

Place and being: a process of Indigenous academic identity growth

Jennifer Dawn McAlpin

Bacone College, Muskogee, Oklahoma United States of America

jennifer.mcalpin@gmail.com

You begin by saying who you are, your tribe, where you come from and your family. You offer a gift and tell your intention. *Instructions on Traditional Introduction*. Apela Colorado (Johnson 2001 p. 56).

TRADITIONAL INTRODUCTION

For my Ojibwe/Anishinaabe relations

*Aanin nijibimaadiziig.
Boozhoo gakina nindinawe maaganag
miinawa niwiji anishinbeg.
Waabizheshi nindodem.
Makwa nimaamaadodem.
Bangii eta go ninitaa ojibwem.
Ninga-gagwejitoon ji ojibwemoyaan.
Jennifer nindizhinikaaz zhaaganaashimong.
Tahlequah, Oklahoma nindaa noongom.
Miigwech!*

Hello my fellow human beings.
Hello all my relatives fellow (Indians).

Marten is my clan.
My mother's clan is Bear.
I can only speak a little bit.
I shall try to talk anyway.
In English I am called Jennifer.
I live in Tahlequah, Oklahoma now.
Thank you!

And for my Diné relations

*Yáátééh, shi éí Jennifer McAlpin yinishyé.
Makwa/shush dóó Ma'íi deeshgíízhinií éí
nishlí Bilagáana éí báshichíín.*

*Makwa/shush dóó Tódich'íi'nii éí da shichei
dóó Bilagáana ei da shináí.*

*Diné bizaad bíhoosh'aah.
Dóó Salt Lake City, Utah dī shi'dizchí.
Tahlequah, Oklahoma di shighan.
Ahéhee'!*

Hello, my name is Jennifer McAlpin and my maternal clan is Bear Coyote Pass People and my paternal clan is European. My maternal grandfather's clan is Ojibwe, Bear clan Bitter Water Clan and my paternal grandfather's clan is European from Scotland. I am learning the Navajo language. I was born in Salt Lake City, Utah. I live in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Thank you!

My husband is Cherokee, Choctaw and European. His mother's family is from Northeast Oklahoma. We live in Tahlequah Oklahoma now, which is in the United States. We moved from Illinois (where I attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) right before our daughter was born. Together, we have five children: four boys and one baby girl.

Ceremonies, songs prayers from our Diné, Anishinaabe, Celtic, Tsa-La-Gi relatives have protected us, sustained us, brought us here today. We give thanks and ask for trust and guidance, offering *asemaa*, tobacco.

May the songs and prayers of the past, the present, and the future ensure that harmony and balance be sustained here in this work, because I understand that there is no moral reason to have a question if it does not lead to *Hózhó*, beauty. In this way, I open myself to each of the seven directions, my research partners.

In this way, I share part of my very personal dissertation research as I sought, simply put, to find out what Indigenous/Native American/American Indian/Aboriginal students need in higher education. I reviewed all of the literature available to me at that time and I began to understand that the question must be approached in a different way, because the information yielded by Western approaches seemed to lack understanding that helped to address concerns in terms of Indigenous/Native American/American Indian/Aboriginal success in higher education. I was gifted with the opportunity to participate in a 'Decolonizing Methodology' seminar at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the dissertation is a result of the ongoing work that the seminar participants and I continue to engage in. This approach is made possible in higher education by the establishment, development and continued acknowledgement of indigenized, sacred places that are safe for Indigenous/Native American/American Indian/Aboriginal students.

Mitig/Tree/Tsin

For a Western-educated audience the notion of a tree with spirit is a difficult concept to grasp- [i.e.,] the universe is alive. Therefore, to see a Native speaking with a tree does not carry the message of mental instability; on the contrary, this is a scientist engaged in research! (Pam Colorado [Oneida] 1988 p. 26) (See Figure 1.)



Figure 1. McAlpin (2005) *Mitig/dream tree*

This beaded tree is a result of the ‘Decolonizing Methodology’ seminar I participated in with Dr. Larry W. Emerson, from Shiprock, Dine Nation. It is a record of my own process which may be read as a prototype for what I have found through my research to be of crucial importance to American Indians in higher education: identity support. This ‘tree of life’ provides a model with key components to, in the words of many Indigenous scholars, ‘indigenize’ the higher education experience for American Indians. I understand indigenize to mean processes that strengthen, heal, reclaim and revitalize our own collective cultural identities therefore strengthening our perseverance in higher education settings. This translates directly into a support system for Indigenous American students in higher education but also into curriculum and methodological systems.

