

# Strategic Narcissism: A Lived Experience of ‘Decolonising’, Inclusion of and ‘Collaborations’ with Indigenous Researchers

Heba Abd el Gawad

University College of London

**Abstract:** Based on my lived experience, the current decolonizing turn towards increasing the inclusion of and collaborations with indigenous researchers is characterized by strategic narcissism. Collaborations are shaped by wishful thinking, ignoring our lived experience and realities on the ground. While decolonizing is framed by Global North academic institutions as a moral project, it could be seen as empty, exploitative and extractive by indigenous researchers. In this short commentary, I reflect on recent ‘decolonial’ attempts to reform the practices and policies of inclusions of and collaborations with indigenous researchers based on my lived experience as an indigenous Egyptian heritage and museums researcher. I argue that the current promotion of Eurocentric perceptions of equity and ethics as universal is rooted in strategic narcissism. It serves the Global North in clearing its consciousness while forcing indigenous researchers into colonial assimilation and violence. I call for a shift towards empathy as an indigenous-centred approach to dismantling current recolonizing decolonial framing honouring the emotional tax and lived experience of indigenous researchers. Global North institutions and researchers are invited to self-reflect and question for whom are they doing this decolonizing work?

*[decolonisation, indigenous knowledge, indigenous methodologies, cultural heritage, indigenous collaborations]*

## Introduction: Framing Positionality

This brief reflection is triggered by my frustration with how the current decolonization of indigenous collaborations is rooted in strategic narcissism, a tendency to define the world only in relation to the West. On the one hand, inclusion, equity and ethics and their subsequent collaboration practices are promoted as a moral project being gifted to the Global Majority. However, in being presented as universal norms, they ignore how their meaning and applicability vary from one culture to another. Perceived as universal, these values can only perpetuate existing imbalanced power relations. On the other hand, panels, workshops and conferences, usually based in the Global North, debate introducing new decolonial theoretical frameworks and methods. In doing so, they ignore centuries of the Global Majority’s indigenous researchers’ anticolonial activism and knowledge produced on the basis of their first-hand lived experience. However, entire careers and research grants are currently being built off writing about inequalities and the victims of colonialism by the privileged dominant voices who have never experienced any of them (Musila 2019). Privilege is invisible to the privileged.

How can we speak of ethical collaborations if partners and landscapes of knowledge are unequal? To what extent are the voices of indigenous researchers being heard and acted upon beyond boosting collaborations through co-authorship? Is the emotional tax experienced by indigenous researchers being acknowledged? And if so, are they being invited to disclose their emotional battles openly and transparently in protected safe spaces? What is the duty of care and protection afforded to indigenous researchers, given that they are exposed to and seek to dismantle colonial institutions and mind-sets? Who should be carrying the heavier weight of confronting colonial practices within academic research fields?

While these questions seem obvious, they remain unanswered, even though they are central to any attempt to build meaningful collaborations between indigenous and non-indigenous researchers. Two contributing problems could be identified here. First, non-indigenous researchers could be unconscious of how colonizing mind-sets can exist within themselves and not just the institutions within which they operate (Krusz et al. 2020). An example from the field of Middle East and North African (MENA) heritage and museum studies is denying MENA communities indigenous status. This demonstrates how research practices and policies still operate through colonial typologies of race and ethnicity. MENA communities are not considered indigenous, as colonial genealogical descent remain the sole legitimator of community relationships with heritage (Abd el Gawad forthcoming). MENA communities are thus labelled as locals. They are perceived as a contemporary community settled within local proximity to the tangible heritage. The connection between them and ancient communities is one of shared geography rather than a shared spatial, emotional or socio-political lived experience.

While I self-identify as indigenous, I am not classified as such by the rigid disciplinary typologies rooted in colonialism. This continued use of colonial racial labelling perpetuates racism and denies MENA communities the right to colonial reconciliation and repair. This is evident in the exclusion of MENA heritage and its contemporary indigenous communities from current repatriation and decolonization debates, the omission of North African collections from the applauded Sarr-Savoy repatriation report being a case in point (Sarr and Savoy 2018).

