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ARTICLE

# Reflecting on place: environmental education as decolonisation

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**Abstract**

We argue that to face climate change, all education, from kindergarten to tertiary, needs to be underpinned by environmental education. Moreover, as a site of *reframing*, education when coupled with philosophy is a possible site of influencing *societal reframing* in order to re-examine our relations to nature or our natural environment. However, we contend that as philosophy has been largely absent from curricula, it is vital to redress this issue. Further, the environment cannot be viewed simply as subject matter for study but, reconceptualised in the Indigenous sense as Place. Only in this way can we overcome the human-nature divide. We conclude that educators must look for what Plumwood calls 'experiences that do not fit the dominant story' to disrupt an important link in the chain of climate change by developing 'traitorous identities' able to challenge the dominant culture.

**Keywords:** Climate change; eco-feminism; environmental philosophy; Indigenous knowledge; philosophy; place; environmental education

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states: 'Without additional mitigation efforts beyond those in place today, and even with adaptation, warming by the end of the 21st century will lead to high to very high risk of severe, widespread and irreversible impacts globally (high confidence)' (IPCC, 2014, p. 18). While there is contention within the climate change community as to how severe the effects of climate change will be, the very possibility 'of severe, widespread and irreversible impacts globally' demands a response from all areas of human organisation, education not the least. Since the early 2000s, scientists have been calling for greater engagement from the humanities in academic research on the problem and possible solutions. This has led to what Hulme (2017) has observed is a new wave of 'environmental humanities'. Unlike earlier environmental challenges — for example, stratospheric ozone depletion — it is unclear whether climate change can be solved solely through technological advancement.

> *Rather, the scale of the transformations occurring to the atmosphere, oceans and cryosphere, and the deep implication of the human in these transformations, reframes what sort of phenomenon climate change is, and therefore reframes how it needs studying, debating and acting upon. The humanities, and the ways they approach the world and the meanings humans impute to the world, are central to these tasks. (Hulme 2017, p. 115)*

Philosophy, which is part of the humanities, questions every dimension of human life and is, therefore, important to the tasks Hulme outlines for two primary reasons. First, philosophy can

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help us to understand the intellectual twists and turns upon which many of our present-day institutions are structured. That is, it can help us to understand the epistemic history that has led us to the brink of 'widespread and irreversible' global impacts of climate change. By retracing our intellectual steps in the way in which philosophers such as Plumwood have done, we gain a greater understanding of our current predicament. This point will be addressed in the first half of this article. Second, philosophy is a site of reframing, and when coupled with education, it is a potential site for influencing societal reframing in order to re-examine our relations as human beings to nature or to our natural environment. Such reframing allows for the uncovering of prejudices that have been codified into our societal intuitions, including education. This point will be addressed in the second half of this article.

Yet, philosophy covers a wide and varied intellectual terrain. We argue for philosophy — presented as a diverse and varied discipline, rather than as a unified practice — as a method of education. In this article, we focus on environmental philosophy as most relevant to environmental education; however, we contend that Indigenous philosophy must not be left out of the conversation as it has been in the past, and continues to be in certain areas, to be discussed later. Indigenous philosophy must be engaged with in a substantive way, as Todd (2016) puts it, by 'citing and quoting Indigenous thinkers directly, unambiguously and generously' and engaging with them as 'dynamic Philosophers and Intellectuals, full stop' (p. 7). In an Australian context, Mathews (2010) points out that 'Aboriginal voices, long referenced in ecological philosophy but seldom heard, are now making their own representations'[1] (p. 7). A central point of this article, then, is that at all levels of education,

> *Indigenous philosophies as well as general Western ideas should be taught, especially the notion of the 'reflective motive',[2] which would help young people to be more contemplative. The reflective motive is a group process of meditating upon our collective actions and experiential learning; it is not a matter of individuals reflecting in a random way but of the collectivity reflecting on why and how we as a group act and experience events. This process is encouraged, via acts of sharing and communal living, in as natural a way as possible ie not solely as an intellectual exercise. The result is that the process becomes habitual and, at the same time, non-egocentric. (Graham, 1999, p. 108)*

Our emphasis is on Australian Indigenous philosophies, for which the ego is potentially volatile, to be treated with a combination of caring stewardship, referee-like supervision and watchful guardianship.

