhythm stays with me, even when I am working on something else. It seeps and bubbles into partially formed consciousness – and analysis and theory are informed.

Tsing articulates and locates her body in the story when she reflects 'stories stick to me' and notes that the rhythm of the stories contribute to knowledge making. This has synergies with Phillips and Bunda's positioning of storying and artmaking as contributing to rigorous academic scholarship. It is within this theoretical positioning that Indigenous research methodologies (Arbon 2008; Martin 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2013, 2017; Nakata 1998), drawing from situated Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiology's, are privileged. Tracey Bunda, a Ngugi/Wakka Wakka Aboriginal woman draws from long held Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2013; Nakata 1998) to locate and privilege Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous standpoints within the book. It is this powerful location of positionality that informs the reader and demonstrates the relationship of the authors as scholars, women, Indigenous/non-Indigenous, storytellers, artists, to enact relationality as central to the storying process. Storyteller, scholar and colleague Louise Phillips draws on her craft and love of storytelling and scholarly work, to form a relational response, a shared conversation with Bunda. This method of responding to each other's stories *call-and-response*, creates an intimacy, as the reader 'listens in' to their diverse accounts based on differing social and cultural context, social memory, resistance memoirs, over time, space and place. Phillips and Bunda think deeply and thoughtfully about collectivity in this book and use the metaphor of *together/two-gather* (pp. 13, 103) to describe the

storying process they have undertaken. 'In reflecting on our practice, that is, what we have done and what we are aiming to do, our affinity with stories draws us close so that we *two-gather* to write this text' (p. 1). This approach highlights a level of vulnerability within public space, a quality that demonstrates humanness. Phillips and Bunda (2018, p. 3) state: 'we see story as the communication of what it means to be human'. This is brave work in a polarised world.

Phillips draws on Barad's (2007) concept of intra-actions and entanglement to see and feel the *ebbs* and *flows* of storying, demonstrating that everything is always connected, where time and space interchange, past, present and future can be all at the same moment. This is not a linear unfolding. Indigenous philosophies have always known this, this is not new knowledge but old. In Chapter 2 Locating Self in place and ancestral storying, Bunda enacts artmaking of a basket, titled: Basket of entangled archives (p. 18). This image of the basket captures the audience to share and engage with the stories and the materials. Bunda's care of description in the making of the basket invites an intimate connection with the readers, an ethic of care (MacGill 2016; MacGill & Blanch 2013) being enacted as the storying research process unfolds.

This ethics of care allows for a *truth-telling* between the authors and the audience around the complexity of colonialism within Australia and Indigenous and non-Indigenous race-relations. *Truth-telling* is hard work as evidenced by the failure of the Australian Federal government's rejection to the invitation by Indigenous leaders to support the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* (Referendum Council 2017). This invitation required a mature emotional and action-oriented vision by the nation-state to address Indigenous and non-Indigenous race relations and affairs within this Country. We are left again with 'unfinished business' (Dodson 2003). Maybe storying and storytelling can contribute to the complex task of truth-telling? I would posit that the authors seek to engage in the act of truth telling through their sharing of stories. This is demonstrated by Phillips' reflection on Bunda's accounts of Australia's policies enacted on and applied to Indigenous people within this Country. Phillips voices her understanding of self and space on *stolen land* (p. 36); this is not an easy process. Storying allows one to work though such histories and current contemporary policies.

Phillips and Bunda's (2018) use of visual arts, threading-weaving-stitching, stories as performed, takes another form as material objects and artistic expression of the storying process. Storying becomes artmaking, both stories and art makings are active and living. Whether it is Bunda's grandmother's stories, or her family stories of threats of removal of Aboriginal children, or Philips's account of generations of family, a history of convicts and women's rights, readers can connect intellectually, emotional, and physically. Stories offer connections to people, place, moments, told and retold, again, and again. Stories require relationships, a storyteller and a listener. Relational knowing through storytelling enacts an embodied engagement.