Second, indigenous communities are still seen as a homogenous collective. This is particularly harming for indigenous communities of practice, as their professional privilege and responsibilities afford them a closer and purposefully different status and attitude towards researching their culture (Weber-Pillwax 2001). Although the challenges of inequality and discrimination are shared, their effects may be felt differently between different indigenous sub-groups. Indigenous researchers who act as mediators between Global North research culture and their indigenous communities are usually at the receiving end of indigenous and non-indigenous passive micro-aggressions. They battle on the research field and internally as they struggle to maintain a balance between safeguarding their communities from extraction and exploitation and having to

deliver impact indicators to Eurocentric research grants (Abd el Gawad forthcoming). Indigenous researchers pay the highest emotional tax within the frameworks of these collaboration projects.

This is not to suggest that we need to establish a struggle barometer among indigenous communities to measure who suffers the most, but to highlight the varying positioning within indigenous communities. Some individual groups, given their specialization and role within the indigenous collective, are assigned a more line-of-fire position than others within current Global North and indigenous researchers' collaboration frameworks. Yet rarely are indigenous researchers' first-hand experiences of the violence of current collaboration structures heard or taken into consideration (Kalinga 2019). Their voices only seem to matter when the need arises to tick the indigenous box, whether on a research grant or on a faculty ethics, diversity and inclusion strategy.

In this piece, I reflect on my frustrations and fatigue with the current decolonial turn by using my lived experience as an indigenous researcher in heritage and museum studies. In writing this, I recognize and build on the activism conducted over the past five years in the field of museums and heritage studies by fellow indigenous and people of colour (PoC) collectives such as the PoC Museum Network Museum detox in the UK, and writers, curators, artists and activists such as Mirjam Brusius, Sara N. Ahmed, Sumaya Kassim, Sylvie Njobati, Mahret Ifeoma Kupka, or Nana Oforiatta Ayim (2023).

I attempt to challenge the Eurocentric perceptions of academic objectivity and rigour by asserting the subjectivity of how I see current decolonial efforts towards indigenous collaborations. Objectivity establishes a distance between the researcher and the researched based on the notion of how neutrality on a subject is the most balanced way to determine its facts. Within these collaborations, however, I am both the researcher and the researched. Academic research has never been neutral towards me, my culture, or community. I cannot and should not separate what I do from who I am. My lived experience is a first-hand testimony to the colonial violence and marginalization of indigenous researchers and its traumatizing scars. My daily face-to-face encounters with colonialism in the research field, digital and physical lecture theatres, academic publications, museums, or border controls are not intellectual concepts which can be framed or theorized: they are discriminatory injustices that require corrective action and reconciliation.

Over past few years, I have developed 'decolonial fatigue'. It is exhausting to witness how everyone seems to have an opinion on who we are, what should happen to us and what can bring us justice as indigenous researchers without meaningfully including us. I have been to digital and physical rooms where far more non-indigenous researchers were present discussing indigenous collaborations and its best practices. This is a form of colonial violence. This piece attempts to challenge these practices by countering the biases of the current decolonial turn by centring my own lived experience as indigenous.

I will openly, yet sensitively, share what I think and how I feel regarding current decolonial approaches to collaborations with indigenous researchers. Arguments raised here cannot usually be cited, as they reflect my personal emotional, socio-political and cultural sentiments and professional observations as an indigenous researcher. My first-hand experience of the failures, challenges, but also opportunities of indigenous collaborations entail them as evidence.

