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Restoring Black/ Indigenous Relations in Australia: An Indigenist Sociological Theory for Bla(c)k Indigeneity in the Global South

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Abstract

The complex, trans-cultural and social history between Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders and people of the global African diaspora in Australia is a long, often undocumented, and unknown history. Much of the Black experience is dominated by the Northern Hemisphere. This paper will consider some of the findings in my PhD research, which speaks back to the North, from the standpoint and intersectional experiences of Black Indigeneity across Oceania. This work offers an Indigenist sociological critique to build a theory on Bla(c)k Indigeneity from the global South. The theoretical developments advanced through this project offer a critical framework to instigate a global Black praxis and agenda for humanities and social sciences theory. Embedding Indigenous relational ontologies from the South into the international Black strategy for liberation, is critical to the political growth and socio-cultural development of our communities. The objective outputs for this research are grounded in healing the racial hierarchies of Blackness that often divide our communities. It deconstructs racialisation as a tool of coloniality that divides Black and Indigenous people. Racialisation has produced the necessary pre-conditions to maintain centuries of psycho-social conditioning and colonial programming that continues to disrupt Black/Bla(c)k Indigenous spirituality and ancestral ways of being in deep relations with one another. In the important era of Black Lives Matter, restoring Black/Indigenous relations beyond performative allyship is one of the most significant and urgent projects towards transformative and liberatory Indigenous agendas for sovereign First Nation futures.

Keywords

Black Australia, Indigenous or Indigeneity, Black Oceania, Black Pacific, Afro-Indigenous, African diaspora in Australia, relationality, trans- Indigenous, Blackness, Black Indigeneity

A note on the words Black, Bla(c)k, Blak, African and Indigenous:

It is acknowledged that these terms all carry historically significant pejorative meanings and subsequently hold multifaceted and complex implications. It is also acknowledged that these are inherited colonial terms and language. These issues around appropriate terminology will be explored throughout this paper.

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Introduction

There are two interconnected obstacles toward achieving the goal of Black and Indigenous freedom and justice in the global South. First, there is *still* no post-colonial moment in so-called Australia and second, Black liberation cannot be complete without the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Zenadth Kesian people (colonially known Torres Strait Islanders) on this continent. The relationship between Black and Indigenous people within the nuanced context of the Southern Hemisphere must include our own articulation of the collective understanding for global Black liberation – the type of liberation rooted in the fierce demands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty and justice. This is the standpoint position and approach of this research, as I am located within this space as an Afro-Indigenous person and scholar.

Understanding Black/Indigenous relations is not about asking whether it is productive or desirable to “[reimagine] coalitions among the colonized/oppressed ... [but rather is about] ... the need to theorize these relationships in order to organize the political practice we wish to pursue on the ground” (Dei, 2017, p.3). This research has been shaped by the questions: what is the relationship between people of African descent and Indigenous people in Australia? How can we transgress the structures of a colonial history that have influenced the nature of their relating? To analyse and answer these questions, I have designed a mixed-methods research approach.

This approach is unique to my social location as an Afro-Indigenous scholar, drawing on elements from the four distinct Indigenous Knowledge traditions I am descended from. I use the Indigenous cultural concept of ‘Sankofa’ to represent this worldview, from which I have built a theoretical framework. I argue and outline the importance of Trans-Indigenous methodologies and approaches, towards developing an Indigenist sociological critique that may contribute toward building a theory on Bla(c)k Indigeneity from the perspectives of the global South.

Alternative knowledges about the Blak experience in colonial Australia complicity hide Afro-Indigenous identities and paradigms. There are multiple, intersecting experiences of Blakness within the Indigenous Oceanic context. Encounters (beyond the settler-colonial project) between Oceanic First Nations people and African diasporic people in Australia is often under-examined, undocumented, under-funded

and an ignored field of research. Despite this, African-descended people and Indigenous Oceanic people have resisted, co-existed, built allegiances and understood themselves beyond the context of exploitation and dispossession by the imperialist settler-colonial state. In the re-reading, re-writing and re-imagining of Indigenous futurities, it remains imperative for “colonized/racialized bodies to engage the deeper structures that undergird our coloniality” (Dei, 2017, p.3). In the global call for the re-theorization of Blackness, there is an intentional and “conscious intellectual shift in reading the Black/African diasporic presence on Indigenous people’s lands...to foster decolonial solidarities” (Dei, 2017, p.1).

The phenomena of Afro-Indigenous knowledges exist as a global praxis, however, the scope of focus here is the context of Indigenous Oceanic people and their relationship shared with African diasporic people situated on the continental plate of Sahul¹ (from here on, Black Oceania or the Black Pacific). How has colonialism distorted our understanding of the history between African diasporic people and Black First Nations people? And what is the Indigenous sibling nature of this relationship? These are both questions and critical frames that have assisted in developing decolonial pedagogical approaches for reclamation work in the field of Afro-Indigenous studies.

The purpose of this work is concerned with how our communities continue to build processes for ourselves in which to better understand the terms of our relations/relationships as it serves transformative, decolonial and liberatory Indigenous agendas. It seeks to understand the tools or frameworks we can deploy to build community, resist anti-Blackness, disrupt Aboriginal erasure and ensure the inclusivity of the Black Sahulian paradigm within the global project of Blackness.

As an Afro-Indigenous scholar building on the scholarship of others such as Asante (2003), Woodson (1920), Hooks (1992), Miles (2015), Dei (2017), Mays (2021), Shilliam (2015) and many more, understanding the imperative to restore rightful relations between Black and Indigenous people, as Mays describes, offers the “foundation for a new sphere of freedom” (Mays, 2021, p.9). Many approaches to understanding the Black and Indigenous experience on this continent have taken to separate the discourses, knowledge systems, language forms and epistemologies of these groups as distinct. Often the struggles and politics of their movements are pulled apart or critically compared. In the important and contemporary moment of ‘Black Lives Matter’, it is critical we restore our understanding of Black/Indigenous relations. Decolonising solidarities beyond performative allyship is both a significant and urgent social, political, and intellectual undertaking.

Building tools or frameworks beyond the ideas of racial solidarity offers a renewed opportunity to address the entangled liberations of Black and Indigenous people globally. Using Indigenous cultural frames to revisit the sites of Afro-Indigenous encounter – or intersecting Black histories – offers an important starting point for this process. Māori professor, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, asserts that:

¹ Sahul consists of the geographical landmasses that includes mainland Australia, Tasmania, the island of New Guinea, Papua New Guinea, Western New Guinea and the many islands situated between the Arafura Sea and Torres Strait.

transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), requires us to revisit site by site, our history under Western eyes...This in turn requires a theory or approach which helps us to engage with, understand and then act upon history. (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.81)

This paper charts my own reclamation journey (throughout the course of my PhD research) voyaging site to site, re-reading, and re-thinking through an Indigenous lens various discursive moments in Black/Indigenous historical encounter. I offer critical reflections on the Trans-Indigenous approaches deployed as means of building Afro-Indigenous frames and modes of analysis to inform theory development. The intentional process of constructing and designing appropriate Afro-Indigenous instruments for data collection and analysis must embed Indigenous processes of cultural reciprocity. Chilisa explains that:

knowledge [in the Indigenous world] is regarded a scared object and seeking it is a spiritual quest...without offering culturally sensitive means of building reciprocity researchers end up with empty findings... as they are unable to access the realities of the communities' experiences (Chilisa, 2012, p.114).