As I engage traditional modalities, I find it important to be more explicit here in the ways that I am seeking guidance from elders. In the spring of last year I was on my way to the University’s Native American House graduation ceremony to introduce my dear friend, Charlotte, who is more like my little sister, as a graduate from the Master’s program in Educational Policy Studies. On the way to campus, my vision in my right eye was overcome by a shimmering being. I felt quite strange, as if the whole world were different. I was not myself. When I looked in the mirror, I did not look familiar. I thought something was in my eye. When I looked in the mirror into my eye, I thought to myself, this is not my eye. I was unsettled, yet at the same time strangely strong in my words when I got up to speak for my ‘little sister’ in front of all the people. After I spoke, I left, concerned that there may be something wrong with me. Being pregnant, I did not want anything to affect the baby. As I departed, the shimmering light being dissipated I was left with a slight nausea that cleared within minutes.

My husband suggested that I tell my teacher about it. When I called him, after I described the experience, he said to ask for a ceremony from ‘up North’ because although he would do the ceremony for me if I could not find someone else, there may be things he might miss, as he comes from the southwest. So, I started searching for someone Ojibwe to ask for a ceremony by asking my biological mother. She told me to ask for Jesus Christ to protect me then mentioned that I might want to call my Aunt Maxine. Aunt Maxine gave me the number of

her cousin, Donald Kakaygeesick and in the same sentence urged me to see a qualified eye doctor, because “vision is not something you mess around with!”

I was a little nervous, but I called Don. He told me how to go about requesting a drum ceremony from the family and he reminded us that we are cousins; we are related. I followed through with his instructions and waited. A few months later, after my daughter was born healthy, I called to check with him to see if there was anything else for me to do to follow up. There was nothing else. Because our powwow was coming up, I thought I should send some money tobacco for the drums traveling there to Warroad, although our family was not able to attend. I wrote on the envelope holding the money a note asking for prayers of guidance with my dissertation, so that this work would be done in a way to bring honor to our family and our people.

Over the summer I also contacted Wendy Geniusz, whom I had met at the University of Illinois in 2006. I was in the process of reading her dissertation for my own work. In that process I found out about Seven Generations Education Institute, which is right across the Canadian/United States border in Fort Frances, Ontario. My Aunt Maxine lives on the United States side of the border in International Falls, Minnesota. Great-great grandpa Namaypok was named as a Chief in Fort Frances Ontario, in a historical record of testimonial hearings regarding the water levels at that area. I was and am amazed that at this very place that grandpa was, there is now an institution of higher education that is home to Anishinaabe programs. I also found out that the grandma my Aunt Maxine had told me to call years ago is one of the teachers at this university.

I realized it was time for me to contact her again to ask for help. She remembers Great-Great Grandpa Namaypok as a Grand Medicine Teacher when she was a child. She grew up speaking the language, Anishinaabemowin, before she was sent to boarding school. I spoke with her before this tree process and the seminar I described here. As I was looking at information about the Seven Generations Education Institute, I saw that she was listed as a participant with the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC). There was an email contact, so I pursued reconnecting with her through this email address.

Shortly I received a response from Laura Horton at Seven Generations who said she would take my email message to the grandma that evening. I found out it would be ok to call the grandma again, so I did. I described to her our conversation from a few years ago and she said I could meet her at the Fall Midewiwin ceremonies at Bad River Wisconsin. I had never been there before and had only read about the Midewiwin. I knew I must go and I thought I should also bring my beadwork tree to ask her to look at it and help me ‘read’ it. I thought I might offer the courtesy of preparing her for my request by sending *asemaa* (tobacco) and an overview of my work, with a color picture printed out of the beadwork tree. I imagined that we might be able to spend a few hours together and she could tell me what she thought of the tree in Anishinaabemowin and I could record it.

I thought and prayed and realized I should also bring my children, not only my baby as she was still nursing, but also my older sons, as this work was for them and their generation for generations to come. Thus, I deduced, it was my responsibility to bring myself and my children to rejoin the circle. Although my husband could not accompany me because of work, the five of us headed north.

When we arrived, I was told that Grandma would not be able to make it to the ceremonies. I was not sure what to do then other than stay and participate and listen as best I could. The next night as I sat on the floor of the Midewiwin lodge I heard the story of the Little Boy Drum as he was being dressed. Through my tears I recognized myself. The next day I was surprised when I got to meet the grandma from Ontario who remembered my great-great grandpa. I was so happy that she could make it after all. She looked into my eyes and the eyes of my daughter and told me of a drum with beadwork at Ober's Island. Also known as Mallard Island, this remote island in the Rainy Lake area of Northern Minnesota Ontario, Canada, is named after Ernest Oberholtzer. Ober studied Ojibwe language ceremonies and collected a vast array of rare books and cultural beings. Even decades after his death, this island has been visited by Ojibwe educators, artists, writers and historians. Oberholtzer's vast collections were in disarray after his death. The work of many volunteers has been required to organize the collections. The well-known Ojibwe author, Louise Erdrich, has written a book that features her work with the rare book collections in Ober's library.