I specialize in the colonial history of Egyptian heritage and museum studies and the amplification of Egyptian voices, views and validity in these histories. Over the past five years, I have been coordinating community and institutional collaborations funded by the Global North. I make this disclosure not to justify my positionality but to assert my deep knowledge of the roots of the current colonial system and how it impacted on the indigenous community. This knowledge, while empowering, is self-defeating, as I witness colonial racism being replicated in the name of universal ethics and equity. I equally acknowledge that I am a single member of a diverse indigenous community of practice within the wider indigenous Egyptian community. My gender, social status, socio-political and cultural biases shape how I see myself and the world around me. Opinions shared here are not neutral and should not be seen as representative of the lived experiences of all my fellow indigenous community of practice. While individual, my lived experience equally matters.

## The Strategic Narcissism of the Current Decolonizing Turn

For me as an indigenous heritage and museums researcher, the current decolonizing turn is characterized by what the field of International Relations and Foreign Affairs defines as 'Strategic Narcissism' (McMaster 2021). Strategic Narcissism means 'defining the world through and only in relation to Western eyes', and then to assume that courses of actions taken, based on these views, will lead to favourable outcomes. The current decolonial turn is, I argue, disconnected from realities on the ground, particularly when forging collaborations with indigenous researchers. It approaches indigenous communities and circumstances as homogenous, seeking 'universal decolonial' methodologies and theoretical frameworks to solve all colonial problems. This is done by passing off the Eurocentric values of equity and ethics as universal, thereby ignoring indigenous structures and psychologies of what society is and how it operates. It fails equally to distinguish the small groups and minorities that make up the collective indigenous community.

I will try and be specific and exemplify my argument based on my own field of museum and heritage studies. I am Egyptian; I self-define as indigenous. Yet, the authenticity and validity of my indigenous identity is contested by my immediate academic and research field and museum practices (Abd el Gawad and Stevenson 2023). These perceptions have their colonial roots but are also the product of inherited and persistent (un)consciously biased perceptions of race and ethnicity. Despite recent improvements

to the right to self-identification as indigenous (Shrinkal 2021), these remain framed by how the Global North divides communities and nation states. Within such a division, the region of the Middle East and North Africa is denied the right to indignity regarding the land on which it lives. It remains the imagined space of the Orient, as the museum galleries' panels across the Global North attest. Even today, as active calls to decolonize are sweeping Africa-related research fields, for example, North African archaeological practices and museum galleries remain immune from the current decolonial turn, given their colonial alienation as the Orient.

Repatriation is another current decolonizing museum hot spot where strategic narcissism is crystallized. Despite years of indigenous anticolonial activism, it is only now that the Global North has decided it is time to confront the colonial atrocities behind museums' collections, occasionally taking seriously requests made by indigenous communities (Abd el Gawad and Stevenson 2021). However, repatriation policies and practices are set by biased Eurocentric dominant organizations such as UNESCO (Reyes 2014). They are object-centred and might not always lead to bringing long overdue social justice to indigenous communities. In many nation states, and Egypt is a case in point, communities have no access to discussions and decisions over which objects should be repatriated, why, and what should happen after their return. Repatriation, as practised today, runs the risk of becoming a consciousness-clearing exercise through which the Global North can claim the moral high ground rather than an act of reparation. On the other hand, incorporating the views and voices of indigenous communities in the interpretation, management and decision-making process of their own heritage is still at the discretion of the museum.

For these reasons, I find the current decolonial turn an example of strategic narcissism in action. It is a preoccupation with the Global North's moral good project associated with neglect of the influence that the Global Majority should have over the future course of events. It still serves and is centred on Western institutions. This is particularly true for current approaches to collaborations with indigenous researchers and how they are increasingly becoming alienating as they fail to recognize the positionality and the emotional tax through and within which indigenous research operates.

