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Reclaiming the first person voice

tebrakunna country and Emma Lee

Identity and myth

*It means that there is unfinished business, that we are still being colonized
(and know it), and that we are still searching for justice.*

Smith 1999, p. 34

In my recent writing I locate myself as a “*trawlulwuy* woman from *tebrakunna* country, north-east Tasmania, Australia” (*tebrakunna* country & Lee 2017, 2018, 2019). This assertion of who I am, and where I am located, already highlights the tensions and disjunction of being a Black female embodying both a colonizing and relational world of identities (Carlson 2016). Here, my identity is entangled between the local and place-based peoples, cultures, knowledge and practices that belong to a 40,000 year-old history of our *trouwunna* lands and seas (Cameron 2011) and the name-changing, recent geographies of colonization, such as Tasmania (Melville 2006).

Yet this “I” is also a place where my Black female body is always the “known”, the “subject” or the “you” (Chambers & Buzinde 2015; Moreton-Robinson 2011). Colonization has overwhelmed me and contributed to my compliance with, and subjugation to, Western ideologies that even “when we do see ourselves... [we] can barely recognize ourselves through representation” (Smith 1999, p. 35). Therefore, these referents of “I” and “you” can never be fixed or synonymous – they cannot be of the “same content in every context” (Kaplan 1977, p. 521) – as there are structures in play that have pre-determined my position in society. To then refer to an “I” as a self-located place of belief and knowing (Castañeda 1986; Perry 1979) becomes my strength, an action of agency and resistant to substitution.

My statement of my cultural affiliations is of utmost importance to the frame of this essay. Referent points of “I” and “you” are powerful tools of Western privilege: the “you” is a space of Othering and occupying the margins (Said 1978), while to be an “I” expresses faculty and demands a place for voice. For me, the relationship with the academy is one of anxiety and is inextricably linked with the specificities of colonization upon my *trawlwulwuy* person and *tebrakunna* country. My identity as an “I” has been displaced within the world, and the academy, and transformed to a “you”.

For my contributions to decolonizing an academic practice of Othering through referents, I draw on the experience of colonization of my peoples, still acutely felt in life and research. In 1803, for *trawlwulwuy*, and other peoples of *trouwunna*, we became the focus of an accelerated British colonial wave into Australia. The desired goal was not only the usurpation of our lands (Lehman 2006), but also the enactment of war upon our peoples to remove us *in toto* from our sovereign “territories of life” (Brodie 2017; ICCA Consortium 2018, n.p.). The genocide by the British empire was so great, that upon the death of our female countrywoman *Trucanini* in 1876 (Taylor 2012) the decimation of our entire population under the myth of “The Last of the Tasmanians” (Bonwick 1870) was proclaimed to the world.

Our forever “myth-death”, once justified as necessary in a time of colonial expansion (Boyce 2008), is now re-packaged and re-told by researchers who still own our histories and reinforce the imperial project by claiming our space (Lee 2020; Smith 1999). The very act, then, of daring to create a first-person authorship out of non-existence indicates the great impact of “I” and “you” referents: I become vitally important in asserting myself because *I* am a *trawlwulwuy* woman from *tebrakunna* country. I exist and the “I” confronts and unsettles the myth that our populations were reduced to naught under British occupation (Madley 2008). The recognition of self as a *trawlwulwuy* Black female body also becomes my authoritative resource for generating agency and demanding rights (De Sousa Santos, Nunes & Meneses 2007). However, despite my awareness of self, this Black female body also has to contend with the knowledge that I too possess a colonized mind (Fanon 2008).

For Frantz Fanon (2008) and James Baldwin (1993) the colonized mind resides within the self, where the constant comparison and measure of self-worth to the colonizer will only ever return feelings of inferiority and self-loathing. In *Decolonising the Mind*, the Gikuyu writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986, p. 16) shows us that colonial power is derived from the domination of the “mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people

perceived themselves and their relation to the world”. Recognizing the colonized mind, then, requires an act of self-awareness. It also requires an agency to begin to repair the unconscious self-harms of being colonized.