Revisiting the past realities of Black/Blackfulla communities and charting the sites of deep relations required analytical framing devices that reflect Indigenous relational ontology. This provided access into an interconnected Blak/Indigenous reality to draw out and seek answers to the questions of Blak forms of relating across various historical registers. In unpacking the process of building decolonial pedagogies as a form of restoration, it also highlighted my own reciprocal responsibilities and obligations – as an Afro-Indigenous person/scholar – to produce alternative knowledges about intersectional Afro/Indigenous paradigms as they are situated within Blak ontological realities of Blak Oceania.

The theoretical developments advanced through this project offer a critical framework that seeks to contribute to global Black praxis, which is modelled and governed by Indigenous relational ontologies from the global South. Blak Sahulian praxis produces a decolonising agenda for the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines, one that radically re-centres Indigenous Knowledge's theory, methodologies, and, importantly, the research needs and priorities of the people to whom those knowledges belong. Embedding Blak Indigenous-Oceanic relational ontologies into the international strategy for Black liberation is critical to the political growth and socio-cultural and spiritual development of our communities. The objective outputs, ideas, and offerings of this research are anchored in building the tools, theory, and critical language we need to aid healing the racial hierarchies of Blakness and 'colonial antagonisms' that often divide our communities (Dei, 2017). The idea that Blak and Indigenous relations are in need of restoration must be contextualized in the meeting of our mutual efforts towards justice, freedom, and colonial liberation of our minds, of our bodies, and our spirits.

On Terminology: re-writing/Re-righting Bla(c)kness

Re-writing and re-defining terms is not only about changing words; it is more than "rescuing the language from [racialized] dichotomies... one must also re-think, that is, re-theorize the meaning of the words" (Dei, 2017, p.7). In Dei's *Reframing Blackness* (2017), he asserts, "there is no essential Black identity. There is, however, a Black

identity that Black bodies can claim... as different yet converging” (p.10). This section unpacks discursive praxis around terminology specific to Bla(c)k identity and Blakness as it operates in Australia—different, yet converging. Acknowledging and placing these caveats from the outset is important in the process to re-right and restore Blak-on-Black relations within this context.

The often-capacious term ‘Blackness’ is applied here with specific intent. Blackness is a term that has seen significant cultural adaptations, which are situated differently within Black Oceania and in Afro-Indigenous experiences globally. In this paper, Blackness is used in an intentionally dissident way to reclaim, restore, and decolonise racialised settler-colonial constructions of ‘Blackness’ that do not speak to or mirror Black ontological experiences.

In the conceptual region of Blak Oceania, the Black Pacific, or Blak Sahul, Blakness is written from an ontological baseline that acknowledges the relational kinship practices of Black people shared across oceans, lands, skies, and Indigenous cosmologies. The intentional use of the term Blak is not pejorative and does not seek to diminish the significant epistemological gains in the broader Black scholarly field.

This paper intentionally interchanges and omits the letter ‘c’ from the word Black. Blak with no ‘c’ speaks with specific reference to Aboriginal, Zenadth Kesian, Australian South Sea Islander, Melanesian, Pacific identities, and other contemporary Oceanic expressions of Blakness in Sahul. In distinguishing Australian Blakness specifically, Latimore (2021) explains that the provenance of the term Blak goes back to the Aboriginal Artist Destiny Deacon, who in her 1991 *Blak lik mi* photo series wanted to reclaim the word. Her defiant removal of the ‘c’ distinguished Aboriginality from skin colour (Stephens, 2021). Today, it is common practice within Australia to drop the ‘c’ or use the particular spelling of Bla(c)k in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Black with the inclusion of ‘c’ often speaks to the broader international Black community outside of the Sahulian context.

The colonial desire for the management and elimination of Black bodies/existence sees multiple iterations of government legislation and practice that both disrupt Black relations and bring about intersectional Black histories. While genocidal government policies of forced assimilation desecrated Black First Nations families and communities, the introduction of the White Australia Policy came into play. It resulted in the mass deportation of melanated Australian South Sea Islanders and the destruction of the Blak family unit, with children being stolen, families forced to separate and the ever-increasing incarceration of Blak men, women and children by the settler-colonial state. These are just some of “the political dimensions that filter through the complexity of the use of the term “Black” here (Aboagye, 2018, p.77). For the Black Australian context, the term ‘Blak’ is used to assert a political positioning that aims to destroy the war against melanated bodies and white supremacy as it operates in Oceania. We utilize “blackness as a political assertion to the right to exist and claim a distinctly Indigenous - often expressed as a “black” or “Blackfulla”- way of cultural being” (Aboagye, 2018, p.77). It is also important to place into this lens the term ‘Blakfulla’, a word constituted within the Southern conception of Blak Indigeneity and used by Aboriginal and Zenadth Kesian people in an intentionally specific way. The term Blakfulla is described by Professor Chelsea Watego (2021) as “being used by those who simultaneously recognise and refuse

the racialised location we've been prescribed... [it presumes] a prior knowledge or shared frame of reference ... [that does not require footnotes] for others to keep up or keep a check on things" (p.9).

I acknowledge that the terms Black/Blackness, African, Afro, and Indigenous all carry historically significant pejorative meanings and subsequently hold multifaceted and complex implications. Racialisation has long been a treacherous tool of coloniality that both distracts and divides Black and Indigenous people. Both Edward Said (1978) and Frantz Fanon (1961) analyzed this phenomenon, with Fanon describing the settler and the colonised as mutual constructions of colonialism. I also acknowledge that racialised identities came into existence through asymmetrical systems of knowledge and power. However, Oceanic Blacks have also taken and repurposed racialised identities to talk back to colonisers and to reclaim representations for themselves. For example, the colloquial use of the term Kanaka or Aboriginal Kanak in contemporary experiences of Australian South Sea Islanders, who are the descendants of Black-birded Melanesians brought to Australia via slavery and indentured labour.

Racialised discursive practices operate to divide, categorize, and organize difference according to the lens, values, and vested interests of the white supremacist, capitalist, settler-colonial, patriarchal paradigm. Racialisation has long been used as a strategy of empire to divide and conquer. Many Black and Indigenous theorists have described the function of race and racialisation as an intellectual tool of coloniality (Du Bois, 1897, 1903; Fanon, 1961; Appiah, 1986). Stuart Hall's (1996) work forewarns that race should not be understood as singular but rather as "discursively creating systems because the interplay between the representation of racial difference, the writing of power, and the production of knowledge" (p.364).

Racialisation as the primary unit of social analysis is not enough on its own for the liberation of our minds and our spirits. Race based Blackness without a spiritual (or cosmological) anchor sustains and maintains centuries of psycho-social conditioning and colonial programming. It continues to disrupt Blackfulla/Bla(c)k ontological paradigms, sibling relationships and Indigenous ancestral ways of being in deeper relations with one another.