Phillips and Bunda (2018, p. 43) outline five principles of the storying process in Chapter 3. They state:

(1) storying nourishes thought, body and soul; (2) claims voice in the silenced margins; (3) storying is embodied relational meaning making; (4) storying intersects past and present as living oral archives; and (5) storying enacts collective ownership and authorship.

These principles offer a methodology beneficial for researchers, students, communities and organisations engaging in projects involving and impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities. For Indigenous researchers and research higher degree students, storying research supports the articulation of Indigenous philosophies that are localised to one's community and grounded within Indigenous standpoint/s (Moreton-Robinson 2013; Nakata 1998) as part of the research process. Storying and storytelling as a discourse is accessible to researchers, students and community members offering a translatable meaning making logic and process. The significance of stories is reinforced by First Nations scholar Jo-Ann Archibald/Q'um Q'um Xiem (Archibald 2001, cited in Martin 2008, p. 20), where she describes the deep learning and 'meaning making' process which occurs through stories and the significance of the relationship between the storyteller and listener to foster a process of 'becoming knowledgeable' (Tur 2018).

Storytelling also centres Indigenous ways of knowing, the long-held tradition of orality, as means for knowledge transmission within Indigenous communities. Phillips and Bunda (2018) reinforce that these principles have an *ebb* and *flow* and will shift and merge through relational embodied connections. They state '... what remains constant and integral to all of these principles is place or country. Stories and storying are located. Country and place provide the fertile soil for the stories to seed' (p. 43). Principle 1 *Storying nourishes thought, body and soul*, foregrounds storying within knowledge production as a living and embodied process. This situates Indigenous decolonising research methodologies (Archibald 2008; Denzin, Lincoln & Tuhiwai Smith 2008; Martin 2008; Moreton-Robinson 2000, 2013, 1998; Rigney 1997, 1999) at the heart of education and research, and positions Indigenous interests and philosophies in this approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 22) centre Indigenous ways of knowing within research inquiry, described in the following way:

Indigenous methodology thus is defined as a theory of inquiry. Indigenous methods – including poetry, drama, storytelling, and critical personal narratives – are performative practices that represent and make indigenous [sic] life visible.

Phillips and Bunda (2018, p. 44-45) posit 'we experience stories as theories...', and further state, 'our claim is that storying has long read the world, and in its existence there is theory'. Bunda refers to Indigenous communities' connections to Country, sovereignty and place expressed through storytelling. Stories are an invitation to share. Both Phillips and Bunda evoke the emotional and spiritual essence of storytelling.

Principle 2 *Storying claims voice in the silenced margins*, draws on Ladson-Billing's 1998, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the role of counter narratives to expose everyday racisms. CRT aligns to storying and storytelling. However, this critique could

be further considered drawing from Moodie's (2017) more recent theorising of Decolonising Race Theory, (DRT). Moodie returns to the work of Brayboy's DRT (McKinley & Brayboy 2005) critique of Critical Race Theory. In his work on Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), Brayboy argues racial categories undermine Indigenous self-determination. He states 'the basic premise of CRT is that racism is endemic in society. In contrast, the basic tenet of TribalCrit emphasises that colonisation is endemic to society' (Brayboy 2001; McKinley & Brayboy 2005, p. 429). Central to their analysis is the reference to Wolfe's (1994) work on "seizure of territory" and the "logic of elimination" (cited in Moodie 2017, p. 33). This analysis is taken further by Moodie (2017 p. 38) in her articulation of DRT, and Indigenous futurity that 'centres place and relationality in place as core concepts for Indigenous education research'.

Storying research locates itself within an Indigenous methodological paradigm and decolonising praxis, where location, place and relationality are at the fore. Bunda's (Phillips & Bunda 2018, p. 52) sharing of the story "Taken" reveals the power of stories through the personal and gut-wrenching account of her mother's, uncle's and aunties' forced removal and the acute awareness of racial policies of assimilation understood by Indigenous children who know the 'state of play' by the government of the day. Bunda poignantly reflects on these accounts, referring to hooks' *radical possibility* (p. 55) located on the margins. Bunda's (2018, p. 56) retelling, again and again, evokes the need to remember and honour her family's experiences of colonial policy; she reflects this is the following way: telling one's stories on the margins demonstrate:

...embodied resilience as a tool of self-determination, a tool to decolonise. In living, breathing, feeling and thinking about the margins, those old people, as with many Aboriginal peoples, have come to claim this site as their own.