As Grandma looked into my eyes she told me of how she was invited to visit Ober's Island while she was there she recognized a Midewiwin drum, dressed in beadwork, from her childhood. Grandma suggested that perhaps I could join her during the summer and help her with her work on the island with this drum. For some reason, my heart felt that this drum may have been in the hands of my great-great grandpa. It was as if the presence of our ancestor's future generations were harmonizing. I was truly humbled in the midst. Grandma then told me that she does not know what will happen, but something good will come, this is all she knows for now.

It turned out that we were not able at that time to discuss the beadwork tree itself, although my hopes for being able to hear how this tree is understood by her as an Anishinaabe grandma was not as I expected, I understand that something good will come and that is all I need to know for now. Perhaps it was the Midewiwin lodge herself who was the Grandma I was meant to seek interpretation from.

Anishinaabe Izhitwaawin

Indigenous science, often understood through the imagery of the tree, is holistic. Through spiritual processes, it synthesizes information from the mental, physical, social cultural/historical realms. Like a tree, the roots of Indigenous science go deep into the history, body and blood of the land. The tree collects and stores and exchanges energy. It breathes with the winds, which tumble and churn through greenery exquisitely fashioned to purify, codify and imprint life in successive concentric rights—the generations (Colorado, 1988, p.50)

It took a long time for me to realize that my story is my methodology. My methodology is not something to be applied from an outside source to this work. My own experiences as a graduate student which I previously defined as an excruciating identity struggle, layered with struggles to overcome my own weaknesses and build community, are part of my decolonizing methodology. I knew this intellectually but somehow did not make the connection that I did not need to engage in additional academic methodological maneuverings. I knew it was my place to learn as much as I could about the structure of other methodologies but I did not realize that I did not need to keep trying to make my own experiences fit into those paradigms.

I prayed, I worked and I asked for offered help. I read, took notes and talked with students and began to identify the need and importance for what I call a safe place. Whelshula (Arrow Lakes Nation of Colville Reservation) (1999) has also identified the need for a 'safe place' as the key for healing through decolonization. Within this 'safe place' is an opportunity to engage in balanced inquiry that includes feeling, watching listening, reflection and doing. Rheault (Ishpeming'Enzaabid) (1999) states:

These four states of knowledge are all brought together in Ceremony (*Manidookewin*). Ceremony allows one to cross the seeming divide between physical and spiritual realms, whereby one can observe with a more complete perception. The Anishinaabeg are empiricists of sorts, going out into the world searching for knowledge. Moreover, the Anishinaabeg have the ability to search in dimensions that exceed that of the physical (p. 101).

This 'safe place' includes a place where students can develop tools to resist dominant oppressive structures and identity politics that disable the acquisition of skills necessary to successfully meet educational goals. In the case of Indigenous American students attending universities engaged in the 'knowledge production business,' this means the student must focus on developing skills to develop and add to the body of knowledge that is currently recognized as legitimate by these systems. Unfortunately, within the competitiveness of traditional university settings, Indigenous academics are often the least supportive of each other in accomplishing these aims. Collective work to disarm the oppressive structures that enable identity politics and instead allow a space for non-harmful ways of being and understanding others and ourselves are our collective responsibility. This cyclic process begins with identifying and naming oppression, but then also transcending it through embracing and accepting traditional understandings that 'interrupt' dominant narratives. Ceremonial understandings of our ancestors are effective in reclaiming a balanced way of being in the world, as articulated in tribal-specific modalities. To ignore these ways of understanding is to reify the patterns of social, political, personal and academic dysfunction present in so many academic settings. Perhaps the dismal attrition rates are indicative of this complex web of dysfunction that must be dismantled transformed within higher education.

To better understand with greater specificity what is needed, we return to the tree and being of my research. The knowledge, gently woven throughout these pages and the pages of my dissertation, point to the incorporation of an *indigenous academic growth process* (see Figure 3), which can support principles of decolonizing practice through which the growth and development of indigenous students can be supported. As such, all aspects of the tree must be intact and nurtured in order to flourish. For example, if the roots of a tree are damaged, they cannot support the trunk and branches: leaves do not grow, they wither die. Branches and bark must be strong to withstand pest infestations and ravages of lightening and severe weather damage. In this way, I offer six central principles to an indigenous identity growth process and examples of how these may be enacted.

