Prologue

This book has three main aims. The first is to set side by side the ethics of the Euro-Western research paradigm and the ethics, or axiology, of the Indigenous research paradigm. The second is to demonstrate that research ethics does not exist in isolation but is linked with other forms of ethics, such as individual, social, institutional, professional and political ethics. The third is to raise awareness of the need for good ethical research practice at all stages of the research process.

The intention of the first aim is not to compare the two paradigms with a view to concluding that one is better than the other. Nor is it to suggest that Indigenous research needs to be compared with Euro-Western research, or to attempt to integrate the two paradigms. The Indigenous paradigm is mature and fully formed; it stands alone. Also, while there are some similarities of method and ethics, the paradigms are based on fundamentally different types of knowledge (Kovach, 2009: 31). ‘Research ethics’ is not a single or a universal approach in either paradigm, but a diverse collection of theories and practices (Ball and Janyst, 2008: 48). Indeed, research practice that may be ethical in one context, such as academia, may be harmful in another, such as a specific community (Brunger and Wall, 2016: 1865).

Yet it is worth learning about, and reflecting on, other ways of being with research than our own. Learning about other peoples’ approaches to research and ethics can be limited by language and translation problems but, even so, I argue that this can expand researchers’ options and improve our ethical practice. The benefit of drawing on both paradigms is recognised by some Indigenous researchers (Kovach, 2009: 13; Chilisa, 2012: 7; Okalik, 2013: 243; Wehipeihana et al, 2013: 283; Lambert, 2014: 8). Elder Albert Marshall, of the Mi’kmaw Nation, has named this ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ (see this book’s companion website: http://policypress.co.uk/resources/kara-ethics). It ‘encourages that we learn to see from one eye with the best in the Indigenous ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the best in the Western (or mainstream) ways of knowing ... and, moreover, that we learn to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all’ (Bartlett et al, 2015: 283). While I am primarily writing for Euro-Western readers, I hope my work will enable researchers working in either paradigm to reflect on their ethical stance in the light of a wider range of ethical perspectives than they might otherwise consider.

The intention of the second aim is to help to enrich understandings and discussions of research ethics. In the Euro-Western literature, research ethics is commonly treated as though it exists in isolation. This is not, and cannot be, true. This book demonstrates that research ethics is unavoidably linked with other forms of ethics such as individual, social, professional, institutional and political ethics. I argue that we will be better able to act ethically as researchers if we are more aware of these links and their influences on our behaviour.
The intention of the third aim is to help Euro-Western researchers to understand that ethical considerations need to underpin research throughout. A variety of scholarly exercises have shown that the current Euro-Western system of research ethics governance, incorporating formal ethical approval, is primarily designed to protect institutions from risk (Dingwall, 2016: 27). As a result, this system focuses almost entirely on the data-gathering phase of research. The system also encourages researchers to see ethics as a discrete bureaucratic process, separate from research itself, rather than as a series of principles for continuous application. Furthermore, not all research is subject to formal governance or approval. I argue that researchers in all fields need to develop ethical knowledge and skills, to enable them to design and conduct research ethically and to manage effectively when inevitable unforeseen ethical difficulties arise.

Writers also need to be mindful of ethics. By the end of June 2016 I had done over a year’s preparation for this book and was almost ready to start writing. At that stage the book was focused on the second and third aims alone. On 6 July 2016 I attended a seminar on post-colonial and Indigenous research methods at the Research Methods Festival in Bath, England. The seminar was convened by Professor Rosalind Edwards, from the University of Southampton, UK. There were three presentations: from Professor Bagele Chilisa (University of Botswana, Africa), Professor Helen Moewaka Barnes (Massey University, New Zealand) and Dr Deborah McGregor (York University, Canada). All three presenters are Indigenous researchers and their words helped me to realise that I needed to reconfigure part of my own work. I had understood, from previous reading, that decolonising methodologies constituted a transformative research framework akin to feminist, activist and participatory methodologies. I learned from Professors Chilisa and Barnes and Dr McGregor that Indigenous researchers regard Indigenous methods, which include decolonising methodologies, as belonging to a paradigm of their own. This insight led me to rethink this entire book, and to do a further year of preparation before I began to write.

This work offers a response to calls from the Indigenous research methods literature for Euro-Western scholars to include that literature on a par with our own research methods literature (Kovach, 2009: 13, 25; Graham Smith in Kovach, 2009: 88–9; Chilisa, 2012: 56; Bartlett et al, 2015: 280). After the seminar in Bath opened my eyes to the need for this, I collected and read Indigenous research methods and other Indigenous literature. There is an ethical danger here: of being extractive, that is, taking information from Indigenous communities and using it for my own benefit, as countless Euro-Western researchers have done before me (Denzin, 2005: 935; Gaudry, 2015: 244–5). I have tried to guard against this by reading Indigenous literature carefully and representing it respectfully.

I also conducted 18 in-depth interviews with researchers around the world who had a particular interest in research ethics. I offered anonymity to enable them to speak more freely about their experiences in connection with research ethics, and indeed most interviewees were very candid. Towards the end of my interviewing process one interviewee stated a preference for being named,
although that person did accept anonymity when I explained that the others
had all been glad of anonymity. I found interviewees from my own networks,
from the networks of my networks and through social media. I did not try to
interview researchers who identify as Indigenous. This was partly because I
thought it would be extractive, and partly because most Indigenous researchers,
understandably, prefer to support other Indigenous researchers in their struggle for
self-determination than to assist privileged Euro-Western researchers. I was able
to interview some Euro-Western researchers who work closely with Indigenous
communities. Quotes from the interviews are used in this book to illustrate and
develop points drawn from the literature and made in the text.