I want to begin to articulate what being cognizant of the colonized mind means in the local context of reclaiming myself out of extinction myths. My journey to recognize my colonized mind, and my attempts to shed this skin, is also a close look at how well decolonizing theories and methodologies translate into action. This emic terrain is guided by the experience of learning to write in the first person as an Indigenous researcher, which is characterized here as decolonization work. In developing the strengths of my own referents, *I* also found an unexpected way to advocate for, and connect to, country.

Recognizing the colonized mind and balancing identity tensions

In the 1970s, the era of my birth, global social changes were sweeping into consciousness issues such as women’s rights, Indigenous Peoples, anti-war platforms and conservation (Haferkamp & Smelser 1992). In Australia, this was a time of land rights and the establishment of an ongoing protest site, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, on Parliament lawns and a raft of new, mostly failed, social policies and measures designed by government, without Indigenous input to address our disadvantage (Behrendt 2007; Muldoon & Schaap 2012; Robinson 1994). By this time, almost 100 years have passed since the myth of our non-existence came into being upon *Trucanini’s* death. Since her death, we have been particularly subject to the stripping of Black histories and identities in schools, work, government and communities in Tasmania and Australia and, in my experience, the acculturation has concretized. Yet the 1970s was also a beginning of the long global journey to reclaiming, recovering, revealing and repairing connections to country and culture as Indigenous Peoples (Bell 2014; Nakata 2007). I am of a generation that belongs to both these simultaneous occurrences of recovery and denial, taking strength in developing my cultural life while subject to grave errors of history.

In the gap between “belonging” to a culture being re-energized and “not-belonging” as an extinct person, I now see that I have been subjected to the conditioning of a colonized mind and body. My colonized body begins in the early 1800s, where my many-times grandfather *Mannalargenna* and his daughter, *Woretemoeteyenner*, became subjects of the British Crown. Less than 10 years

after first contact, *Woretemoeteyenner* became a mother to *Dalrymple Briggs Johnson*, where the change to Western names is a record of the rapidity in which our culture and lives were no longer our own. *Mannalargenna* and *Woretemoeteyenner* were the last generation to know *tebrakunna* country solely by that name and peopled only by family. Our peoples were wholly displaced from country through disease, massacres and government round-ups, where the remainder of us were removed to the margins on an off-shore island (Plomley 1966). Dispossession and destruction of my *trawlwulwuy* peoples and culture transferred control to the colonizers: my name is now in the English language and my place is now a township rather than *tebrakunna* country as a territory of life.

Some decolonizing texts speak to the ways in which we have had to continually demonstrate our humanity as Indigenous Peoples to gain local and international rights, respect and justice (Césaire 2000; Rigney 2001). In Tasmania, this colonizing demand for justifying our humanness is keenly felt in the face of having to also prove our very *existence*. As an extinct person and *trawlwulwuy* Black female body, the former has always taken precedence over the latter as the characterization of my being. The very existence of my body has had to be defended throughout my life and guarded against accusations of extinction through white annihilation. Our supposed extinction was, and still continues to be, taught, historicized, researched and claimed as fact by the colonizers (Morris 2017; Windschuttle 2002). I hold a clear memory from my mid-teens of a history teacher telling me that I “couldn’t be Aboriginal because Governor Arthur was more successful than Hitler in wiping them out”.

In recognizing our specific Aboriginal Tasmanian histories, the Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (whom we honour in our essays) sees more of a multi-car pile-up rather than intersections (Crenshaw 1991) when facing any crowd, let alone a hostile research one, in defending our very humanity. She writes in her seminal text, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999, pp. 72–73): “In Tasmania, where experts had already determined that Aborigines were ‘extinct’, the voices of those who still speak as Aboriginal Tasmanians are interpreted as some political invention of a people who no longer exist and who therefore no longer have claims.”