As a Blackfulla with Akan heritage writing from my own social location, I have prioritized the need to find communication forms that disrupt colonial systems and hierarchies of race that emphasize our racial difference. Seeking rather to develop information/ knowledge translation methods that help me to speak across these communities that are "different, yet converging" (Dei, 2017, p.10). To theorize and build communication forms that speak to my own community's and Blak relations on their/our own terms.

Re-reading and Re-theorizing Blak Relations in Sahul

In Cassandra Pybus's book, *Black Founders*, she states that "one of the many tragedies of race relations in Australia today ... includes our failure to accord any space to the intersectional stories of people of colour who were not Aboriginal, especially those from the African diaspora" (Pybus, 2006, p.180). The findings of my research extend this assertion further, seeking to accord space to read the intersectional stories of the African diaspora with that of First Nations people. An

important point of demarcation in my approach places emphasis on the necessity of Blak/Indigenous cultural frames in both the analysis and critical re-theorisation of Afro-Indigenous experience. I argue that understanding Blak/Indigenous relations in the Southern Hemisphere must not only be decolonised but needs to be Indigenised.

Colonialism in Oceania and the socio-political context that has impacted these communities can be one lens of focus for examining African and Indigenous relations. However, it is not the only term on which this relationship should be approached and examined. To remove the colonial canon from the centre of our meeting, or in the ways in which we come to encounter and know each other as Blak/Indigenous people, offers one strategy toward decolonising and reclamation history work. Tuhiwai Smith states, “coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonisation, to hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.81).

The terms of Afro/Indigenous relationships on this continent are both complex and complicated by colonial programming. By disrupting colonial versions of our own histories, we develop the means to re-analyse and re-define the terms of our relating, and to also develop the means to reconstruct Indigenised versions of our collective experiences and Black/Indigenous social phenomena. This process allows for the re-evaluation of historically significant issues, which have both impacted and impeded our communities’ understanding of each other. Decolonial pedagogies and Indigenous re-theorisation allows communities to reclaim and articulate their own research needs and agendas. In the case of Afro/Indigenous history, I argue that such a process may help reveal and advance joint strategies for shared notions of progress, justice, healing, and divestment from colonialism.

There is an argument that theory does little to change social reality. However, many Black and Indigenous theorists have countered that argument by asserting intellectual activism as offering a way of making knowledge serve the liberation of our communities from oppressive European histories and epistemologies (Rodney, 2019). Dei (2017) asserts that intellectual activism can serve our communities through the function of advancing them theoretically and applying these theories to our new historical conditions as they are related to the development of our societies. Indigenous theorists are innovating critical Indigenist methodological interventions throughout the human and social sciences globally. Trans-Indigenous theory is but one example that demonstrates emancipatory intellectual approaches being used in service of communities.

Trans-Indigenous theoretical frameworks allow for Indigenous-to-Indigenous exchange to occur through cross-cultural knowledge translation. I have applied this to the Afro/Indigenous situation in Australia with the intent to transgress colonial representations of Blak history. It is a vehicle that provides safe carriage of Indigenous knowledges, presenting the means for two or more Indigenous knowledge traditions to be in conversation with deeper resonance and rightful relations. The Trans-Indigenous processes ask that we turn back to the past and re-examine the lives, wisdom, and intelligence of our ancestors by drawing on pre-colonial epistemologies, rituals, traditions, and philosophies of our ancestors. We can use ancient Indigenous forms of knowledge and communication to examine Black/Indigenous meaning-

making practices to continue building alternative methods and the critical language of emancipatory discourse.

I have developed an Indigenist sociological critique using Trans-Indigenous methods to build a theory on Bla(c)k Indigeneity from the global South. In my PhD research, I have evoked an Indigenous West African philosophy through the application of the Ashanti (or Asante) philosophical paradigm of Sankofa. Sankofa represents a relational epistemology that belongs to the Indigenous Akan people of the broader Ashanti tribe in Ghana, West Africa. It is an Indigenous relational understanding of time, space, and knowledge that speaks to the interconnected nature of the past, present, and future. There is an Indigenous synergy between the Akan concept of Sankofa and the Aboriginal concept of 'everywhen' espoused in Aboriginal Dreaming cosmologies. Gilchrist explains, that 'everywhen' "is a conceptualisation of Indigenous understandings of temporality... a much broader worldview that challenges ... the [very] limits of western temporality" (2020, p. 119). Much like the Sankofic paradigm, the past serves as an access point to the future and this nexus can inform our present conditions.

To the Akan, there is wisdom in learning from the past, which ensures a strong future. The Akans believe that there must be movement and new learning as time passes (Temple, 2010). As this forward march proceeds, the knowledge of the past must never be forgotten (Temple, 2010). This Sankofic notion reinforces Indigenous cycles and the connectivity between past, present, and future—a cyclical paradigm that mirrors the universe's cycles of life/death/life (rebirth), bringing into resonance the spiritual and ancestral realms in our everyday lives. These cultural practices, steeped in a reverence for the dead and maintaining connection to our benevolent ancestors through death praxis, ritual, custom, and ceremony, reinforce the significance of Indigenous concepts of cyclical temporality. Nourishing and maintaining reciprocal relations to these elements allows for direct connection to the past, non-living, and non-human ancestral and spirit world. Similarly, Sankofic philosophy and Akan temporality can be cross-read with contemporary Aboriginal understandings of the Dream-time or Dreaming cosmological systems. Gilchrist's (2020) application of "everywhen" describes it as "an elastic paradigm" (p.119). He explains that using the term "everywhen" is about "the power to claim time" (p.23). Everywhen "captures something elusive about the Dreaming's approach to time — its singularity, sequentiality, and connectivity" (Gilchrist, 2020, p.119). Both Sankofa and the Dreaming traverse Western linear constructs of time to a transcendental space of ancestrality and Indigenous spirituality. In this space, the past, present, and future all exist at the same time and are one in the same place. Indigenous language systems and Indigenous technologies such as Adinkra, Sankofa, and the Dreaming all enable us to access these Indigenous realities.

As a Blackfulla of Akan descent, I deploy a Sankofic theoretical approach to re-claim, restore, and re-imagine the ways in which we think about Indigenous concepts of Blak realities. It is then used to interrogate and ask questions, such as how have these Blak ways of being influenced trans-Indigenous encounters between differing groups of Black Indigenous peoples?

Understanding Sankofric philosophy

“Se wo were fin a wo Sankofa a yenkyi” (It is not a taboo to return and fetch it when you forget). – The Adinkra Dictionary (Willis, 1998).

The Sankofa proverb above foretells the Akan virtue of wisdom, explaining we must go back and reclaim our past so we can move forward; so we understand why and how we came to be who we are today. The word ‘Sankofa’ is both a proverb and Akan hieroglyphic symbol belonging to the Indigenous people of the Akan lineage of the broader Ashanti language group in Ghana, West Africa. The English language translation denotes San (return), Ko (go) Fa (look, see, take). The symbol (see figure 1) depicts an image of a mythical bird with its feet firmly planted forward and its head stretched backward to retrieve an egg (represents the past) upon its back.