For Indigenous peoples, reflectivity,[3] or the reflective part of the reflective motive, emerges out of the 'relational', but this depends on how the relational has or was developed and adapted over time for the individual, group, or community. Human nature is not viewed as fixed, but as composed of different states of being that have or will be experienced from childhood through to old age. Humans are invented or created by the Land or Country. This is the primary relationship through which Indigenous peoples learn to be custodians — giving them a proper place in the world; or, put another way, the Land gives humans 'Place' in the world. More accurately, the Land gives 'Feeling' that connect us to Place.[4]

Feeling is a deep-rooted connection that gives rise to ways of observing that inform and guide our motives. Here, a distinction can be made: human motives can be reflective and unreflective, whereas other-than-human motives are unreflective only. Thus, humans and other-than-humans share physicality, spirituality, sentience, consciousness and instinct, but not reflectivity. However, we all have personhood and are autonomous beings, including other-than-humans, we all have the ability to observe the other (flora, fauna, all other living things — the landscape is alive, vital and dynamic), but, especially, humans also have the ability to see and understand the other looking back at us and how they look at us. The question that arises from this conception of personhood is not just 'What are the motives of the living thing that looks back at me in the mirror or in society or the landscape?', but also, 'Are the motives reflective or unreflective?'

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The reflective motive is the first step toward understanding and relationality. For example, my going to university solely to get a better paying job is a case of the unreflective motive. However, when my chosen study leads me to a point where I am no longer concerned with the personal rewards associated with the subject I am studying, and the broadest and deepest meaning appears and initiates my search for meaning within and through the subject, then the reflective motive has emerged. Because the Land/Country has created us, the reflective motive goes much deeper than the egoistic motives associated with Western philosophy (a transcendence of individual soul). This is because the relationalist ethos and the accompanying system that emerged out of custodianship, that is, the custodial ethic, maintains that we are not only in the world but with the world; not out of the world or above it but with it.

To engage with Indigenous philosophies in a way that breaks with present-day colonial practices, we argue that educators embedded within Western institutions need to become reflective traitorous identities. Colonisation is the story of the nullification of Indigenous peoples' ways of knowing, being and doing, and relationship with non-human other. Plumwood (2012) argues that colonisation is ongoing and codified into our societal, political and institutional practices.

> *Locke's recipe for property formation allows the colonist to appropriate that into which he has mixed his own labour, as part of the self, transferring his ownership of self to what is laboured on, on condition that it falls under the category of 'nature', not under prior ownership. But since the colonist was either not able or not disposed to recognise either the prior ownership of Indigenous others, nor their different expression of labour and agency, the formula aided large-scale appropriation of Indigenous lands by those who could visit upon them highly transforming and destructive European-style agricultural labour. (p. 214)*

Plumwood's (2002) notion of a traitorous identity contrasts with what she calls the 'incorporative identity', whereby 'the incorporative self of the colonising mind is insensitive to the other's independence and boundaries, denying the other's right to define their own reality, name their own history, and establish their own identity' (p. 203). If Plumwood is correct to argue that it is the chains of the liberal individual, the Lockean self, that tie our socio-political structures to ecological devastation, then it is past time that we move away from conceptions of an individual self toward a reflective, relationally embedded self. Education, therefore, needs to turn away from the production of liberal citizens to develop, instead, ecologically rational persons able to see, hear and better respond to injustice and ecological problems such as climate change. We argue that to achieve this under the conditions of existing institutions of liberal-democracy, such as schools, teachers need to take traitorous action against dominant logic.