These experts leave trails and waves that continue to rattle me, but also provide the boundaries in which I can advocate for decolonizing change. My Black female body is the contained site where I can exert “control over our resistances” (Smith 1999, p. 38), where I can declare myself. Yet this awareness is still to come, as I have been trained to “write about ourselves as indigenous

peoples as if we really were ‘out there’, the ‘Other’, with all the baggage that this entails” (Smith 1999, p. 36).

With a body colonized by myth-making and non-being, and our peoples dispossessed and exiled from country, there are few barriers to becoming accustomed to the colonized mind. While I have never acceded to denying my identity, I have previously accepted the rights of the colonizer to question it. This is a colonized mind. The colonizer overlays my truths of existence with their facts to the contrary, such as my history teacher, which requires me to be silent under the weight of those “superior” facts (Latour 2004; Sundberg 2014). As a young woman in an unequal power balance, to pass the schools tests in order to continue with a Western education (the only educational option), I was made mute.

My experience of the colonized mind, as encountered throughout my formal education, had me accepting that white voices, theories, pronouncements and teachings were prominent, correct and unquestioned. Our histories, as oral traditions, stories, activities and things shared among family and country, were kept at home and hardly ever crossed the boundary into formal education. While my *trawlulwuy* self never doubted these rightful cultural learning moments, the colonized mind justifies and explains these practices from a position of inferiority.

By this, to justify my humanity I give explanations for engaging in a cultural life not from the practices in and of themselves, rather I account for my behaviors from within, and to, a Western framework of reference. I prove my existence through cultural practices that are recognizable to Western gazes (Smith 1999) to disprove extinction. Inferiority feels like having to insert a kernel of doubt within a mainstream victorious narrative of Australian colonial settlement in order to open up the possibilities of cracks within it, rather than speaking from a position of power derived from belonging and existing within my own *tebrakunna* country. In this way I can only exist if I dispute the current views from within, leaving behind my own relational world of Indigeneity as core. White voices have taught me that mine does not count and is secondary at best.

The colonized mind and body, as inferior and silent, also knows that the right to refer to “I” and “we” belongs to the Western academy as a signifier of power. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 35) writes: “I frequently have to orientate myself to a text world in which the centre of academic knowledge is either in Britain, the United States or Western Europe; in which words such as ‘we’, ‘us’ ‘our’, ‘I’ actually exclude me.”

Until I began a PhD in late 2013, and even for a little while longer, I had internalized that Western academic referents of “I” and “our” did not include me. My peoples have always been the “you”, and the Other, as our place in conversation or academic paper. Therefore, and at personal pain now, I subjugated myself to an inferior place of uncritical writing using a remote and distant third-person narrative. I personified a colonized mind in my use of “them” and “theirs” and “for Indigenous people” in my early contributions to scholarship (Lee 2015, 2016b). I did this from a place of having no voice, little insight and faint direction into the literature and learning of colonization and decolonization principles and practice.

Yet I consider myself as being born and raised as a cultural woman of country – finding and learning and researching our practices and cultures with family and Elders and the broader communities that comprise us as *trouwunnan*. We are reclaiming ourselves out of truly horrendous circumstances of genocide (Bonyhady & Lehman 2018; Curthoys 2005; Ryan 1996) and our knowledges lost or resting out of sight cannot be repaired in haste. The last 50 years of reclaiming our histories and our place as extant peoples is a practice of cultural resurgence, which Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014, p. 179) describes as seeking “to practice decolonial, gender-emancipatory, and economically nonexploitative structures of law and sovereign authority”.

Our turn away from the colonized and extinction myth-mind towards a relational world shares in common the mantras that Kahnawake Mohawk and Cherokee theorists Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel (2005, p. 613, my emphasis) propose as supporting resurgent cultures: “*land is life*”, “*language is power*”, “*freedom from fear*” and “*one warrior at a time*”. These messages of solidarity and connectedness are tied to real action for rights. They contribute towards an understanding of resurgent possibilities that can occur in the absence, or at the least the lessening, of influence, of the colonized mind (St Denis & Walsh 2016). For me, I have participated in learning cultural activities from Elders, such as the art of shell stringing and sculpting kelp water carriers, and continuing familial cultural practices from childhood, such as caring for living midden sites and sea country. It is this cultural framework of resurgence that I now wish to make central without the need for Western parameters to judge my worth (Evans 2019).