While writing the book I learned through social media that some Indigenous
people think it is disrespectful of me even to address this topic. Also, I am sure
that there are some Euro-Western people, particularly racist white people, who
think this is a stupid and pointless endeavour. It certainly would be pointless if
I failed to acknowledge that Euro-Western research has helped to create and
perpetuate horrendous injustices affecting Indigenous peoples around the world
(Wilson, 2008: 13; Kovach, 2009: 158; Millett, 2013: 318–19; Smith, 2013:
91–2; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014: 231; Castleden et al, 2015: 1; Strega and Brown,
2015: 6; Rix et al, 2018: 7).

Today, many Euro-Western researchers are still unaware of these injustices (Ball
and Janyst, 2008: 34). Also, much of Euro-Western research literature completely
ignores the Indigenous paradigm (Brearley and Hamm, 2009: 38). Where Euro-
Western researchers do hear of Indigenous research, they may believe it is inferior
this view, having internalised it from Euro-Western teachers (Potts and Brown,
2015: 38). Euro-Western researchers who study Indigenous peoples often start
from a ‘deficit model’, focusing on what they see as the problems, rather than
looking at Indigenous peoples’ strengths and their positive contributions to the
world (Ball and Janyst, 2008: 37; Chilisa, 2012: 175; García et al, 2013: 368;
Sherwood, 2013: 204). There is a depressingly long history of Euro-Western
people researching Indigenous people around the world in ways that conveyed no
benefit to the Indigenous peoples and all benefit to the Euro-Western researchers
(Liamputtong, 2010: 3; Rix et al, 2018: 6–7). Also, Euro-Western research ethics
often focuses inward, on the processes of the research project itself, rather than
outward, on the impact the research could have on structural inequalities (Millett,
2013: 326; Smith, 2013: 96). Overall, this constitutes colonisation in practice: not
as Euro-Western people commonly think of it, that is, in terms of moving into
other physical territories, but colonisation as ‘an attempt by the Western world
to order the whole world according to Western standards’ (Chilisa, 2012: 81).

In view of all this, the Indigenous research methods literature is far more
respectful towards Euro-Western researchers and our methods than we deserve.
Despite this, reading Indigenous research literature from a Euro-Western
standpoint is uncomfortable, because it gently but inexorably makes visible
colonially assembled structures that, if you read only Euro-Western literature, are invisible (Ascione, 2016: 168).

Here are two recent examples of that invisibility. First, an edited collection was published in the UK called Research and Policy in Ethnic Relations: Compromised Dynamics in a Neoliberal Era (Husband, 2016), which includes detailed accounts from Europe and Australia. The back cover states that one of the book’s aims is to ‘kick-start a wider debate about the political context of current research and policy’. Yet this book makes no mention of Indigenous peoples, and mentions colonialism only occasionally, in passing. Second, in the same year a sole-authored collection of ‘brief essays on the things that matter’, by the Australian philosopher and ethicist Peter Singer, was published in Australia and the US. Singer’s book, Ethics in the Real World, has a comprehensive index which does not include the words Indigenous, Aboriginal, Torres Strait, native American, First Nation, Indian, colonial or post-colonial. There are eight essays on the rights of animals, but none on the rights of Indigenous peoples. One essay does address racism, and the author acknowledges that he learned the key fact on which the essay is based from his Black students in America (Singer, 2016: 254). Singer speaks of Australians as though they are one homogeneous group, saying ‘We truly are lucky to be Australians’ (Singer, 2016: 168) without any acknowledgement that some Australians are very much ‘luckier’ than others.

These kinds of omissions are not exceptional; they are the norm in Euro-Western research and ethics literature. This is colonialist privilege in action (Wilson, 2008: 44). It is probably mostly unintentional that Euro-Western literature serves to reaffirm colonialism (Ascione, 2016: 169), but being unintentional does not make it acceptable. I now find it astonishing that so many really clever Euro-Western people can completely ignore these issues, even though I largely did so myself until July 2016.

Gennaro Ascione is one of the few white Euro-Western scholars engaging with colonialist privilege. He identifies the links between research methods and ‘the historically determined relationship between power and culture’, and suggests that ‘thinking the global’ is aligned with ‘the political and theoretical problem of how to think the colonial’ (Ascione, 2016: 171). I would argue that this applies equally to research ethics. To be truly ethical, among other things Euro-Western scholars have to acknowledge colonialism, its injustices and the resulting benefits we still accrue today.

I have learned a great deal from the words of Indigenous researchers. This prologue itself was inspired by Indigenous scholars Graham Smith and Margaret Kovach (Kovach, 2009: 3). Although I have learned a lot, I am not, and never will be, an ‘expert’ on Indigenous matters or Indigenous research. I have not used, and would not try to use, Indigenous methods in my own research. Most of my learning about Indigenous research methods has come from books, journal articles and the internet. In writing this book, I tried to work as ethically as possible with all the literature I used in the process: to acknowledge, respect and honour the scholarship of all the authors and contributors. I aim to work within
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the ‘ethical space’ (Poole, 1972, cited in Ermine et al, 2004) that can be found in the conceptual hinterland between cultural divides (Ermine et al, 2004: 20). I am accountable for all that I have written. I am writing primarily for Euro-Western readers, although if any Indigenous people find this book useful I will be glad. I hope that my readers will take whatever they find of value in these pages and forgive my mistakes.