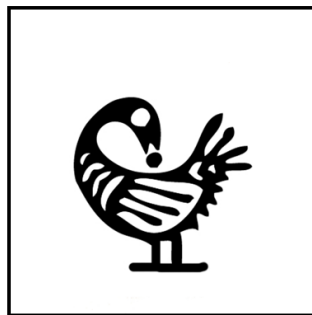


Figure 1. Adinkra Symbol: Sankofa

The spiritual context of Sankofa

Sankofa is a small part of a much broader Akan philosophical tradition (Temple, 2010). Adinkra is the system of Ashanti symbols that are a prototypical writing system used to communicate Ashanti ideas, values, and virtues (Thomas and Alanamu, 2018). The Adinkra Alphabet is a phonetic writing system derived from Adinkra symbols. Together, the Adinkra system is an Indigenous language technology that expresses timeless values and philosophy (Temple, 2010).

In many Black spiritual traditions and cosmological ontologies, symbols and ritual are very significant, as they allow humans to access the spirit world and realm of revered and benevolent ancestors. Ritual is the gateway to connect and build reciprocal relations with ancestors and spiritual entities who can provide guidance, focus, and grounding to the human psyche (Somé and Somé, 1999). Whereas symbols are the doorway to ritual:

Symbols make us aware of the [Spirit World] ...where we draw our deepest connection and identity. Symbols...are messages pointing to a different and higher dimension, or consciousness. The part of the self that craves this reality will recognize it through symbols. (Somé and Somé, 1999, p.148).

This is my premise for using the Indigenous Akan concept of Sankofa, which reminds us of the importance of learning from the past. It is the guiding mantra employed as the research philosophy for the data collection process in reconstituted Indigenous to Indigenous analysis.

The Sankofa Theoretical Framework I have developed seeks to disrupt western linear concepts of temporal reality, time, and space, and seeks to remove this influence from my research and its methods. It is this aspect that is a point of distinction between the work of decolonisation and the project of Indigenisation. It connects the past to the present and the present to the future, and it speaks to the idea that the past, present, and future exist all together at the same time.

The decision to use the pre-colonial and Indigenous concept of Sankofa as the theoretical frame allowed me to conduct research that could reclaim parts of the past, present, and future in a way that is interconnected, di-unital, and concentric. Di-unital means something apart and united at the same time and concentric means two or more things with a common centre. This form of theorizing mirrors a planetary pattern thinking of ancient geometry that precedes many of the structures and organizing principle of the Indigenous Universe. It acknowledges genealogies and ancestrality in a way that extends beyond human dimensions and allows us to incorporate Indigenous spirituality and praxis. The wisdom and intelligence of Indigenous scientific knowledges enable scholarship that can create, structure, and order Indigenous worlds to navigate and voyage across oceans and skies.

The Sankofa Theoretical Framework diagram interconnects dimensions of space and cosmos, the place where our ancestors reside. It allows for a concept of reality that is consistently continuing to cultivate a cyclicity of the past within the present moment that is deeply rooted in the concerns of future generations. It speaks to an Indigenous understanding of the past and present as non-linear, and moreover as cyclical. My dear friend Dakota Camacho once eloquently described this way of knowing and being as “constellational . . . like drawing a point in the sky and then drawing another point and then imagining the spaces between them” (personal communication, August 8, 2019). For me, the Sankofa Theoretical Framework encapsulates a representation of cosmologies and constellations that our ancestors studied, researched, and created research questions and priorities for themselves and their future generations, such as myself.

Blakness in Sahul: An Intersection of Blackness and Indigeneity

My sociological theory on Blak Indigeneity as it operates in the global South draws out ontological intersections between Aboriginal, Zenadth Kesian, Melanesians and descendants of the global African diaspora. I use my own social location as an Afro-Indigenous Oceanic person to demonstrate two distinct things shared in common between these groups: their Blackness and their Indigeneity. Sahulian Blackness is premised on Blak Oceanic sovereignty that includes songlines back to Africa and all her connecting Indigenous diaspora. There is much evidence to support the claim that Oceanic Blackfullas and people of African descent have converged and engaged each other in historically significant ways. Importantly, in my own research

(Aboagye, 2018) and the scholarship of many other Black and Indigenous scholars, such as Foley (2003), Maynard (2005), Grieves (2018), and Shilliam (2015), tells us something about the intersections of race and Indigeneity as it operates distinctly within this regional context. Many Indigenist theorists, such as Carlson (2016), Martin (2008), and Nakata (2007), have taken to addressing and theorizing the nuanced dimensions of both Black and Indigenous constructions of identity in Australia. However, it is outside the scope of this paper to fully address these dimensions here.

What is important to demarcate in the Black Sahulian context is that both groups can identify with Blackness and share membership to the broader global Black world. However, this does not negate the issues of racialised conflict between the groups. Blackfullas have had to disrupt discursive moves and ideologies to erase Black Aboriginality from within the international concept of Blackness. While African diasporic Blacks continue to dismantle anti-blackness in Indigenous communities as well as deal with their own erasure from the global concept of Indigeneity. Many Blackfullas share an identification with the conceptual space of Blackness that is rooted in both politics and Black cultural ontology in much the same ways African diasporic peoples (who are Indigenous to elsewhere) do regardless of their location on the planet. I argue that the intersection of these two key concepts – Blackness and Indigeneity – are important epistemic drivers in the intellectual development of existing theory for Black Indigeneity in the global South. Writing from my own standpoint as an Afro-Indigenous scholar, my work attempts to further develop analysis of these intersections.

The intertwined concepts of Blackness and Indigeneity as they are understood by Black Indigenous people represent not just a racialized alliance or affiliation between people to be critically compared. It represents something much more profound and deep. It represents evidence of a rich mosaic, of a nuanced, complex, and esoteric trans-Indigenous paradigm, like many of our Indigenous knowledge constructs (found in song, dance, art, parable poetry and proverbs). Blackness as cultural conceptual notion is reclaimed and reimagined here as a voyage ship traveling constellations that stretch beyond the limitations of western knowing or categorizing. It transcends colonial constructs of time and space, ethnicity and race, instead moving Indigenous peoples from Africa to Oceania on a journey through the process of ancestral reclamation and healing from colonial epistemicide, its subsequent colonial conditioning and manifest intergenerational trauma.

As Fanon once forewarned, “Imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove from not only our lands but from our minds as well” (1961, p.46). However, what many Black and Indigenous social scientists recognise is that “theory does little to change colonial power relations, as Indigenous people still share a base experience of subjugation” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p.186). This subjugation ripples out and permeates almost every aspect of the internal world experienced by Indigenous people. This includes Indigenous scholars, educators, and others working within colonial and neo-colonial worlds. Therefore, the complex task given to Indigenous scholars straddling, or in-between this intersection is taking up the work of knowledge production that can achieve goals situated both within and outside of the academy. Gilchrist states that “despite centuries of subjugation, it is still possible to be Indigenous, to Indigenise and to enact profound instantiations of Indigenisation” (2020, p.249).