By mid-PhD, my readings of Indigenous methodologies and decolonization theory and practices trickled in and created a shift in my relationship with the world to give priority and precedence to *trawlulwuy* peoples and *tebrakunna* country. My referents changed and the Western “I” would no longer exclude me

but would be reclaimed towards decolonizing my own mind. By this point, in 2015, my life had been a split world of being subject to extinction myths while also being a proud *trawlwulwuy* woman. My mind and body have been colonized and controlled by the dominant Western culture to accept the primacy of their values and histories. This resulting separation of myself from my writing and thinking has further reinforced colonial power. Yet in this unhealthy brew I still know myself as a proud Black female body with a capacity to shift the objects of my captured and bound state. The shifting of colonizing objects, then, begins with recognizing these harms of the colonized mind and developing an agency towards correcting them.

Indigenous methodologies and safe spaces for identity

The work of Unangax woman Eve Tuck with K. Wayne Yang (2012, p. 7) advocates for decolonization strategies that involve the “repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted”. For these authors (Tuck and Yang 2012), decolonization is neither metaphor nor synonym and is grounded in truth-telling of Indigenous lives. Decolonization is also the resistance of colonial narratives that make smooth the complexities of dispossession and destruction by focusing on (and forgiving) whiteness rather than centring Indigeneity (Tuck & Yang 2012). For Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015), however, we cannot decolonize until we really understand whiteness and its power structures that manipulate our existence and distort our sovereign rights. Indigeneity and race are tangled up with social constructions of whiteness, therefore we cannot fully know ourselves as contemporary peoples without the critical knowledge of whiteness to unstitch these histories (Kovach 2010b). These ideas are similar to Fanon’s (2008) unflinching view of how decolonization is to occur, such as “taking freedom from the master and effecting a violent break” (Karklins 1996, p. 53) through force, and what it accomplishes through a physicality and muscularity of action. To delve here into these critical, social justice and reparative territories to support decolonizing aims is to attack the very heart of colonial control through reclaiming the things that matter – land and power. Decolonization is a tangible movement to destabilize and unsettle dominant social structures in favor of Indigenous rights that the academy should look to uphold.

Readings on Indigenous methodologies have also been important to understand the responsibilities we have in conducting our research, particularly

in regard to action-oriented and participatory research. Theories such as Indigenous Standpoint highlight the need for us to center our voices, recover the use of languages and gender roles, and have explicit aims to create Indigenous benefit (Foley 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2013; Rigney 1999). As Datta (2018) found, the cornerstone of Western science methodological practice – the neutral observer role – must be discarded to genuinely engage with Indigenous methodologies and decolonizing practices. Instead, research must become a process that reflects our ways of knowing, the relational characteristics that bind together country, culture, knowledge, practices and peoples, and deliver social justice outcomes and impacts (Datta 2018). In this manner, Indigenous methodologies support decolonizing work by theorizing frameworks for new ways of research that has aims of respectful relationships, real improvements to remove disadvantage and our leadership to drive the process.

To recognize and resist a colonizing mind, these approaches help to reframe how the controls over our worlds operate so that we may consider decolonization as a positive experience for us. By this, decolonization work creates restorative action, an interrogation of power and a positioning of our knowledges and peoples as central to research and practice. These tools have allowed me to engage in cultural resurgence and create a safe space to redefine my referent points. In a 1967 interview with the Martinique grandfather theorist of decolonization Aimé Césaire, the Haitian poet and activist Rene Depestre suggested that it is “equally necessary to decolonize our minds, our inner life, at the same time that we decolonize society” (Césaire 2000, p. 31). Agency generated by seeing our own colonized minds can be actively transformed into statements of decolonization – the “I” becomes inclusive and powerful.