## Ecological Irrationality

Plumwood (2002) argues that, ecologically, our story is parallel to that of the *Titanic*:

> *[W]e have reached the stage in the narrative where we have received the iceberg warning, and have made the remarkable decision to double the engine speed to Full Speed Ahead and go below to get a good night's rest. A change of course might be bad for business, we might have to slow down, lose time. Nothing, not even the ultimate risk of the death of nature, can be allowed to hold back the triumphant progress of the ship of rational fools. (p. 1)*

Plumwood (2002) notes that if we consider the damage done to the environment — to our life support system — what we think of as rational in the past and the present is, to a large extent, irrational. Our systems of human organisation are not capable of responding to the environmental crisis as they are implicated in creating it. If this is the case, they must change, as 'no culture which

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sets in motion massive processes of biospheric degradation which it has normalised, and which it cannot respond to or correct can hope to survive for very long' (p. 1). This has implications for education, especially environmental education, but also for history, science and technology, humanities and social sciences, and civics and citizenship education, as education is a form of cultural renewal. It is imperative, therefore, that we understand the ways in which our systems are failing and seek to redress these failures through education. As a 'philosophical method',

> *taking failures as one's starting point is a good strategy. If one wants to discover the conditions of a given positive social value (justice, freedom, independence, equality . . . , it tends to be instructive to look first at the various ways in which it is likely to fail. (Fricker, 2013, p. 1318)*

The failure Plumwood (2002) draws attention to is the Western[5] societal, cultural and political normalisation of ecological irrationality, which, she argues, results in a cultural blind spot, a societal ignorance of the ill effects of our everyday thoughts and actions on the environment. This blind spot results in harm to both the environment and humans, although not to all humans equally. In fact, both locally and globally, it is those who contribute the least to environmental degradation who suffer the most. For it is,

> *the privileged members of a society who can most easily insulate themselves from forms of environmental degradation; toxic wastes and occupations can be directed to poorer residential areas (including Third World destinations), and if privileged suburbs, regions or territories become noisy, degraded or polluted, the privileged can buy places in more salubrious environments. (Plumwood, 1995, p. 138)*

Environmental degradation brought about by human subjugation of the environment, from the felling of trees to climate change, Plumwood (2002) argues, stems from a failure to acknowledge our human 'being' as a part of 'nature'. She looked to the logic of domination, 'a hubristic and sado-dispassionate form of economic and scientific reason' (p. 2), and found at the root human exceptionalism, which 'foster[s] illusions of invincibility and hide[s] our real danger' (p. 3).

Plumwood (1990) notes that while what we would generally consider to be environmental philosophy is relatively new, concepts of nature have always been prevalent in the 'rationalist tradition'. The traditional view, however, has been marked primarily by exclusions and assumptions, or, as Plumwood put it, dualisms. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993a), she critiques the form of rationality that underpins human chauvinism, teasing out the multiple uses of the term 'rational'. The problematic dominant form of rationality Plumwood (2002) highlights is linked to dualisms 'through the narrative which maps the supremacy of reason onto human supremacy' (p. 4). Plumwood (1993b) takes this point up in relation to Western thought:

> *Western thought and society has been characterised by a set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms which permeate culture, forming a fault line which runs through its entire conceptual system. Each of them has crucial connections to other elements, and has a common structure with other members of the set. The interrelationship of the elements of contrasting pairs is determined not in isolation but at least in part by the other members of the set. They should be seen as forming a system, an interlocking structure. (p. 443)*

The traditional Western conception of rationality Plumwood (2002) outlines plays a key role in the justification of the maltreatment visited upon those it relies on and simultaneously excludes from the realm of reason and the category of fully human. These exclusions amount to a denial of humanity, which Plumwood (1993a) argues results in the creation of a class of 'Others'; humans grouped as non-humans, lumped with other non-human animal species and nature to 'naturalise domination' (p. 54). The naturalisation of domination is implicit in many appeals to nature.

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Under this framework of reason, nature 'can be thought of as a sphere of multiple exclusions of various areas of difference marginalised as other' (p. 445). Traditionally, predominantly Indigenous peoples, women, minority groups, and the economically and environmentally disadvantaged have been placed in this category and defined as primitive, irrational, uncivilised, savage or imperfect.

In respect to climate change, Schneider, Rosencranz and Niles (2002) argue that inequality and injustice play out on a global scale:

> *[A] consensus is building in the scientific community that the damages that climatic changes might inflict on societies will depend in part on the adaptive capacities of those future societies, which in turn depend on their resource bases and technological and infrastructure capabilities. This suggests … that damages may be asymmetrically felt across the developed/developing country divide. (pp. 35–41)*

Chapter 13 of the 2014 IPCC report is entitled 'Livelihoods and Poverty' and 'is devoted to exploring poverty in relation to climate change, a novelty in the IPCC' (p. 798). Its addition reflects growing global recognition and concern over the effects of climate change on those already economically and ecologically disadvantaged. Plumwood's concern with the logic of domination can help us to contextualise these disadvantages in the historical epistemic terrain. It can also help us to tie together the epistemic and ontological terrain.