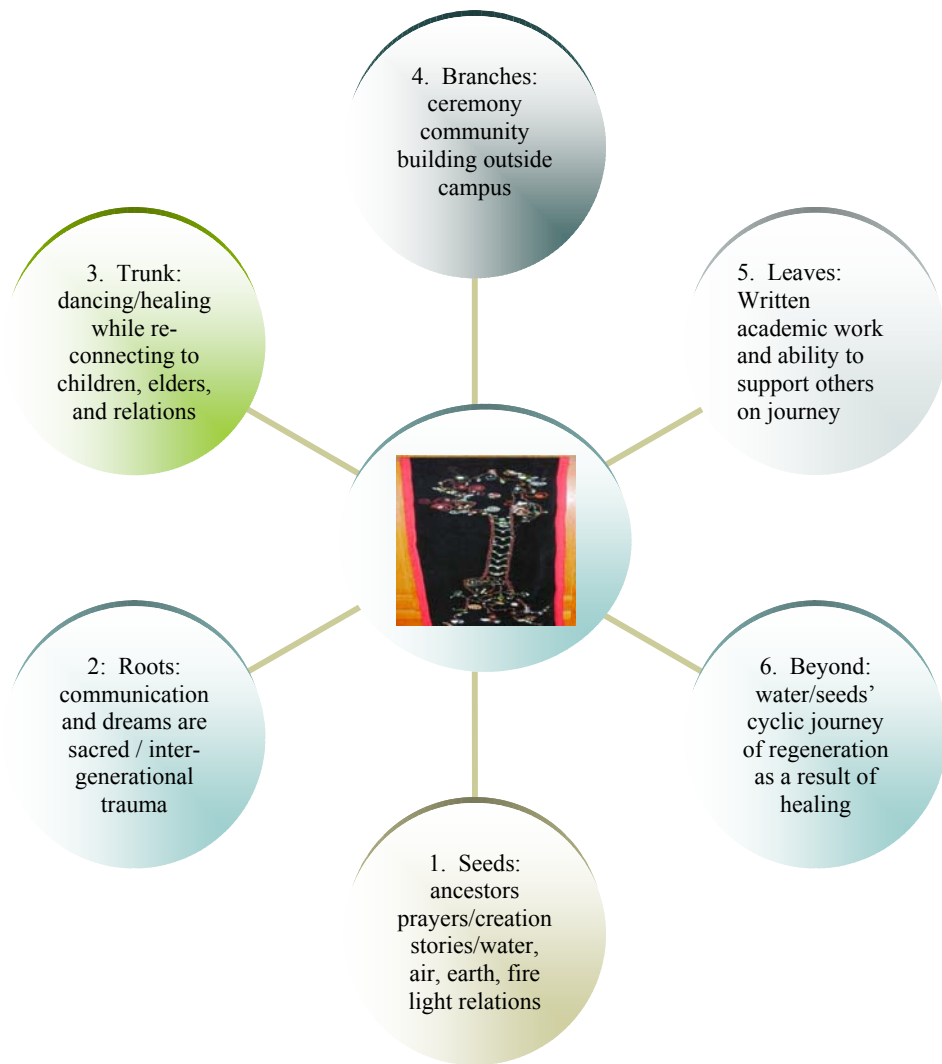


Figure 3: McAlpin (2008) Indigenous academic identity growth process.

1. Seeds: Acknowledgement of students and their ancestors, along with the generations to come. Prayers and creation stories must have a place as well as an acknowledgement of relations to water, air, earth, fire and light. This constitutes an indigenous way of being in the world and is the beginning of everything that is to follow. Concrete examples of implementing this into higher education programs are as follows:
 - a. A blessing for new students
 - b. A blessing for new buildings that are intended to serve Indigenous students
 - c. Physical spaces that are demarcated as sacred spaces both indoors and outdoors
 - d. Professors and those in positions to serve Indigenous Students can introduce themselves traditionally acknowledging ancestors and future relations of students. This is a simple way to make metaphysical 'space' for ancestors.
2. Roots/*ojiibikan/bikétt'oól*: Acknowledgement that communication is sacred, dreams can teach us an acknowledgement of intergenerational trauma and can support

acceptance of the need for healing. Examples of ways to implement this into higher education settings are:

- a. Teaching staff and faculty who teach Indigenous students simple protocol and the importance of acknowledging ancestors and future generations
 - b. Staff and faculty who are personally committed to decolonization and healing willing to engage honestly with students and each other and accept them for who they are
 - c. Active recognition of historical and intergenerational legacies of trauma and loss, married with opportunities for healing
 - d. Train for staff and faculty sensitivity toward issues of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional and chemical dependency abuse)
 - e. Waiving ALL tuition and fees at ALL land grant institutions for students who have tribal affiliation to those historically connected to the land on which land grant institutions are built
 - f. Incorporating accurate educational curriculum that honors and integrates the cultural and historical histories of Indigenous students.
3. Trunk/*Bizhí'*, Bark/*Bita'shtóózh*, Journey: Acknowledgement and strengthening of relations and connections with elders, children and community. Dancing and healing. Learning from written oral histories about one's people, both historically and in contemporary times. DuBois' double-consciousness can be understood here as the bark and the trunk are developed. Concrete examples of implementing this into higher education programs are as follows:
 - a. New Indigenous Student orientation where assessments of academic, social, cultural, physical and spiritual needs can take place. Stanford University in California does something like this a month before classes begin in the fall
 - b. Recognition and support of indigenous identity growth as process, much like Johnson's (2002) "Medicine Wheel: Signposts of Remembrance"
4. Branches/*Bits'áoz'a* Leaves/*Bit'qq'* Journey: Ceremony and community building on and off campus. Written academic work, sharing physical work and celebrating.
 - a. Collaboration with indigenous communities: family, extended family, clan, community involvement.
 - b. Indigenous Conflict Resolution opportunities. The need for this is well documented in works that engage identity politics (Mihesuah, 2003; 2005)
 - c. Staff and faculty who are personally committed to decolonization and healing and willing to engage honestly with students and each other and

accept them for who they are

- d. Training for staff and faculty for greater sensitivity toward issues of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional and chemical dependency abuse)
 - e. Gifting, generosity and thanksgiving
 - f. Expressions of song, dance and ceremony
 - g. Whole engagement of self group
 - h. Maintenance of personal contact, faculty/staff eating dinner or lunch with students on a regular basis
5. Beyond/Drum/*Dewe'igan*: Acknowledgement of the cyclic spiral nature of this process, inherent in our ways of being. Regeneration and reciprocity in larger contexts of higher education and community.
- a. Recognition of students as whole beings, not stereotypes of static identities. In other words, the recognition of Indigenous academic identity as a process
 - b. Curricular extra-curricular involvement with current economic, political, and environmental tribal affairs
 - c. Indigenous language conferences like at Northeastern State University in Oklahoma tribal colleges in Montana.
 - d. Recruitment programs that start as early as possible in grade schools, for example: University of Alaska Kuskokwim Campus talent search programs and Northeastern State University's outreach to Woodall Elementary through questionnaires and tutoring programs
 - e. Improve the number and quality of native teachers who serve Indigenous students
 - f. Environmental initiatives and research that serve the needs of tribes like White Earth's Mahnommen project which also has federal funding

Recommendations for faculty and staff at higher education institutions begin with the need to de-objectify the histories of Indigenous peoples as 'active agents' instead of as solely victims of western expansion. Obviously, inclusion of Indigenous Americans in decisions that will affect Indigenous students is another important step toward empowerment. This will require that the academy be willing to move away from the 'father knows best' paternalistic approaches (Williams, 2006 p. 337) that have consistently negated and dishonored the strength, wisdom, and humanity of Indigenous peoples for over five hundred years. Clearly, recommendations for future research and program development must be specific to the settings for which they are intended. Tribal Colleges are very different from large Public Institutions like the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Since my experience during this process was mostly at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, these

recommendations for future directions for research have emerged from this context, but may still be applicable given commonalities of lived experience of intergenerational trauma. They include:

1. Gather indigenous students and families to spend time together to communicate who we are in relation to our ancestors
2. Share stories with each other and continue the conversation
3. Encourage indigenous modalities in research
4. Engage students in identity healing processes through an indigenous modality (my tree is one example)
5. Examine how we relate to ourselves as we are responsible to beings around us through prayer and ceremony in community
6. Future research focused on understanding lived experiences of Indigenous Americans in higher education
7. Include Indigenous Americans in higher education as critical research members
8. Engage in indigenous decolonizing research methodologies.

These cyclic processes begin with identifying and naming oppression but then also transcending it through embracing and accepting traditional understandings that interrupt dominant narratives. Ceremonial understandings of our ancestors are effective in reclaiming a balanced way of being in the world as articulated in tribal-specific modalities. To ignore these ways of understanding is to reify the patterns of social, political, personal and academic dysfunction present in so many academic settings.

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Understanding and living respectfully within Indigenous places

Bronwyn Fredericks

Monash University, Queensland University of Technology & the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council, Australia

Bronwyn.Fredericks@med.monash.edu.au

Introduction

To many Aboriginal Australians, Country means place of origin in spiritual, cultural and literal terms. It refers to a specific clan or a tribal group or nation of Aboriginal people and encompasses all the knowledge, cultural norms, values, stories and resources within that particular area - that particular Indigenous place. The notion of Country is central to Australian Aboriginal identity, history, and contributes to overall health and wellbeing. Women and men both have a central role within Country, in terms of ownership, care and rights. With an increasing shift of Aboriginal people to urban areas or living in the Country of other Aboriginal people it does not mean that one's connections to Country are lost, or that the significance of Country is no longer present. It does mean that many Aboriginal Australians now pass through, dwell, and live within the Country belonging to other Aboriginal Australians. While we as Indigenous people might live within the Country of another Indigenous nation, they are still, Indigenous places. A map available from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (Horton, 1999) pictorially depicts over 500 Indigenous nations in Australia.