However, many of these writings come from a position of secure identities, whether formal or informal recognition of Indigeneity, and without the burdens of proving group existence. These writings speak to me and spur my own advocacy pathways, but they do not answer questions of how we recover ourselves and our identity out of extinction. How, for example, does the call for land return or Black female leadership in critical thinking sound when my peoples have been held up as a global example of outsized death under colonial greed? Where is the power in rallying calls for restitution when *trawlwlwuy* peoples are confronted by a repetitive cycle of “you can’t exist” or “didn’t you all get killed off?” The decolonization shout often peters out in the face of such epistemological onslaughts. Hence, for me, there was a safety in distance and a respite from exhaustion to write about myself and other Indigenous Peoples in a third-person narrative.

I am grateful to have found the writings of Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) to shed light on understanding the colonized mind as a product of, in our shared cases, the British education system and overwriting English language and his/stories upon our own. This has helped me to reflect on the particular hurts that are a result of other Indigenous Peoples (both from Australia and elsewhere) being surprised at my assertions of Indigeneity, questioning how we survived, repeating facts they too had learned in school and elsewhere: that Aboriginal Tasmanians were extinct. This late-in-life recognition allows me to see that a colonized mind is not singular or random, nor is it solely ours alone (Fanon 2008). The Western education system encourages and continues the structure of colonization upon furthering dispossession of ourselves from our lands and culture by infecting everyone's mind, both white and Black (Battiste 2002; Fanon 2008; Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986; Wolfe 2006). I can now forgive myself for the inferiority and self-loathing feelings I have experienced upon justifying my existence and Black female body to Indigenous and other people.

Yet these texts still do not address how to recuperate an identity and belonging away from extinction myths, which should count as a pre-condition for even having a referent point. How does one make the leap from not existing to that of action-orientated, reciprocal research? More importantly, how can I undertake decolonizing work without creating further trauma to our *trawlwulwuy* mythologized bodies and families? In suffering the injustice and shame of a global denial of identity, I must tread cautiously to not replicate the patterns of colonization in our *trawlwulwuy* families and *tebrakunna* country. I have a responsibility as a researcher, then, and in light of our special and particular circumstances of colonial harm that consumed our very existence, to first create the safe spaces for recognition to occur (Champagne 2015).

In finding my own safe ground through balancing resurgence activities with awareness of the colonized mind and agency to undertake decolonizing work, I have enjoyed the post-human and more-than-human work of Deborah Rose (1996), Sheridan and Roronhiakewen "He Clears the Sky" Dan Longboat (2006, 2014), Healey and Tagak (2014) and others, such as the collective papers under Bawaka Country authorship (2013, 2014, 2016). These authors show that country has its own agency and epistemologies that open up new forms of research and relationship-building. The ethnographic force and statement of belonging and grounding from Black females such as Indigenous Hawaiian researchers Renee Pulani Louis (2007) and Haunani-Kay Trask (1991) also tease out the local

contexts of the intersecting issues of Indigeneity, identity and gender (see also Bravo 2015; Crenshaw 1991; Moreton-Robinson 2013). These authors offered an imagination of identity and referents that are not dependent upon staking a theoretical claim to any particular social outcome, but developing a voice premised upon the strengths and assets of experiencing the Indigenous life, in all its fractured or fully formed glory.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith and others (Smith et al 2016) wrote that the experience of being colonized and our newfound knowledge of these changing times are no less valid as contributions to the substance of Indigenous methodologies, traditional practices and a decolonizing corpus. Therefore, the tensions and complexities of being a colonized person and extinct body and a cultural woman can be recognized as inhabiting the same spheres of concern – that of finding voice and articulating resistance (Dutta 2012). The resurgence of cultural activity, or the returning to country, is integral to my journey of defining a responsible researcher voice for an inclusive “I” as referent and resistance. My connections to country, the process of belonging from kinship and reciprocity, then become the scaffolding and nesting for my decolonizing work that creates no additional harms.