To me, decolonizing and indigenous collaborations are increasingly becoming hot keywords, which feature heavily in academic and public discussion panels, editorials and journals across Global Majority-related studies linked to career advancement and securing research grants (Coetzee 2019). But keywords are not neutral. They are, in today's academic culture, an essential part of unlocking opportunities, building reputations and attracting funding. The open databases and search engines create a false sense of equal landscapes where choosing the hot keywords can guarantee equal visibility to all scholars and wider public accessibility contributing to inclusivity and open discussions. Yet, these keywords only map discussions taking place in rooms where discussants and attendees have no visa restrictions and excellent broadband. Moreover, search engines will only feature editorials and scholarship published in journals that are included in metrics. These are usually Global North-based, meaning that any

knowledge produced outside the time and place assigned by these Eurocentric metrics is irrelevant (Vanclay 2009). Access to these journals is also dependent on being able to cross the paywall boundary, a privilege that most Global Majority institutions and researchers cannot afford. These inequalities of accessibility make 'keywords' as a term and concept a suppressive tool ingraining injustices, rather than providing a solution to academic queries. A key can unlock a door, but this door between the North and the South is safeguarded through a paywall and metrics.

In this respect, most recent improvements remain superficial and encourage colonial assimilation. Growing calls to increase the representation of indigenous researchers in academic journals are a case in point. Increasing indigenous representation within Eurocentric frameworks of knowledge dissemination, rather than reforming structures of academic publication to be more open to indigenous modes of knowledge dissemination and languages, is colonial assimilation (cf. Egypt Exploration Society, n.d.). This conflict between intent and effect could be attributed to how, in my view, the current decolonial turn seeks feel-good, short-term fixes, rather than challenging the persistence of institutional and academic colonial violence and injustice through long-term indigenous-centred structural changes. Conducted superficially, decolonization becomes an exercise in tokenism. Discussions and decision-making surrounding these topics is, to a great extent, led and developed in Global North institutions and only heard when voiced by Western academics, given the current socio-political economy of academic enquiries. While the dominance of Global North institutions forms a direct correlation with the socio-political research economy, indigenous alternatives and the framing of these very same funds and resources are present.

In the same vein, heritage and museum studies' subject field journals do not support Egyptian Arabic typesetting. On most occasions, I am forced to make two choices: either omit any Egyptian Arabic wording from my academic publications or transliterate Egyptian Arabic into Roman script. But even when I accept the Romanization of Egyptian Arabic words, editors and reviewers are strict in asking me to conform to the Classical Arabic transliteration system, devised by nineteenth-century Orientalist academia (Elmgrab 2011). I am therefore denied the right to transliterate my own Egyptian Arabic dialect and forced to find a Classical Arabic alternative. Classical Arabic is a formal academic form of Arabic which I only use in formal settings and is alien to my perception of identity and self. Being forced to use alternatives to conform to academic publications' typesetting rules, which are usually set in the Global North and made universal, is another act of epistemic violence.

We, indigenous researchers, are then forced to conform to the traditional western mode of academic writing, which discriminates against our languages and ways of being. This is yet again another form of colonial assimilation. Decolonizing academic publishing should instead be concentrated on calling for openness to indigenous forms of the dissemination of knowledge.

Similarly, the recruitment processes of indigenous academics need to abandon the traditional western evaluation tools of publication lists and teaching statements as per-

formance markers and adopt indigenous evaluation frameworks, which are grounded in the caretaking of knowledge, community, or family and relational interactions and responsibilities regarding all things in nature, the spirit world and each other (Waapalaneekweew 2018). Not only will this deconstruct the biased power dynamic between the Western evaluator and the indigenous subject of evaluation, but it also has the potential to resolve discrepancies in the recruitment processes of marginalized groups within Euro-Western spheres, namely women.