The key conceptual formations produced from my theorizing offer new synergetic possibilities drawing together aspects of critical race theory and Indigenous knowledge methodologies, as well as broader social science disciplines. Importantly, this theory might offer a knowledge project that speaks to the social justice priorities and project of emancipation for Black Indigenous people on our own terms and grounded in our own ways of knowing and producing knowledge. In my theory and research, I make offerings that might assist the communities to which these knowledges belong answer some of the bigger overarching questions of their realities and to map these answers out for themselves. To do the work of an Indigenous practitioner, whether in the academy or on the frontline, is to both 'Decolonise' and 'Indigenise'. That means we need to centre our efforts politically and concentrate our theories in a way that ensures the continued nourishment of our souls, cultural values, and spirituality.

Refuting racialisation and why White Sociology will not work for us

I now want to take a step back and address the field in which I sit or in which much knowledge about 'Blackness' emerges: sociology. The discipline of sociology has been foundational to the infrastructure of British imperial colonialism. Historically, the discursive realms of colonial race science have produced many violent forms of intellectual, epistemic imperialism against Black and Indigenous people and their systems of knowledge. The scholarship from disciplines within the social and human sciences have often constructed a version of [Black]/Indigenous reality with no [Black/] Indigenous input (Foley, 2003). Representations of the Black and Indigenous ontological experience have often imagined the Black or Indigenous "Other" through the lens, standpoint and social positioning of the western gaze.

For Black and Indigenous folk, disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology, and others have engineered theories and systems of race that produced ideologies and discourses that justify racialised differentiation (Hall, 2021). Consequently, racialised processes and social phenomena, such as the hierarchies of race, which often produce material realities of division and conflict among Black and Indigenous people, have emerged. The insistence on the racialisation and/or ethnicisation of Black and Indigenous people and their experiences have produced black/Indigenous binaries and categorical social hierarchies inside our communities that replicate colonial ideas constituted of racial difference. For example, the social phenomena of the 'hierarchies of Blackness' still operate in Australia today (Aboagye, 2018). The study of race scholarship solely on its own without the inclusion of deeper Indigenous knowledges epistemologies is limiting the work that is required for decolonising minds, bodies, and spirits. The imperative for deeper epistemologies that are culturally literate in Black/Indigenous communication forms is better positioned to analyse representations of Black and Indigenous ontological experiences and phenomena.

Sociology, like many other disciplines across the human and social sciences, have systematically relegated Black and Indigenous knowledges to the periphery. In the contemporary moment, many forms of epistemological violence enacted within the production of normative sociological knowledge continue to require new methods and interventions from non-white scholars, such as Moreton-Robinson (2004), Martin

(2008), Wilson (2008), Carlson (2016), Te punga Somerville (2012), and Potskin (2020). Sociology in Australia is overwhelmingly white and yet what is rarely addressed is the roots of colonialism that have been inherited and are intrinsic to this academic discipline. From its inception, sociology has been a vehicle for the legitimization of colonial logics, rationale, and ideology. Today, white colonial epistemologies continue to shape the social and human sciences. To make sociology work for Indigenous/Black peoples, we need to reimagine everything from the roots of the discipline all the way to its questions, such as what does it mean to know, who knows and how do they know? Moreton-Robinson's work, *The White Possessive: Property, Power and Indigenous Sovereignty* (2015) is foundational to deconstructing some of these questions.

The theory of critical Afro Indigeneity that I offer does some of this work in relation to the existing context of Australian sociology. However, it is also grounded in my own subject positioning and therefore embeds accountability to communities of knowers from which these knowledges emerge. This element is one example of the multitude and magnitude of Black intellectual interventions being sought after and developed by Black and Indigenous scholars and their communities globally.

The goal for the global Indigenous research movement is twofold. First, it seeks to truly work from a basis that is transformative to the lives and communities of Indigenous people, and second it aims to draw on theory that not only affirms our sovereignty as an act of reclamation, but to develop new theory that is centred from "within our own Indigenous world views, perspectives and for our own purposes" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.3). Furthermore, the idea is to do so in a way that is reconciled as being both academically sound and culturally rigorous.

Indigenous knowledge's theorists all over the world have established comprehensive and systematic approaches for analysing and researching Indigenous-centred phenomena from an Indigenous perspective. For example, leading activist intellectuals, including Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Nakata (2007), Te Punga Somerville (2012), Bessarab and Ng'Andu (2010), Chilisa (2012), Wilson (2008) and Martin (2008), have offered multi-perspectivist, Indigenist methodological approaches to complex Indigenous issues. Other Indigenous scholars globally are continuing in the footsteps of these scholarly forerunners and forging new agendas that seek to move toward restorative Indigenous epistemological practices that engender new theoretical developments. They do this as a form a liberatory praxis addressing the very rot of colonial epistemicide once described by Fanon (1961).

What is important is that these new methodological interventions, whether they be Indigenous to Sahul or Indigenous to Africa, engender transformative action in our internalised, psycho-social, spiritual, and cultural, as well as intellectual, realms. They must offer us a language of de-colonialism, while at the same time centring restoration, unlearning, and healing from the long period of colonial programming that is often left out of structural analysis. Sociology that is "divorced from dispossession... [of our lands and our spirits and mind]" as Watego (2020, conference presentation) puts it, is not the type of sociology that will work or be useful for us.

The critical Indigenous knowledge theory that sits at the intersection of critical race theory and other critical social sciences theory offers a small and revolutionary 'pocket' inside of academia. It has the potential to create safe spaces that restore Indigenous values of ancestrality genealogy, and healing—culturally and spiritually—from the harmful colonial conditioning stemming from our epistemicide, as well as denial of the Black spiritual ontological condition, which includes a reverence for the agency and spiritual disposition of our lands and non-human kin.

One of the forms through which I have been able to broker this 'pocket' within my own work is to engage in the development of Trans-Indigenous methodologies. Trans-Indigenous methodologies offer a useful vessel that brings into synergy Indigenous knowledge theory/interventions with decolonial/anti-colonial conceptual frameworks. The objective is to enable the development of methods that can produce outcomes and theories that offer a vehicle to reclaim sovereignty. They also remind us of what is already stored within the cellular memory, blood cells and spiritual disposition of our peoples, reinforcing that theorizing the ways in which we walk in the world is an important and transformative project. To build theories of our own existence is to remember the principle of Sankofa and the relational knowledge custodianship that we have to the land and to each other, and to know that every form of our Black Indigenous existence is connected to the universe, even in the academic theories we produce.

Trans-Indigenous methodologies to re-claim and restore relations

The Trans-Indigenous theoretical field is a project that seeks to privilege Indigenous-to-Indigenous relationships and connections, transcending the political geographies and borders of the conceptual notion of the (settler) nation state. Scholars such as Chadwick Allen have paved the way by proposing new methodologies for global Native literary studies based on focused comparisons of diverse texts, contexts, and traditions to foreground the richness of Indigenous self-representation and the complexity of Indigenous agency (Allen, 2012).