In this manner, by the final PhD stage I was able to create a balance that suited my local context and conditions for coming into being and claim a space within a new referent point. By this, *tebrakunna* country becomes a co-author, following on from Bawaka Country et al (2013), to help guide and anchor my contributions towards decolonizing and ending extinction myths in ways that nurture and recognize *trawlwulwuy* histories and sensitivities. The authorship of my later papers that interrogate whiteness by centering Indigenous ways of knowing and leadership have created an “I” (*tebrakunna* country & Lee 2017, 2019).

I have understood that my colonized mind previously allowed me to accept my lesser, non-being status from others. In finding a pathway towards creating an inclusive “I” and a referent that reflects my deep connections to *tebrakunna* country, I now use country as a co-author to open the spaces for a cultural affiliation and agency to integrate Indigenous methodologies into my decolonizing work. Where other research does not address recuperating identity away from extinction myths, in cloaking myself with country I have begun non-harmful measures into undertaking decolonizing work and finding a safe space away from non-being. This leads me to reflect, in the next section, on where my positioning statement has come from and what it means to my future research behaviors and social outcomes.

Coming into being and belonging to country

While as Indigenous Peoples we have long had to prove our humanity as sentient beings to gain rights, there is a special tension in having to first prove existence at all. This aspect of colonization, the realization of genocide through decimating a population and then claiming a silence or nostalgia or *mea culpa* in the grab for land, power and wealth is seldom viewed through Indigenous and *trawlulwuy* voices (Lee 2016b; Lehman 2006; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Reynolds 1995; Ross 2017), especially Black female ones. Extinction and coming into being are social and theoretical decolonizing actions that requires new thinking or greater significance within decolonizing research. If restoring peoples' identity and place is not the most important task of decolonizing work, then reparations and power shifts are unlikely to follow as contributing to positive change.

Therefore, my referent and statement of belonging at the beginning of the essay, *I am "a trawlulwuy woman from tebrakunna country, north-east Tasmania, Australia"* takes on new meaning. By this, I locate myself not as myth, but as being. I belong to a Peoples and a country; I have a shape and form that is inclusive of the responsibility of a reciprocal researcher and an alertness to my own cultural knowledges. I am aware that the addition of "Tasmania, Australia" speaks to my recognition of being a colonized person. I also understand that the use of the colonizing names "Tasmania, Australia" continues to reinforce whiteness by orientating my country for an international, predominantly Western, readership.

Foremost, though, is the agency that belonging creates. Using country as a co-author, and locating myself through language and kinship, I now possess the means to chip away at the harms that globally embedded myth-making causes. I can contribute to changing our place of extinction to one of vibrant, resurgent and present peoples that can make claim to restorative justice and advantageous impacts through the production of a *trawlulwuy* voice. In learning to free myself from inferiority while still retaining the strengths from participating in culturally resurgent activities, my decolonization work begins with the centering of our narratives of "always-belonging", rather than justifying a survival on the margins.

While this approach for safe referents may seem far away from the meaty and deliberate decolonizing work to, for example, restructure power and return lands, it does begin to look closely at what is missing from the literature. What can Indigenous methodologies do to heal extinction bodies? What does

decolonization work look like for peoples who are non-beings? In revitalizing my identity, I have been concerned with decolonizing myself without the self-loathing or explanations and revelling in the strengths of a power to assert my Black female body as existing. This has been my entry point into decolonization work and the pivot for future efforts. My claim to my Black female body is perhaps what Alfred and Corntassel (2005) mean when they state “one warrior at a time” to recover power and resist colonization as an effort that counts.

A self-knowing buttressed by the supports of theory and practice is behind my statement of belonging. This is an extraordinary gain away from the bulk of nineteenth-century colonial history that has strongly refuted my right to have an identity. Agency, then, begins to look like a freedom to engage and participate in decolonizing work from a different angle, that of the safe spaces to come into being from extinction (*tebrakunna* country & Lee 2019). As Potlotek First Nations woman Marie Battiste (2007, p. 117) states, “[n]o uniform or universal indigenous perspective on indigenous knowledge exists – many do”. Our perspective has not only been shaped by the colonized mind of myths, but our continued existence as Aboriginal Tasmanians with knowledges and practices. Our experience in Tasmania is, unfortunately, not unique as a colonizing story of mythical extinctions, as for example Ainu peoples of Japan share similar histories of being denied their very being (Cotterill 2011). However, it is rare that a spectacle to a greed so great becomes a part of popular Western culture, where even Charles Darwin thought to comment on our lamentable existence (Darwin 1839; Debord 2005; Wells 1898). Yet our identity and being can, and will, be recuperated away from these boundaries and towards something that is defined by and for ourselves.

