

# Respectful Authorship and Design

Indigenous Peoples, their Knowledges,  
Experiences and Relationships

Djinjama

Cultural Design  
& Research

Danièle Hromek, 2022

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Furthermore, it is protected by Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP)\* rights in which ICIP refers to Indigenous peoples' heritage and culture (where heritage includes all aspects of cultural practices, traditional knowledge, and resources and knowledge systems developed by Indigenous people as part of their Indigenous identity) and is collective in that ICIP originates from a clan group and is passed on from generation to generation. As such it is not ownable by anyone other than the Indigenous peoples and communities from which it originates.

This publication aims to work respectfully with all peoples and protect the rights of Country and all entities of Country.

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*I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and abroad, and their continuing connection to culture, community, land, sea and sky. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and give thanks for their continued sharing of culture. I acknowledge all First Peoples who have strived to retain and reclaim their cultures, languages, identities, and connections to Country despite colonisation. I recognise the valuable contribution made by Indigenous peoples to community, narratives, spaces and places.*

*Maroubra Scrub*



# Respectful Authorship and Design

Indigenous Peoples, their Knowledges, Experiences and Relationships

Aboriginal peoples' knowledges, relationships and experiences have been developed over thousands of generations and are sustained despite the impacts of colonisation. Like an engineer is an expert in engineering concerns or a medical doctor in health, an Aboriginal Knowledge Holder is an authority in cultural matters. Their knowledge has not only been inherited from ancestors but also maintained and developed within their own lifetime. Knowledges are often pragmatic and experiential, and learned through doing, observing and being present. They require vast memory and repeat actions over long periods to ensure they are conserved and responsibly shared. Unlike in western knowledge systems, Indigenous Knowledges are not accessible to all; specific people have the right and role of passing knowledge on. Indigenous Knowledges are no less valuable because they were not learned in formal educational systems.

*By Danièle Hromek, a Budawang woman of the Yuin nation*

Colonial processes and governments have historically appropriated Indigenous peoples' lands, lives, knowledges, identities, narratives and even children. In order to avoid the further appropriation of Indigenous voices and cultural heritage, there are some key guidelines to ensure respectful authorship and design regarding Indigenous lives and knowledge systems.

## Non-Indigenous writers, researchers, authors and designers should not;

- Write or create designs about Indigenous cultures, experiences, worldviews, values, lives, stories and relationships.
- Address creation stories, the Dreaming and Country, Law or events prior to colonisation.
- Appropriate Indigenous Knowledges, cultural heritage or lore (Heiss 2002; McDonald 1997).

An Aboriginal person should be the voice, author and designer about these viewpoints. Furthermore, when citing or editing Indigenous text, Shawn Wilson argues that Indigenous researchers and authors have the responsibility to 'place themselves and their work firmly in a relational context'. He continues, 'We cannot be separated from our work, nor should our writing be separated from ourselves (i.e., we must write in the first person rather than the third). Our own relationships with our environment, families, ancestors, ideas, and the cosmos around us shape who we are and how we will conduct our research' (Wilson 2007, p. 194). Therefore, in order to ensure authenticity and that the meaning in Indigenous peoples' work is not misconstrued, the Indigenous voice must be heard and privileged in regard to the above topics.

Heiss, A 2002, 'Writing about Indigenous Australia—Some issues to consider and protocols to follow: a discussion paper', *Wiradjuri, Southerly*, vol. 62, no. 2 (Summer), pp. 197-206.

McDonald, W 1997, 'Tricky Business: Whites on black territory', *Australian Author*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 11-14.

Wilson, S 2007, 'Guest Editorial: What is an Indigenist Research Paradigm?', Opaskwayak Cree, *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 193-195.

## Non-Indigenous writers, researchers, authors and designers can;

- Write or create designs about the above viewpoints if an Indigenous person or community asked them to write or design on their behalf and have been provided ample opportunities for corrections, edits and changes as well as full acknowledgement of the source.
- Write or design a co-authored piece guided by an Indigenous person or group.
- Transcribe an Indigenous person's oral history if requested.
- Write or create designs about their own experiences with Indigenous people or communities from their own perspectives.
- Write or create designs about shared events, politics or histories that have occurred since colonisation (Heiss 2002; McDonald 1997).

Indigenous peoples did not colonise themselves; colonisation is a shared story with enduring impacts and traumas. Therefore, non-Indigenous allies can support Indigenous peoples by 'taking on the burden' of having to address colonisation and subsequent consequences; this is a way of assuming some responsibility and recognising the past (Heiss 2002).

Heiss, A 2002, 'Writing about Indigenous Australia—Some issues to consider and protocols to follow: a discussion paper', Wiradjuri, *Southerly*, vol. 62, no. 2 (Summer), pp. 197-206.

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**While writing or creating designs about Indigenous content non-Indigenous writers, researchers, authors and designers should consider;**

- Do I have permission to write or design this?
- Why am I writing or designing it? What are my intentions? What am I gaining?
- Do I have direct experience of or knowledge about this?
- Which community or person am I writing or designing on behalf of? How am I maintaining that relationship?
- Have I followed correct protocols, for instance, regarding consultation and benefit sharing?
- Could an Indigenous person write or design this?
- Am I taking an opportunity from an Indigenous person? Is there a more appropriate voice I should be privileging?
- Have I acknowledged those whose work I relied on? Have I shared the benefits of this work with them?
- Projects are richer when Indigenous voices are heard within them, thus benefits must be shared in regard to cultural knowledge in projects. All who wish to engage with Indigenous peoples and their knowledges, experiences and relationships must have an understanding of protocols, Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (see Janke 2009), as well as appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches. It is highly recommended they also have developed and maintained their own relationships with Indigenous people, communities and Country in order they speak from experience.

Janke, T 2009, More Than Words—Writing, Indigenous Culture & Copyright in Australia, Meriam and Wuthathi, Australian Society of Authors.