Trans-Indigenous approaches to research restructure concepts that racialized others often find themselves placed within by colonial theories/practices. Huang and colleagues (2012) describe ideas such as transcultural or trans-nationalism as problematic hierarchal demarcations of the centre and margin. Critical Trans-Indigenous interventions developed through Indigenous scholarship encourages scholars to "think Indigenous" and go beyond national, regional, and international boundaries. These are what Huang and colleagues describe as going to "alternative geographies" of the Indigenous world that encompass ancient networks and far-stretching coalitions of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous ideas, and evolving Indigenous cultures (2012, p.90).

The Trans-Indigenous paradigm arises from the melting pot of amalgamated epistemologies that come out of a long history of ancient intertwined relationships. Indigenous knowledge systems meet at different points of intersection and manifest from multiple ancestral stories, voyages, and histories that have occurred not only within Australia but throughout the world. Trans-Indigenous models for thinking, engaging, and using theory seek not only to repatriate and reclaim, they are also intended to revitalize misconceptions of Indigenous-to-Indigenous exchange, form

and narrative. Black and Indigenous relations have often been misconstrued because of the colonial epistemologies that have traditionally shaped and framed them within the human and social sciences.

The Trans-Indigenous lens offers a model that entails methods and approaches that seek to push forward, stretch out, advance, and transform. For example, the incorporation and inclusion of the Black Sahulian experience within the international field of Black Studies extends and deepens our lens and engagement with Indigenous cultural relational theory and praxis. Trans-Indigenous methods of inquiry “urge associations between the near and far, inside, and outside, human and non-human” (Huang et al., 2012. p3). It is a methodology that insists we “de-territorialize and re-territorialized [our thinking] ... and to privilege a planetary reach” (Huang et al., 2012, p.3). Phillip Curtin explains, “we must try even harder to balance the depth of our own specializations against a wider span of knowledge” (cited in Huang et al., 2012, p.3). In taking up Curtin’s call, my own research sought to recognise alternative Trans-Indigenous borders between Black and Indigenous Oceanic peoples. It articulates and draws out the links and intersections between Black cosmologies placing diverse Indigenous peoples in cosmic connection with reciprocal kinship bonds and ties.

I capture this idea in the conceptual development of the Black Relational Code of Ethics, explained in the next section. Importantly, Sankofa speaks to the relational cosmology of Black and Indigenous people that form the central points of interconnectedness that is ancestrally shared, understood, and continues between these two groups today and into tomorrow’s future.

Blak cosmologies as a relational codes of ethics

In this new section on praxis, I introduce the notion of Black Relational Codes of Ethics—an overarching concept of Black Indigenous relationality—and explain its role in my framework as an organising device for applying Trans-Indigenous methodological approaches.

What is important about the Black Relational Code of Ethics is that it captures the macro-level philosophical underpinnings of a global Black ontology, which I apply in my context. The theories used in my research are premised on a construction of Black universal relativism, which is an ontological system I see operating within the Black Sahulian experience. I have termed this the Black Relational Codes of Ethics. I argue Black relational forms engender Black protocols and principles that can resonate across multiple Indigenous Oceanic/ Black cultural ontologies. I argue that unpacking this Relational Code in a Black Sahulian constituency provides an appropriate theoretical device with which to reconstitute and analyse data about Indigenous-to-Indigenous exchange as it operates within a universal Indigenous ontological concept governed by Black spiritual cosmologies and/or lore.

The idea of relationality as it is applied through Indigenous epistemologies refers to the complex systems of relating and relations that connect (Indigenous) people, places, and entities culturally, spiritually and philosophically as it is concerned and described within the nature of Indigenous reality (ontology). In its application in my own research, I argue that interrelated roots of ancestral tradition, ritual, culture, and

cosmology have sustained and inspired vast generations of exchange, relational kin, practice and cultural connection between Afro-diasporic groups and Indigenous Oceanic cultures. I argue that deeper engagement with this phenomena should be grounded as a feature of Black Sahulian cultural ontology.

Trans-Indigenous connections between Black people can be traced back through the intergenerational collective memory of its descendants. An intergenerational memory that has been emerging and producing a di-unital consciousness of intra-Indigenous relations. This concept of intra-Indigenous relations is culturally rooted in a shared Indigenous ontological and epistemological reality and philosophy of existence. Black relational forms of praxis are nonlinear, intersectional, moving backwards and forwards, beyond and between Indigenous knowledge systems to make sense of things that transgress the intellect. They are rather felt in the body and in the spirit, and embodied in the many forms of Black Indigenous communication and pre-colonial literatures. For example, exploring the relational interplay between of two Indigenous drum languages, such as the Akan drum with that of the Zenadth Kesian drum. Putting both instruments in communication through Indigenist call and response represents non-human forms of Indigenous meaning-making praxis and communication. It also encapsulates how we might find ways to make new meaning from within cross alignments.

Conceptualizing an Afro-Indigenous Sankofric theory

Applying a Black Sahulian cultural ontological lens to my research data enabled me to develop my own Trans-Indigenous methods to answer research questions. I designed a mixed methods approach that is unique to my social location using the concept of Sankofa as a theoretical framework to describe it. In the following section, I will discuss some of the conceptual complexity Indigenous scholars broker in the design and intellectual reach of their theories and approaches.

To build a Sankofric theoretical framework I first considered the relationship between theory, methods and motives. Working from an Indigenous knowledges base, my own relationality to the subject matter is highlighted and positioned. Developing an organizational model to represent the amalgamation of the four distinct Indigenous knowledge traditions from which I am descended governed the design of culturally appropriate methods and informed the motives towards Black Oceanic Afro-Indigenous theory. What is particularly worth noting is the need to develop a methodology and associated methods that transcend traditional approaches within sociology or anthropology to 'studying racialised subjects', which is to simply compare and/or contrast two or many Indigenous groups. This model instead was designed as a capacious framing of research questions and concerns. It provided a foundation to bring together some of the many complex conjunctures between Indigenous Oceanic and African diasporic relationalities and situate them within an Indigenous epistemological and ontological framing. Given whiteness and the colonial roots in many traditional sociological methodologies, I needed to develop a methodology from the ground up – starting with my own roots. I needed to develop a methodological approach that was broad and vast in its conceptual reach.

I designed an organising model (Figure 2.) to represent the nexus between methods chosen, the motives for using them, and the cultural authority of my own ancestral

lineages (Akan, Erub Islander, Ni-Vanuatu and Kuku Yalanji heritage). The image or the structure of a triangle (Figure 2.) is a symbolic representation of the relationships between these elements. Underpinning the framework are ideas from Aboriginal Australia, Zenadth Kesian culture and history, Australian South Sea Islander history, the African diaspora in the Blak Pacific as well as both continental and domestic African studies.