Figure 1. Dr Pamela Crofts

Dr Pamela Croft (See Figure 1) names her Country as that of the Kooma clan of the Uralarai people, South West Queensland. She lives in Keppel Sands on the Capricorn Coast in Central Queensland within the Countries of the Darumbal people (mainland and coastline) and the Woppaburra people (Keppel Islands), who are intricately linked through history and relationship (Horton, 1999). This area is known as the Central Queensland region in numerous State of Queensland documents. As a geographical area, it comprises tablelands, flatlands, plain lands, open scrub, wetlands, river and creek systems, coastal areas, islands,

mountains and now cityscapes and urban sprawl. Within broader Australia, this region is marketed and written about as the 'Beef Capital of Australia' (Forbes, 2001: 1). Sometimes uses the slogan where 'the beef meets the reef' (Great Barrier Reef) in advertising materials so that people know that it is close to one of the world's greatest wonders; the World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef. Pamela Croft has practised as a visual artist since the mid-1980s and uses both Aboriginal Australian and Western techniques, education and style to tell the stories based on identity, sense of place, and the effects of colonisation. She was the first Aboriginal Australian to gain a Doctor of Visual Arts (Croft, 2003).

In her artworks, Dr Croft focuses on concepts of place and space and change within Country. A recent series of artworks were undertaken on the muddy banks of the upper regions of Pumpkin Creek at Keppel Sands. Pamela knows the way the moon and the sun impact on the tidal flows and how the time of year affects the temperature of the water. She has traced the tracks of animals and other people who at times dwell within the area. She has watched, observed, hunted and gathered in ways of Aboriginal women, past, present and future.

In the Creek, Pamela left special paper to capture the gentle nomadic nature of the tides which result in delicate patterns left on the mud that change with each ebb and flow of the water. The crabs imprinted their presence as they foraged for food, so too did the Ibis and seagulls. This evidence of water and animals became stories, recorded in the mud like texts that have been imprinted within the artwork. Croft later used the paper as canvases for her art works and added local ochres – black, brown and red to symbolise the water's connection to land, people, place, and a sense of past, present and future. The colours and lines flow within the artwork just like the contours of the Creek. They are tied within the artwork to a sense of Country that binds water, land, animals and us as human beings. Over time, the changes in Country became mapped in Croft's 'Mud Map' series and other artworks. Croft's Mud Map series has been exhibited in Atlanta and Houston, the United States of America.

Interview with Dr Pamela Croft

I interviewed Dr Pamela Croft in her studio at Keppel Sands to specifically talk about her research and arts practice within Country and how she incorporates a sense of Indigenous place within her artworks.

Dr Pamela Croft [PC]: I am a Kooma woman of the Uralarai people. I give honour to the Darumbal dreaming ancestors and acknowledge the Darumbal people as the Traditional Owners of the Capricorn Coast where I now live. I additionally give honour and acknowledgement to the Woppaburra people who are the Traditional Owners of the Islands and waters off the Capricorn Coast mainland where I sometimes dwell and forage for food and items for my artworks. It is important to me to recognise that the site of my home and studio and where the majority of my artworks have been carried out is within Darumbal Country and Woppaburra Country. It is the places within their Countries that inspire, motivate and give me continued purpose for my work.

Dr Bronwyn Fredericks [BF]: Pamela can you tell me about the foundations of your artworks.

PC: Most of my artworks are land-centred. They are centred on places within Country. From my positioning as an Aboriginal woman, I try to portray the importance of tradition, recognition of ancestors, respect for uniqueness in spiritual expression and facilitate an understanding of history and culture, a sense of place and connections to family and

community. It has been estimated that we have lived on the Australian continent for over 100,000 years. As a result we have a long history of relationships connected to Country: Australia's landscapes and seascapes and all the animals and plants and peoples that inhabit them. I try to honour the Countries in which I work. I undertake my research of and within the places, deep within Country and I undertake my work incorporating ceremony.⁵ I try to challenge non-Aboriginal people to come to an understanding of our world. I try to show them just how long Aboriginal people have been here within Country; that we have our special places, our sacred spaces and how we have cared for and lived within Country and how we still care for and live within Country, even if it is now the Country of other nations. The history of these places within Country, are not just tied to British and European invasion, pioneer, settler and immigration history.⁶ These are our belonging places.⁷ I try to show them all of this in my artworks.