The interplay of the epistemic and the ontological in Australia has been shaped primarily by two vastly different ways of knowing, being and doing in the world: Australia's First Nations people and colonisation. The first is a rich culture, the extent of which is only recently being admitted into current Australian institutions such as universities and is still largely omitted from primary and secondary education. Recent work by Pascoe (2014) seeks to rectify this, debunking the hunter-gather myth largely perpetuated in Australia as a means of justifying colonial land theft.[6]

> *The use of the word 'agriculture' in relation to Australian Aboriginal people is not something many Australians would have heard. However, if we go back to the country's very first records of European occupation, we discover some extraordinary observations that provide a picture of what the Australian explorers and pioneers witnessed, and how it refutes the notion that Aboriginal people were only hunter-gatherers. (p. 13)*

In contrast to the still far too prevalent conception of Aboriginal peoples as primitive, irrational, uncivilised or imperfect, Pascoe (2014) argues that Aboriginal peoples were among the first in the world to start using tools, engineering fisheries, building houses, growing and harvesting grains and are 'the world's oldest bakers', predating the Egyptians 'by almost 15,000 years' (p. 30).

In 1937, the legal scholar R.T. Latham wrote of the first European colonisers that the 'invisible and inescapable cargo of English law fell from their shoulders and attached itself to the soil on which they stood. Their personal law became the territorial law of the Colony' (Latham, as cited in Reynolds, 1987, p. 1). The dominant logic that accompanied colonisation was transported through all areas of human organisation, erasing, or as Plumwood puts it, nullifying prior presences. Dotson (2011) argues that the 'epistemic side of colonialism is the devastating effect of the "disappearing" of knowledge, where local or provincial knowledge is dismissed due to privileging alternative, often Western, epistemic practices' (p. 236). Pascoe (2014) reveals the physical aspect of such practices.

> *Colonial Australia sought to forget the advanced nature of the Aboriginal society and economy, and this amnesia was entrenched when settlers who arrived after the depopulation of whole districts found no structure more substantial than a windbreak, and no population that*

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> *was not humiliated, debased and diseased. This is understandable because, as is evidenced by the earlier first-hand reports, villages were burnt, the foundations stolen for other buildings, the occupants killed by warfare, murder and disease, and the country usurped. It is no wonder that after 1860 most people saw no evidence of any prior complex civilisation. (pp. 11–12)*

The trend toward nullifying Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing continues in relation to philosophy. There is a general resistance to the acceptance of Indigenous philosophy as one among many traditions of philosophy with its own epistemology, ontology, axiology and methodology. As Muecke (2011) notes, in 'Australia, the massive knowledge of Indigenous Australians consolidated and refined over 60,000 years has been happily filtered and translated in departments of anthropology, history, and English, but ... philosophy, for the most part, continues to take little interest' (p. 2). It is a resistance that carries over to education (Thornton & Burgh, 2019). As the UNESCO study of the present state of teaching philosophy in the world reveals, 'Philosophy is often viewed as a foreign — or frankly, Western — subject' (UNESCO 2007, p. 52). In other words, philosophy in Australia, in primary, secondary and tertiary education, is an epistemically built environment; dominated by what is commonly called the Western or Eurocentric tradition of philosophy, particularly the Anglo-American analytic method of philosophy.

We use the term 'built environment' to describe 'an environment that has undergone large-scale changes', creating a habitat that is almost exclusive to one way of knowing, being and doing, such that all other cultures and species must adapt to the created dominant environment to survive, 'rather than a mutual adaptation of diverse habits and habitats, allowing space for continual reconstruction' (Burgh & Thornton, 2017, pp. 8–9). A built environment was instantiated upon settlement (invasion) in Australia. To use Wolfe's (2006) words, invasion 'erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base [ . . . ], settler colonizers come to stay: *invasion is a structure not an event*' (p. 388, emphasis added). In this sense, 'settler colonialism' in Australia was a form of structural invasion, accompanied by an epistemically and ontologically violent 'logic of elimination', which uprooted more than 50,000 years of bioculture and transplanted British law, institutions and environment (right down to the introduction of cottage gardens) in its stead.