The diagrammatic representation (Figure 2.) of the triangle represents the point of a spear head. A symbol that traditionally carries cultural significance for each of these groups. The intentional use of the triangle symbolises the point of a warrior's spear – a spear of change. Each element and quadrant within the triangle is distinct yet placed together in quite a specific, di-unital and intentional way. Di-unital meaning literally an undivided whole, something apart and united at the same time (Aboagye, 2022). Figure 2. represents the relationship between knowledge/theory, methods and motives. The triangle symbolises the point of a spear, which seeks to be a spear of change.

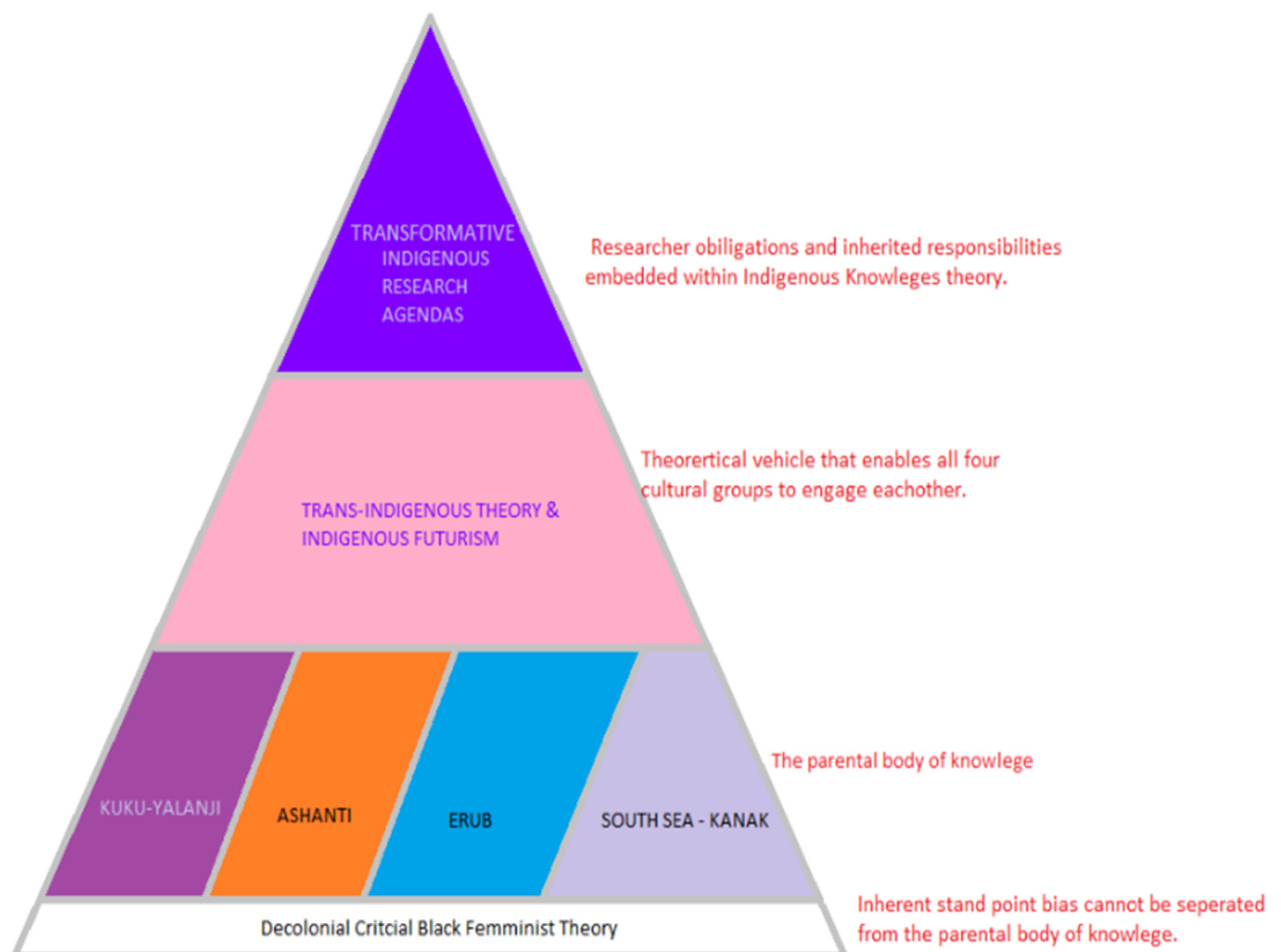


Figure 2. Spear of change

In the Blak Sahulian experience, culture is not linear but concentric and spherical. An Indigenist di-unital logic helps to explain what Dixon describes as “something can be a thing and something else at the same time (and in the same way) without

contradicting itself" (1977, p. 139). In the triangle structure, the distinct aspects of each section within the triangle meet in convergence, or move towards a common point of transgression, reinforcing the di-unital consciousness of Blak Indigenous logic. Dixon (1977, p. 122) argues African logic is 'di-unital', meaning two or more ways to understanding one whole. The Blak Di-unital logic helps us understand the dynamics of Indigenous spirituality and philosophy in a way that mirrors the cosmos. The many differing and distinct elements in their very juxtaposition become, at the same time, a common point of convergence.

Tier 1 represents significance of ancestral knowledges that fortify a solid foundation to perceive/receive Indigenous understandings of the universe and cosmos. As an Indigenous being embodying a racialised (cosmetically) Black and female-gendered body, these knowledges speak through the experiences of my distinct embodiment. Tier 2 represents the usefulness of Trans-Indigenous methods and approaches to propel and push forward Tier 3, which seeks to transform Blak/Indigenous realities to perform and carry out the cultural obligations and responsibilities that come with obtaining sacred knowledges to enhance communal goals and objectives.

The methods and theory used in this framework are unique to my social and cultural location. Importantly, they draw on my own ancestral knowledge systems, rituals, pre-colonial concepts, proverbs, traditions, and praxis. These knowledges guide the basis from which my research principles are derived to create theory and address research motives, as well as speaking to the tri-cultural heritage that I share an embodied relationality to/with. In the following section, I discuss the diagram (Figure 3.) that illustrates what emerged: the research themes and design principles. The themes (the past, present and future) each representing components of an Indigenist/ Decolonial/ Liberatory organising framework.

Principles of research design: Decolonial/Indigenist/Liberatory praxis

The Sankofric approach I used required me to consistently go back and retrieve as I designed the analytical frames for research, as Tuhiwai Smith suggests to “go back and revisit site by site” (1999, p.81). Sankofa provided the critical Indigenous cultural lens to Decolonise and Indigenise significant moments of Afro/Indigenous histories of encounter. The diagrammatic representation in Figure 3 illustrates an encapsulation of the thematic framework that emerged from this going back and retrieving. It offers a model to analyse Afro-Indigenous phenomena and encounters, emphasizing the multi-dimensional, multi-layered and intersectional paradigm of Blak Sahulian ontology and epistemology.

Afro-Indigenous scholarship can be considered a genre within the broader research umbrella of Indigenous knowledge theory, which is a wide and far-ranging theoretical field. From within this very broad space, I crafted elements of the Sankofa Framework to draw out specific nuances that hold cultural resonance and allow for a cross alignment between diverse Black Indigenous cultural groupings. To capture this, I have illustrated this process through three conceptual layers or themes (the past, present and future) each representing components of an Indigenist/Decolonial/Liberatory organising framework.