BF: Your Mud Map series of artworks is of particular interest. They detail the movements in the water, the tides, and the animals found in different areas of Coorooman and Pumpkin Creek. What has undertaking this type of artwork told you about this place?

PC: I see the day-to-day things, the changes in the water, along the coastline, in the Creeks and on the land that laps the water. I see what is happening to the mangrove areas. I have witnessed the removal of the areas where the crocodiles used to forage for food. The process of undertaking the Mud Maps reveals all of this (See Figure 2). Each Mud map is likened to a cultural text that records the past and present journeys of that particular part of the Australian landscape. The process maps out the connections to place revealing sets of relationships including the physical, physiological, social, spiritual and metaphysical. It also maps the botanical, colonial and the Indigenous layers of memories within the landscape sites. The tracks of animals and peoples, connections and relationships to spaces and places, symbols, patterns and colours are all recorded. It is all connected and we are connected. They are all showing me changes within the sites, within my mapping and my artwork practice (See Figure 3). To represent all of this I use different colour clays as my printing block and include a variety of mixed media in these works (clay, ochre, acrylic, charcoal, pigment, oil paints, mud).



Figure 2: Dr Pamela Croft at Pumpkin Creek making mud maps

⁵Carolyn Kenny (2000) describes how ritual and ceremony can be incorporated into research. Pamela Croft made reference at a later point to Kenny's work.

⁶ Bird, 1999; Huf, McDonald and Myers, 1993; and McDonald 1981 all write about the history of the Rockhampton Region / Darumbal Country and other Central Queensland regions from the perspective of the pioneers and settlement of the Australian bush.

⁷Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2003) offers a powerful theoretical analysis of the differences between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous understandings of Belonging and Place in Australia.



Figure 3: Dr Crofts mud map artwork

BF: What are the changes that have been mapped and how do you know there are changes within Country?

PC: When I sit in the Creek I can feel the temperature of the water and I use to know exactly when the seasons were changing. Now days, it is harder to pick. The temperatures of the waters around Darumbal Country and Woppaburra Country have changed. The fish follow the tides and the temperature of the water. Other animals follow the fish, like pelicans, and other sea birds. With the warmer water, we now all have less fish. We have to go further out from the coastline to forage for food. The temperatures are not uniform – some areas seem to have changed more than others. The corals tell me that I am not lying. You see, the corals change colour, they become stressed and pale when the waters get too warm. This is called bleaching. Some corals might regenerate; it is hard to say. There seems to be an increase in the number of areas where you can see that the corals have been bleached. We hear on the TV in Australia that the frequency and severity of the coral bleaching is inevitable if global warming continues.⁸ It concerns me that there will be further deterioration of the corals within the Reef. To me, that says that other aspects of the Reef that depend on the corals and these ocean gardens will also deteriorate and die.

BF: What about the animals within the reef, along the coastline and in the Creek?

PC: There are now not as many crabs and ibis and seagulls. In my last series of Mud Maps there were so few crab prints. It really bothered me. I will be going back down into the Creek soon to do another series of Mud Maps to see if the crabs have returned or if they are no longer there.

Fishing has become a problem. The biodiversity within the waters has been damaged by large-scale commercial fishing and by large numbers of people recreational fishing. People have fished for more than just what they need for food. There have been incidents where fish have just been left or discarded. In 2001 a big cod washed up on the beach near the Creek. It had been pulled up by a big trawler chasing smaller fish and just discarded. I tried to incorporate that incident into my artwork at Yeppoon main beach but the local Council didn't take it up. Maybe it was too political. What has happened now is that there are large areas where there are no fishing zones. This is vital if the area's ecosystem biodiversity is going to be fixed up and protected. I sent the bones of the cod to Brisbane and they have now been cast in bronze. The bronze work is now waiting to be installed along the Coastline. I wait for

⁸ Coral bleaching is considered one of the biggest threats to the Great Barrier Reef. See CSIRO (2007) and Buchheim (2008) for more information on Coral Bleaching.

the time when the cod will be placed back in the position of guarding his ancestral waters, even if he will be on land and in bronze. I feel in a way that his dignity will be reinstated.

BF: You have also concentrated on the pollution that washes up on the beach in some of your other artworks.

PC: Pumpkin Creek, Coorooman Creek, Long Beach and the other beaches in the area are always scattered with litter from people on boats out at sea. Most of the litter washes up in with the tides. Over a 3-month period in 1996 I collected much of the discarded rubbish that washed up along a 20-kilometre beach line where I live. I then made a huge net (4.5m x 3.5m) with all of that rubbish. I used small bits of other nets along with small pieces of rope, twine, rubber and plastic. I also incorporated all the skeletons of sea animals that I found trapped within the rubbish and feathers were woven threw the net. I put some of the found objects into pockets that I made on the net. I assembled the net across one entire side of my house and members of my small village would watch as it progressed into this huge net (See Figures 4 & 5). Sometimes they would also bring me bits that they had found too. They were offerings and gifts for the work. The fishing net image reinforced the notion of fragmentation and slipping through the net and getting caught in the net. For me the interwoven strands of fragments became emblematic of the sometimes fragmentary interwovenness of Aboriginal life.