For these reasons, decolonizing acts conducted within academic and research spaces today are, in my view, strategically narcissist, being rooted in epistemic vice with a self-referential view of the challenges and the solutions to be sought. Strategic narcissism produces policies and strategies based on flawed assumptions, wishful thinking and short-term approaches to long-term problems: 'Wishful thinking is thinking in which one's desires are more influential than logical or evidential considerations' (Cassam 2021). Most current collaborative projects with indigenous researchers can be characterized as 'wishful thinking'. While for Global North institutions collaborations with indigenous researchers are seen as a noble project fulfilling moral and ethical obligations, in most of these projects, which are funded by Western-European research councils, indigenous researchers are forced to conform to and comply with the institutional guidelines and laws of their colonisers (Sukarieh and Tannock 2019). The guidelines for the call for funding for the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council's partnerships with indigenous researchers encapsulates the wishful thinking of current decolonization turn (UKRI 2022).

While it offers a fluid self-identification to the indigenous, it strictly seeks indigenous co-investigators to be affiliated to an institution. This is due to the adoption of a Eurocentric definition of a researcher. A researcher within indigenous knowledge can be a fisherman, a hunter, a mudbrick builder, or a land surveyor. To put it simply, they are experts – within their own knowledge systems – in any form of inquiry related to their tangible and intangible surroundings and environment. They could have gained this knowledge through their elders, the land, the water or the classroom, and they can belong to any age group, including the young.

This example reveals how some current decolonial attempts to collaborate with indigenous researchers have more of wishful thinking about them than being meaningful. The failure here to use indigenous definitions of research(er) is the result of wishful thinking, in the form of the assumption that the flexible definition of indigenous used is, by itself, a corrective act. This ignores how eschewing the term to fit within Eurocentric categorizations of what counts as research defies the intention behind the inclusion. This could be attributed to how some current decolonial efforts are more a preoccupation of Western-European institutions themselves to perform a moral act rather than reflecting a meaningful desire to repair or reconcile. This is yet another trait of strategic narcissism.

This essential requirement, then, disqualifies most indigenous researchers in all fields. For example, based on these guidelines, none of the Egyptian archaeological excavators

who are the keepers of knowledge about the archaeological landscape are eligible to apply, despite the current risk of losing this indigenous knowledge forever, given the lack of local funds and the disinterest of the Egyptian state in documenting these practices.

On the other hand, the main suggested decolonizing foundation of collaborations with indigenous researchers is achieving equity. Despite being a highly moral value, within this setting equity is a 'brick wall' in respect of the rigid Western ways of knowing and relating to the world. Seeking equity within these collaborations is a form of strategic narcissism and delusional thinking. The inequalities between indigenous and non-indigenous researchers operate and intersect through all social, economic, political and cultural levels, rendering equity impossible. Most indigenous communities live in poor socio-economic conditions lacking infrastructure and access to health and public services. Moreover, stigmatized and discriminated against minorities lack the mobility and freedom of movement between international border controls (Maadad and Tight 2014). Some even lack the right to be issued with identity papers, thus denying them access to public services and confining them to a single territory. This is all in addition to the unequal distribution of wealth between North and South and the drastic difference in individuals' average incomes. To aim for equity with these ingrained inequalities is to discriminate against indigenous researchers' suffering and to discredit the injustices exercised upon them. Any claim of equity denies them the right to reparation and social justice.

Global North research grants are usually based upon deliverables and impact. A focus on deliverables denies indigenous communities their right to refuse (Simpson 2007; Simpson 2016). While indigenous researchers and communities may choose to participate in a certain research project, they should still retain the right to refuse to engage or expose certain topics that they do not want known or misrepresented by outsiders or that might cause harm. Research grants are usually short-term, with a rigid budget expenditure timeframe and the need to 'show' impact, both designed with the assumption that the parties are in agreement. While a failure to deliver is factored in, it will result in institutional and principal investigators being marked down, which risks their chances of securing future funds (Kalinga 2019). These time constraints in contracts and budget expenditure can make non-indigenous partners impatient to understand the various socio-political and cultural codes that govern indigenous communities.

Research grants are usually framed without meaningful (in)formal consultations with the multivocality of indigenous communities. International research grants usually operate backwards, as a group of researchers puts forward a proposal which has been designed without consulting with communities. Once awarded a grant, the project is taken to the Global Majority to be implemented without checking with local partners whether the project is in their interest or fulfils their needs. What is the intention behind these collaborations, then, if they do not recognize indigenous needs, local conditions and framings? Whom are these collaborations meant to serve?