The Afro-Indigenous Sankofric paradigm is cyclical, inter-connected and relational. Each theme is interrelated and mirrors Indigenous cosmological temporalities:

- Theme 1: The Past aims to disrupt our past colonial histories (to Decolonise)
- Theme 2: The Present seeks to divest from our present colonial condition by returning to Indigenous ways of being and knowing (to Indigenise)
- Theme 3: The Future considers ways to reconstruct (to liberate/transform) Blak Indigenous futurities

The Sankofa Theoretical Framework (Figure 3.) represents the deductive analysis protocol developed for categorizing various Indigenous elements – what might be called data or texts – I was looking for. Furthermore, it represents their epistemological base. Moreover, knowing this helped me to draw meaning from these entities. The Sankofa Theoretical Framework diagram is a fluid protocol that can be adapted as it develops. It demonstrates the interconnected relationships between Black theories, as well as the relational nexus across the three intersecting themes that enfold into each other through a cyclical praxis.

I selected and examined data using these three organising themes (past, present, future). These themes later became principles: to Decolonise (our past), Indigenise (our present) and Reconstruct (our futures). This helped guide my analysis on the interplay between Indigenous memory work, Afro Indigenous literature, genealogies, discourses, media, oral histories, and the reading between the lines of early explorers and settler-colonisers’ diaries as well as anthropological and/or archaeological work. For example, in my article titled *Australian Blackness: the African Diaspora and Afro/Indigenous Connections in the Global South* (2018), I apply this organising frame to case studies of prominent Afro/Indigenous historical encounters, such as those between convict John Black Caesar (African descent) and Bidjigal resistance warrior Pemulwuy.

The Sankofric Afro-Indigenous paradigm illustrated in figure 3. outlines the relationship between the key three thematic layers: past, present and future. It demonstrates the way in which these themes have influenced my conceptualization of a Decolonial/Indigenist/Liberatory praxis. It provides a culturally sound, psycho-social and Bla(c)k spiritual methodological framework. Each of the parts contain elements of precolonial concepts, practices, ideologies, Indigenous theories, and conceptual languages that have been aligned and cross-read together. The result of this is that, collectively, they offer [me] tools to interpret, explain, re-focus and reconstitute case studies of Afro-Indigenous encounters from within a Black Sahulian lens.

In conclusion, the Decolonial, Indigenist and liberatory model of Sankofa offers a set of interpretative practices that hopes to move forward a dialogue to restore deep relations between Black and Indigenous people. It builds upon Shilliam's "decolonial science of deep relations" that is grounded in Blak ancient forms and Indigenous cosmologies. For in the interior lives of Black/Indigenous people everywhere, a "relationality exists underneath the wounds of coloniality, a cutting logic that seeks to – but on the whole never quite manages to – segregate peoples from their lands, their pasts, their ancestors and spirits" (2015, p.13). Something the Western world is longing to remember.

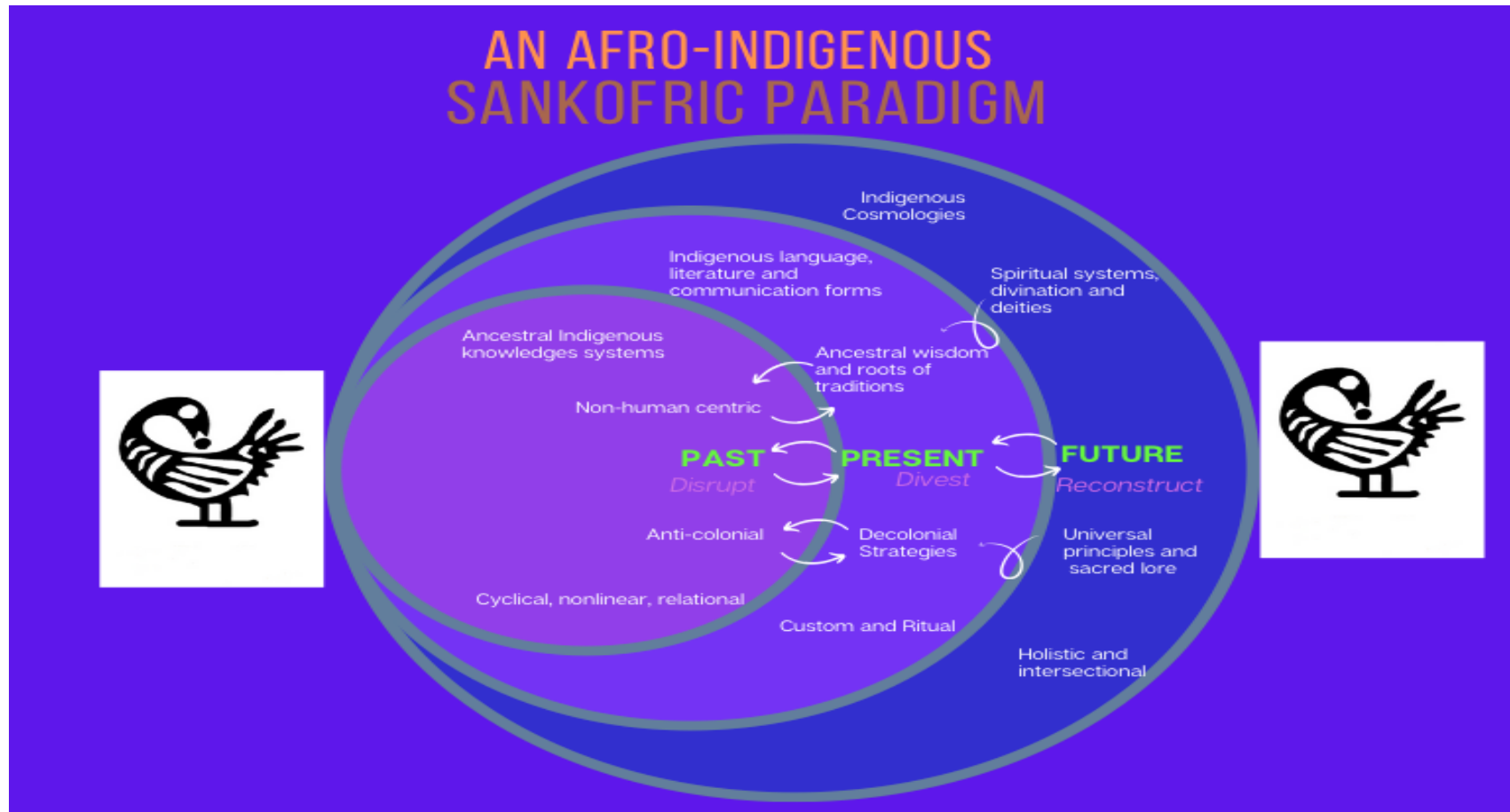


Figure 3. Organising Themes and Principles for Afro-Indigenous Sankofric Research

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