As a *trawlulwuy* woman from *tebrakunna* country my referent point is vitally important to center my voice and decolonizing work. This work has come from self-determined pathways that, having learnt the conditions of the colonized mind, confront myth-making to unsettle my perception of the world and reinforce my connection to country. There is, however, much required from my actions as a reciprocal researcher to continue to challenge the dominant Western historical view of my non-being. This goes hand-in-hand with seeking a clearer view over extinction and cultural resurgence that can contribute to Indigenous methodologies and decolonizing practices. However, I am still grappling with how to negotiate my statement and position of belonging when writing with multiple and diverse authors.

New voices and co-authorship

Referents can be both liberating and constraining when authorship is shared with country and a voice is developed. In claiming an identity marker of “I” to represent and express myself as a reciprocal researcher to communities and country, I celebrate my power to contribute towards decolonizing the academy. How this approach is sustained and grows is what I am interested in, rather than repeating cultural affiliations in lieu of more action. Decolonizing work for me will always be part of my lifeworld, although I have now lost the fear to make country central in my research.

I am yet to find the space within the academy for genuine mutual benefit in writing with multiple and diverse authors, a place where I do not have to acquiesce to the dominance of Western “I” referents and lose the precious connections with *tebrakunna*. I am vexed by the default setting of Western standards and styles in the co-production of research papers (*tebrakunna* country and Lee & Tran 2016) with people I have built kinship, reciprocity and deep research relationships; people that I like and respect and learn from.

I sting from the “you”, with its structures of whiteness, that I consciously adopt and want somehow to turn this into an “ours”. It is vitally important that country stays with me in authorship, yet how to avoid reinforcing the primacy of the Western world when whiteness is not the subject of descriptors and nominations of country and culture? Perhaps there is the capacity of country to incorporate new referents that encompass multiple views as a means to decolonize spaces for shared voices (Shultz 2018). Country may be pliant and elastic enough to adopt new languages that do not privilege whiteness and do not detract from working together to decolonize together.

There are recent examples of collective writing that exemplify the critical thinking and reciprocal researcher relationships that speak to seeing ourselves in nurturing ways. The Gay’wu Group of Women (2019) write of Yolŋu histories of North East Arnhem Land as a kinship collective of Indigenous and other Australians that centers women’s business and is seamless in author voice. Positionality statements are increasingly being made between author collectives that pay tribute to Elders and communities (Carothers et al 2021), kinship relationships (Jimenez-Luque 2021) and country (Hughes & Barlo 2021; RiverOfLife et al 2020) as central to the work. These new approaches dismantle barriers to ethical knowledge production and begin to heal colonizing harms that have valued sharp distinctions in referents and place.

In this essay I have attempted to show what a colonized mind looks like and how coming into being away from extinction is a slow process of awareness tied to respectful and reciprocal behaviors and careful attention to our methodologies to guide this work. I am still not convinced that the literature has satisfactory answers to recovering from identity loss and cultural resurgence, yet it is these writings that have guided my advocacy. I believe, however, that there is great potential for Indigenous methodologies to assist in new forms of research and shared referents that deconstruct whiteness and provide a cultural safety to experiment with new knowledges. In creating a first person authorship out of non-existence suggests that the impact of 'I' and 'you' referents is vitally important in locating the self and place as a means of decolonization. It is this journey to understand the colonized mind through connections to country that has been the surprise. I have felt a deeper kinship with *tebrakunna* country through the act of signifying our relationship as co-authors to produce a grounded statement of belonging. Decolonization does not need to be a traumatic process to occur, but rather a generous position of belonging.