Stories breathes life into spaces old and new.

Principle 3 *Storying embodied relational meaning making*, reinforces this. Bunda and Phillips (2018 p. 56) articulate the way in which storytellers bring experiences to life, and in telling 'transport' the listeners to these ephemeral locations, which capture all one's senses. They state, 'embodied storying, in turn, provokes relationality: to feel and know another' (p. 57). Phillips shares this embodied sensory entanglement through her research project *The Walking Neighbourhood*, describing the sensory experiences and connections walking through the neighbourhood of Chiang Mai, Thailand, led by children as public performance. She refers to Ingold's (2000) 'animic ontology' as she explains the 'complex network of reciprocal interdependence, sustained through perpetually drawing on the vitality of others' (cited in Bunda & Phillips 2018, p. 58). Storying therefore has many elements and dimensions as an embodied practice which involves the whole being (utterances, movement, look of the storyteller, emotions, pitch of voice) and all its encircling elements and connections. The authors reinforce Barad's ideas of matter as entangled, and all interconnected.

Embodied relational meaning is supported by Moreton-Robinson's explanation of the ontological relationship to Country; she affirms:

Indigenous people's sense of belonging is derived from an *ontological relationship* to country derived from the Dreaming which provides the precedents for what is believed to have occurred in the beginning in the original form of social living created by ancestral beings. During the Dreaming ancestral beings created the land and life and they are tied to particular tracks of country. Knowledge and beliefs tied to the Dreaming inform the present and future. Within this system of beliefs there is scope for interpretation and change by individuals through dreams and their lived experiences. (Moreton-Robinson 2019 para 16)

Principle 4 *Storying intersects the past and present as living oral archives*, is brought to life by the authors through the account of “This young boy” told by Bunda. This story shares the profound impact of Australian policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – in this context a young Aboriginal boy. It provides an emotive and powerful account of Indigenous people’s resistance to the unjust treatment and breach of Indigenous human rights. ‘Boy,’ as he is called, stands in his sovereignty and does not accept the unjust treatment by the colonisers. Age is no barrier to his purposeful action. Bunda (Phillips & Bunda 2018, p. 63) states: ‘The story of the young boy informs Aboriginal senses of sovereignty that are found in having identification with country, a land to come from, a place to stand on, a standpoint position (Haraway, 1991)’. For future researchers, research higher degree students and communities, storying as a valid meaning making process to offer perspectives, positions on past, present and future in relation to Indigenous interests is powerful. Phillips and Bunda state (2018, p. 64), ‘Storying is a collective process’.

Principle 5 *storying enacts collective ownership*, looks at the complex understanding of how collective authorship and ownership is enacted by Indigenous communities and how western systems of power (in particular, the western legal system) fail to understand this. This collision of ‘ownership’ in the context of stories and storytelling is not without its problematics. The authors outline collective research output and publications within the academy, highlighting academic conventions of collective authorship as often difficult to negotiate. However, they do provide examples of collectives/groups who have maintained collective authorship. Worby, Tur and Blanch (2014, p. 2) reflect on their collaborative article ‘Writing Forward, Writing Back, Writing Black-Working Process and Work-in-Progress’. As Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors they state:

We write for each other to tests the tolerances of trust in ever-changing contexts and to contribute to the greater story of the role of powerful discourse in our lives.

Chapter 4 *Storying Ways*, grapples with the ethics of the storying process asking: ‘which way?’ (Phillips & Bunda 2018, p. 73). It raises fundamental questions and considerations in research and highlights the need for deep listening and thinking around knowledge production and ownership from an Indigenous standpoint. Bunda reinforces this when she asks, ‘who can do research?’, and emphasises the significance of relational knowing when seeking to engage in research with Indigenous communities.