## The Emotional Tax and the Invisible Labour of Indigenous Researchers

'Emotional tax' is the combination of feeling different from peers at work because of gender, race and/or ethnicity (Brassel et al. 2022) and being 'on one's guard' to protect against bias or unfair treatment, as well as the effect this has on an individual's health, well-being and ability to thrive at work (Travis and Thorpe-Moscoon 2018). An important aspect of 'emotional tax' is when indigenous researchers feel that they must be 'on their guard' to protect against racial and ethnic bias, as well as against extraction and exploitation (Brassel et al. 2022). When being part of a Global North-funded and -led research project within our indigenous communities, we are seen as the face of the Global North institution, which has to protect its interests and reputation, and equally, as the back support for our community, they have primarily to work in and for their interest. This adds its emotional toll to us, as well as an invisible workload in maintaining the community's trust and the hosting institution's reputation control.

## Empathy Framing for Collaborations with Indigenous Researchers

Current decolonial attempts to collaborate with indigenous researchers can thus be described as having the mind-set of 'seeing others as we see ourselves'. This mind-set corresponds to the act of understanding others as deserving of the same understanding and tolerance that we give to ourselves. In this respect, the values of equity and ethics are seen as integral to attempting collaborations with indigenous researchers by assuming they are universal. These assumptions of the universality of perceptions and values are problematic, as they fail to recognize Global North privileges and indigenous cultural, emotional and socio-political differences and inequalities. They put into stark light the wide gap between the often Eurocentric theoretical sophistication of scholarly calls for decolonization and the realities on the ground.

Empathy, on the other hand, taken to mean 'the ability to understand and share the feelings of another' and 'the ability to interpret signals of distress or pleasure with effortful control' (Boyer 2010:13), can help us recentre indigenous world views and lived experience in collaborative projects. The achievement of social justice and the dismantling of oppressive relations have often been linked in part with the development of empathy (Wain et al. 2016). Empathy can then be both a cognitive process – a conscious and deliberate attempt to understand how others experience the world – and an affective response to another, a feeling of connection with another's experience and an alignment of feelings (Yorke 2022).

The power of empathy lies in how it fosters connection, and its capacity to elicit emotions within audiences and to indicate to them that their interests and feelings

are considered. On the other hand, it can compel others to take decisive action and show their commitment, provoking emotional reactions and helping messages resonate (Yorke 2022:1).

Institutions and the academy are usually after quick fixes. They issue a call for consultations, usually short-term, and publish a report with a set of rigid and blunt inclusivity and diversity guidelines, which do not recognize differences or respond to individual needs and perceptions of the self. Rarely are such consultations run by a wider indigenous community group that extends beyond the academic sphere. Rather than a set of blunt institutional serving and protecting guidelines, a formula, empathy should be adopted as an ethos. In this respect, institutional and academic knowledge language, tone, mood and performance become vehicles with which to communicate empathy and build connections with people, signalling shared experiences, understandings and common purposes:

Through communications and actions, empathy offers a means by which to confer respect and dignity on others, showing a willingness to listen and understand, despite intense disagreement and animosity, thus creating opportunities and space for change and transformation. Expressions of empathy signal to domestic and foreign audiences a change in approach, and a desire to understand another (Yorke 2022:2).

How do you convince a population that has suffered extreme violence and conflict that they should try to understand their aggressor? Advocating empathy in such circumstances can sound naïve or callous. Intense emotions and trauma can make empathy hard to countenance, thus limiting people's willingness or capacity to use it. People may prefer direct action or retribution, rather than a cognitive process of exploring different perspectives. It therefore has to be managed with cultural sensitivity (Yorke 2022).