If environmental degradation is, as Plumwood (2012) contends, a problem that has an epistemic source in a dominant rationality, then to unravel the threat of ecological irrationality, we argue that educators must become traitorous identities. Traitorous identities are created through reflection on 'experiences that do not fit the dominant story' (pp. 12–13); experiences that point to the need to revise our 'conception of the self and its relation to the non-human other, opposition to oppressive practices, and the abandonment and critique of cultural allegiances to the dominance of the human species and its bonding against non-humans' (p. 205) and those humans classed as non-human. Traitorous identities cultivate an ethical, ecological rationality and by extension 'Place', through constant reflection on the ways in which being traitorous habitually interacts with the environment and others, looking for experiences that lie outside of the dominant narrative.

Rethinking the current physical state of the world requires us to rethink both the current and historical epistemic terrain. That is, to rethink Place.[7] 'There is no Aboriginal equivalent to the Cartesian notion of "I think therefore I am" but, if there were, it would be — "I am located therefore I am". Place, being, belonging and connectedness all arise out of a locality in Land' (Graham, 2014b, p. 18). Education must be a site for such a rethinking if we are to change the culture that has structured our unsustainable habits and habitats. Decolonisation, then, is a necessary part of environmental education. In the next section we look further at the notion of Place as a response to dominant logic, a focus that allows educators an avenue toward becoming traitorous.

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## Environmental Education as Decolonisation

Tuck and Yang (2019) note that: 'Indigenous and decolonizing perspectives on education have long persisted alongside colonial models of education, yet too often have been subsumed under broader domains of multiculturalism, critical race theory, and progressive education' (p. x). We concur with Tuck and Yang and acknowledge 'Indigenous worldviews and decolonizing theory as distinct philosophical traditions' (p. x). They highlight that:

> *Decolonizing studies, when most centered in Indigenous philosophy, push back against assumptions about the linearity of history and the future, against teleological narratives of human development, and argue for renderings of* **time and place** *that exceed coloniality and conquest. (xiii, emphasis added)*

Pushing back against the colonisation of education, therefore, requires embedding it in the history and meanings of the land on which the classroom and greater community is situated, including: the philosophies and practices of the traditional owners of the land; perceptions and conceptions of childhood that disrupt the dominant narrative of liberal individualism; education's role in politics, including aspects of ongoing assimilation; Indigenous approaches to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); the flora and fauna; the environmental health of their surrounds; right down to understanding the origins of the glue that holds together the tables and the impacts of its manufacturing on the environment and social fabric in the place where it is made. That is, education needs to trace the *moral memory of Place*. In this way, the relationship between humans and nature is grown and strengthened. As Neidjie (1996) put it, 'this earth, this ground, this piece of ground e grow you' (p. 30). Part of this process of growth is the transferral of emotion from Place to person, a shaping of human experience and personhood.

In human experience, Place looms large, providing, sometimes dominating, the backdrop and sometimes the foreground as well. The backdrop of Place informs and influences judgment and imagination. People flee from and flee to Place both physically and psychologically. Place is a reference point to guide to and from. Place is a physical point in landscape, but also a point in time, an event, an imagining or even a landscape itself. (Graham, 2014a, p. 7)

The concept of Place contrasts with the Western concept of 'position' (Graham, 2014b). Indeed, Place is a challenge to sado-dispassionate, abstract and universal logic; that is, dominant logic.