Phillips addresses this as a non-Indigenous person through her account of researching within Aboriginal communities in an early-childhood setting, bringing attention to the significance of building relationships and respecting the priorities and interests of communities, including research approval processes (see AIATSIS 2012) and building genuine ongoing relationships. Tur (2018, p. 64) refers to Quandamoopha scholar Karen Martin (2008, p. 20-21) on the role of stories within her research process. She states:

This importance of stories connects to Indigenous scholars within education and research who privilege the role of storytelling as central to Indigenous epistemologies and argue that stories have an important place within decolonising praxis. For example, Quandamoopha scholar Karen Martin (2008, p. 9) articulates the importance of maintaining her communities stories – the ‘*Noonuccal* People of *Quandamoopha*’ – through her Indigenist Research Paradigm. Martin (2008, pp. 20-21) says: ‘In sharing Quandamoopha Stories in this way makes clear their essential place in this research ceremony, the research study and dissertation. These are Stories about what is known, what is to be known and what is yet to be known and thus they are grounding, defining, comforting and embracing’.

Understanding the different forms of storying is important. Stories that tell of survival and of the historical accounts and experiences of families, stories grounded within Indigenous philosophies, require deeper consideration by all. This is particularly evident with stories that are relational, embodied and grounded within Indigenous philosophies, and where collectively owned and shared knowledge exist within Indigenous communities. This highlights ethical considerations when storying within research contexts. Phillips and Bunda (2018, p. 76), comment, ‘deeply respectful listening about Aboriginal ways of knowing and being is critical for white researchers to try or find ways to understand and conform to Aboriginal ways of being, in relation to country and to the people of country’. The authors reinforce the importance of knowing from where stories come, and ones’ own positionality in the context of the story. This goes to the heart of authority and responsibility to story and the role of teller and listener. It also calls upon the readers of this book to consider the concepts of storying as knowledge production, authority, collective ownership, ethics, responsibility, and meaning making, to imagine futures grounded in long traditions and future imaginings.

In Chapter 5 *Sharing through Storying*, the authors share examples of research demonstrating storying as praxis. They refer to works in two main sections: ‘performed, visual and embodied and storying and written storying’ (Phillips & Bunda 2018, p. 91), drawing from creative arts, artmaking, workshops, performance, curatorial works, scholarship and digital technologies. Ways of knowing merge and entangle, artmaking and storytelling make old and new form. This chapter offers tangible examples of storying as a methodology in enactment in the creative arts. Examples of such creative works include Paola Balla, a Wemba Wemba and Gunditjmarra woman of Italian and Chinese heritage, on Indigenous expressions of survival, determination and sovereignty, and Romaine Moreton, Goenpul Jagara/Bundjunlung woman, in her analysis of the

effects of colonialism through the enforcement of English language on Indigenous bodies. These examples offer alternative ways to inquire.

In my role as a topic coordinator delivering Indigenous education topics to undergraduate and postgraduate students undertaking a Bachelor or Master of Education program in a university setting, students have responded to this contribution of storying and storytelling to their pedagogy, enthusiastically and thoughtfully. Students relate personally and as part of their professional practice on the pedagogical possibilities of storytelling in teaching critical Indigenous and decolonising pedagogies. Student's find storying engaging, lived, giving, nuanced, emotional/emotive, accessible and relational.

Philips and Bunda (2018), offer a challenging, creative, human approach to the significance of storytelling within all communities outlined through the five principles of storying. Long held traditions of storytelling are given agency within current ways of knowing, being and doing. The complex role of truth telling required within Australia and all locations of colonialism seeks to shift and bring into relation members of the community from the margins to the centre. Agency also requires a third space for new and alternative imaginings. Collective storying is not an easy task and requires great care, thoughtful and rigorous intellectual scholarship, deep listening, respect and a recognition of ones' own position.

The relationship with others is at the core of bringing stories to life. (Phillips & Bunda 2018, p. 86).

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