Figure 4: Water helping us see – close up



Figure 5: Water helping us see

Destruction has come with the western domination of water and waterways and is likened to the domination and colonisation of Country and of Australia. The ocean somehow is able to cast the rubbish out of itself as if knowing the destruction it does within the water. I have tried to push these issues with my artworks. I too try to show the dysfunctional thinking within society and encourage people to cast this out of the way they live. Just as the ocean casts out rubbish, we can cast our rubbish (or those things we thing are rubbish) from our lives too.

BF: Tell me Pamela what do you try to do in your artworks when you put them into the public domain?

PC: Through my artwork, I try to ask the questions to people about how they know about Country, how do people understand Country and how will they contribute to the care of Country for now and the future. What decisions and actions will they take that will impact on the natural activities within the Darumbal landscape, the Woppaburra landscape, Country, and

the other landscapes on this continent and on this planet? I ask how can we all best work to safeguard the landscapes and seascapes so they can continue to be enjoyed; and so that future generations will be able to see and know Country as we see it today and as it was seen yesterday? I want to ask the people who view my work, what are you doing? What are you doing to care for this place?

Conclusion

In her interview Pamela Croft, a Kooma woman of the Uralarai people has shared what she has observed, and come to understand within Country of the Darumbal and Woppaburra. Her knowledge of the environment and the ecology of Country are rich and provides a source of learning for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. When non-Indigenous people read Aboriginal art narratives and other forms of narrative, they learn alternative text and stories about their own history. Pamela Croft asserts that she wants to “raise their political unconsciousness” and “challenge the norms, values and ideologies of the dominant social order and culture”. She does this through her use visual narrative (art works and art stories) as a tool for remembering, reclaiming, retelling and healing and generating alternative ways of seeing and being within Country. She shows us and teaches us how we can exist, survive and thrive within such spaces if we offer the same respect and understand her messages.

What is powerfully demonstrated through Pamela Croft’s art works are the connections and relationships between all things and between the personal and the political. In her work within the Coorooman Creek and along the coastline of Darumbal Country and within the waters of Woppaburra Country, Dr Pamela Croft maps and encompasses the climate and environmental changes within Country in her artworks. In this ways her artwork storytelling embodies the repetitive rhythm of the unfamiliar, the familiar and the everyday experiences and discourses of being within land-centred spaces. She undertakes map paintings, prints and assemblages and in doing so, she challenges us all to consider how we live within the Country of other Indigenous people and how we can demonstrate respect and custodianship for Country.

Pamela Croft’s work contributes to the knowledge base from within Country and informs the dialogue of what is happening in other parts of Australia and throughout the world. She brings the local to the global and instils within all us through her artworks and words what action we can take to reduce the pollution in our waterways, over-fishing and the impacts of climate change and more. Croft’s works while distinctive also represent a terrain of common concerns around the environment, social justice, identity, land, and reconciliation that criss-cross boundaries between Indigenous and the non-Indigenous in Australia. In this way she is able to use her artwork as a site of communication for exchanging knowledge and understandings. Her artistic narratives and expressions conceptualise cultures in the likeness of maps of place within Country and in this way reflect far more than merely an aesthetic piece of art.

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Dr Bronwyn Fredericks is an Aboriginal woman originally from South-east Queensland, Australia. She is an NHMRC Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Monash University & the Centre for Clinical Research Excellence (CCRE), Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC). She is also a Visiting Fellow with the Indigenous Studies Research Network, Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

Accompanying Artworks

1. Dr Pamela Croft, 2006. (Photo by Kardia Stokes)
2. Dr Pamela Croft in Pumpkin Creek making her Mudmaps, 2006. (Photo by Mark Warcon)
3. *Mud Map series: landlines and watermarks*, Mixed-media monoprint (clay, ochre, oil, charcoal, acrylic, oxides, mud), 2007, 1.6m x 1m, Private Collection in Georgia, USA (Photo by Pamela Croft)
4. *land home place belong: Water helping us see, connecting the knots*, Net assemblage, feathers and ropes, 1996, 4.5m x 3.5m. Private Collection in Queensland, Australia. (Photo by Kardia Stokes)
5. *land home place belong: Water helping us see, connecting the knots*, Net assemblage, feathers and ropes, 1996, 4.5m x 3.5m. Private Collection in Queensland, Australia. (Photo by Pamela Croft)