> *In the Aboriginal notions of autonomy, a place isn't a position. A place can't be a position because it's a matrix of relations, narratives, obligations — it has neither rigidity nor flexibility, it has soft, inclusive structure, spirit, agency and* **memory**. *And while position can also have the same kind of matrix as place, it has not come into the world to preserve relationality (like place) — it comes to contain, define and* **dominate relationality**. *(p. 19, emphasis added)*

Traditional educational ways of knowing and being in a classroom function according to position to the detriment of a complex understanding of Place. 'For most Westerners, Inquiry precedes Place. Knowledge acquisition both defines and supersedes place' (Graham, 2014b, p. 5). The Western conception of linear time also plays a role in knowledge acquisition. Constructing the past is, as Spivak (2012) puts it, a work of epistemology: 'We know only a passing, and, studying in the present, we construct a past thing: epistemology at work' (p. 1). Inquiry, or as Spivak deems it, 'the study', creates a memory of a non-experiential past, divorced from Place. Reversing the order of inquiry so that Place precedes inquiry disrupts our notions of 'keeping school'. Keeping school means keeping it constantly attuned to the demands of the present; demands Colwell (1972) deems 'the tyranny of familiarity which, under the banner of relevancy, eliminates a richness in perspective, nuance, and counter-challenge we cannot afford to miss' (p. 88). This elimination, Colwell (1970) explains, is perpetuated by a resistance to question values.

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> *The philosophy of the schools is a kind of positivistic pragmatism, which is to say a bastardised pragmatism, which defines its purposes solely out of response to the here and now, the immediate problems before it. As in the larger society, there is much planning, but it is particularistic, confined to the moment. We are fearful to define broader purposes, because to do so would involve questioning the values that underlie present arrangements, and this would detract from* **keeping school**, *and would be 'utopian' or even subversive. Hence the expedient quality of education today. What is 'good' educationally follows from the growth trends of society. If society is proliferating in population, building ever bigger cities, producing more and more for a seemingly endless consumption, despoiling its environment, and conducting tragically senseless war, it is not education's job to reason why, but to accept the inevitability of this growth ('progress') and to fashion its activities in a manner best suited to realize it. (pp. 113–114, emphasis added)*

Rose (2004) further emphasises the importance of linear time in this recipe of domination. She argues that the past-present-future linear conception of time 'provides a template for a great deal of colonising thought' (p. 151). Discussing the time orientation of the Yarralin People,[8] Rose demonstrates that there are multiple ways of thinking about such a fundamental concept as time:

> *We here now come after or are behind our ancestors who came before us. Our descendants are the 'behind mob' relative to us. We precede them, they follow along behind. And the whole of ordinary life can be understood collectively as a 'behind mob' — we all follow along behind the Dreamings. This is a temporal orientation that is based on sequence. (p. 152)*

Rose argues that in contrast, the Western conception of time is 'set within a Christian pattern: it is teleological, this present is *imperfect*, the future will be better. And the relative evaluation of the future as better necessarily implies that now is worse, and that the past is even worse than now' (p. 152, emphasis added). The Western conception of time moves away from the realities of the past, creating a stark break between it and the present, and in doing so, disallows the movement of past realities into the now and the future. Relegating wrongs to history denies their present-day realities,[9] in a sense finalising them while at the same time creating a fictitious future, or as Rose writes, 'the fantasised utopia of the future is a key narrative for a certain type of triumphal history' (p. 152). A linear progression is evident also in our conception of childhood[10] and by extension the development of self, which is education. The progression of linear accounts of personhood are marked through exclusions; or, put another way, are premised on what they are not, creating dualisms, such as child-adult, savage-civilised, and are accordingly part of the logic of domination.

Plumwood (1992) stresses that the 'major forms of oppression in our culture — oppression of class, of sex, race and nature — are interwoven' (p. 48). She further links such oppression with the denial of the value of reproduction. Following Merchant, she uses the term *reproduction* 'to include the reproduction of all nature, including human reproduction' (p. 49). This denial of reproduction is accomplished through the conception of human identity or human consciousness as fundamentally opposed to nature and Other, and the 'real heart of the problem of sustainability lies in this kind of consciousness' (p. 49). To create a sustainable consciousness, or an ecological identity, we need to become traitorous to colonial culture's opposition to both nature and Other. In the classroom, this requires looking for ways to promote the reproduction of both ontologies and epistemologies that have historically borne the brunt of colonial epistemic and physical violence. The development of reflective traitorous identities gives us a starting point for a wider social and environmental reconstruction.

## Conclusion

We have argued that education underpinned by environmental education is imperative to face climate change. Environmental education, however, is lacking alternative ways of knowing, which hampers its ability to respond to climate change. Indigenous philosophies, which have much to

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offer regarding ways of knowing, being and doing that have been largely absent from curricula, are vital to redress this issue. This article, then, is also a rallying call to educators to not continue to do business as usual, but to disrupt an important link in the chain of climate change by developing reflective traitorous identities, their own and those of their students. Traitorous identities are those traitorous to the dominant culture, those who think outside the bounds of their institutional structures whilst all the while confined within them, that is, those who reflect on Place.

In Australia and many other countries, the knowledge and resources of Indigenous peoples were subsumed and consumed by colonisers without recognition and, in many cases, actively denied, evidence destroyed (such as in the case of agriculture) and myths perpetuated (such as Indigenous peoples as hunter-gatherers). The legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge and philosophy has been repeatedly called into question in support of such myths. As Watson (2014) put it:

> *The 'domestication' and 'assimilation' of Indigenous peoples are on the main agenda of the Australian state and within that process of assimilation the richness of Indigenous law, knowledge and philosophy is largely ignored, or treated as if those Indigenous ways of being are of minor interest. (p. 509)*

Education as a form of reproduction of the state has been a site of ongoing assimilation, but a growing body of Indigenous scholarship challenges this (e.g., see Graham, 1999; Rainville, 2001; Shay & Wickes, 2017; McKinley & Smith, 2019; Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2019; Watson, 2014). Australia is a clear example of a colonial legal and cultural epistemology meeting with a far older epistemology and ontology, with the former by and large othering, denying, backgrounding, nullifying or assimilating the latter, with the latter never ceding sovereignty, nor giving up the struggle for recognition. To cease assimilation, we must create ecologically rational identities by deconstructing our (colonial) own and our (colonial) culture's opposition to both nature and Other, both within and outside the classroom.

## Endnotes

**1.** Mathews cites Graham (1999, 2009) and Grieves (2009).

**2.** For more on the reflective motive see Graham (2012).

**3.** We use *reflective*, not in the Anglo-European sense of the word, that is, not 'as a metaphor to express an inner mental activity' (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017), but rather, in the Indigenous sense, as emerging out of the relational, as we explain.

**4.** In *Story About Feeling*, Neidjie (1996) explains this idea in more detail. Work that draws similar conclusions has recently emerged; for example, see Gabriel and Asma (2019).

**5.** Although a geographical concept, 'the rubic "Western" is a historiological concept and signifies today's European history and culture, which were inaugurated by the Greeks and especially by the Romans and which were essentially determined and borne by Judeo-Christianity' (Heidegger & Rojcewicz, 2015, p. 16). We follow Plumwood's use of the term in the remainder of this article while recognising it has limitations.

**6.** Justifications abounded for what Reynolds (1987) calls a 'land grab' (p. 13); a prominent one being that Aboriginal peoples never owned the land (p. 13) because they did not 'use' it in a way that was recognised by the colonisers, that is, they were said not to practise agriculture. This is a claim Pascoe shows to be false. However, even if the colonisers were correct, a lack of agriculture was not enough under international law of the times to justify forcibly taking Indigenous lands. Reynolds explains that intentionality played a large role in the international law of the time in establishing ownership; an intention to occupy and use or enjoy the land, even if only intermittently, was all that was required for ownership (p. 15).

**7.** We use 'Place' in the way intended by Indigenous writers, which is not to be confused with the Western concept, even though it shares some similarities.

**8.** 'Yarralin' is 382 km south west of Katherine in the Northern Territory, situated within the Victoria River Downs cattle station on the traditional lands of the Ngaringman people. Over 300 people call Yarralin home, including those from the Ngarinyman, Mudbarra, Bilinara and Gurinji tribes' (https://www.yunmi.com.au/pages/yarralin-creative).

**9.** The relegation of colonisation to the past by many is an attempt to deny its current day occurrences. The Stolen Generations, for example, is taken to be a past wrong, even though the rate of Indigenous children in 'care' is increasing.

**10.** For more on how childhood relates to colonisation, see Kohan (2014), McKinley and Smith (2019), Murris and Haynes (2018), and Smith et al. (2019).

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