The ethics currently governing collaborative research projects involving indigenous academics are one-sided and remain set within a Eurocentric view of what ethics is and how it can be pursued (Coetzee 2019). This is because conditions set for partnerships are usually dictated by funding bodies and host institutions, which are mostly Global North-based given the current misdistribution of research funding.

For example, ethics as defined and practised within the current decolonizing turn remains Eurocentric. It assumes a homogenous world view of values and morals. For an interaction between two entities to be ethical, rejecting human suffering and exploitation, it must confront the world views and intentions of both entities. These world views and intentions are usually guided by the memories, values and interests of the past. When these sets of views and intentions transparently confront each other, an ethical space is constructed (Poole 1972:5). This ethical space offers an opportunity to be reflective about personal convictions and intentions regarding the 'other'. This confrontation of world views sets up the necessary conditions through which negotiations can take place to arrive at ethical interaction.

On the other hand, empathy has a stronger potential to develop meaningful partnerships with indigenous researchers that are grounded in social justice and inclusion

than what current Eurocentric ethical framing affords. Empathy demonstrates care, concern and understanding for indigenous researchers' life circumstances. There are three aspects to empathy: cognitive empathy, or engaging with the indigenous to understand their thoughts, emotions and perspectives; affective empathy, or sharing in or showing similarity to indigenous researchers' emotional states; and behavioural empathy, or actions that communicate and demonstrate a sense of empathy for employees. Below are some suggestions based on my lived experience of how empathy could be actively practised in collaborations with indigenous researchers.

### From Equity to Duty of Care

Rather than aiming for imagined equity, Global North institutions and researchers should be legally and morally bound to a duty of care towards indigenous researchers and communities. A duty of care is a legal and professional obligation to safeguard others while they are in your care, are using your services, or are exposed to your activities (Carroll et al. 2021). This means always acting in their best interests, not acting in a way that causes harm, and acting within your abilities without taking on anything that lies outside of your competence. While rooted in health-care services, the notion of a duty of care offers a resolution to recognizing and responding to the imbalanced power relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous researchers when entering collaborations.

A duty of care entails safeguarding indigenous researchers by responding to their needs, promoting their well-being in its wider sense, and ensuring they are kept safe from abuse. This can be achieved by adopting a holistic approach focused on emotional, physical, financial and social well-being, and therefore demonstrating a meaningful commitment to responding to the diverse needs of indigenous researchers. Emotional well-being could be met by ensuring indigenous researchers are receiving support for their well-being and mental health. Access to well-being and mental health within the Global Majority remain limited and expensive, in addition to the persistent cultural stigmas associated with seeking psychotherapy and mental health support. Similarly, health services in many Global Majority countries suffer from inadequate health insurance, unaffordable and unreliable private health services (cf. Rafeh et al. 2016). This could be mitigated by budgeting for indigenous researchers' health insurance and well-being support in funding applications, or it could be offered through the project's Global North host institutions. For financial well-being, non-indigenous researchers must guarantee indigenous researchers receive a dignified stipend, per diem, and have their service invoices redeemed in timely fashion. In many indigenous cultures, asking for or chasing money owed is culturally inappropriate. Indigenous calendar of festivities and events also need to be taken in consideration when designing projects' timeline and deliverables. Many indigenous researchers might have family-care responsibilities,

which involve them taking long-term leave. Flexibility in working hours should be afforded to indigenous researchers, given differences in work culture and infrastructure. For example, many Global Majority countries lack a digital infrastructure, which means that administration must operate through face-to-face visits to public offices, which are usually busy and understaffed. Long extra hours spent in fulfilling administrative tasks should be factored into indigenous researchers' stipends.

## **From Radical to Sensitive Transparency**

A central value for change within Western academia is radical transparency, through which practitioners reflect on their practices and their institutional history and its current practices. While radical transparency is effective within a Global North setting, with indigenous collaborations, sensitive transparency might be more culturally appropriate and empathetic. Sensitive transparency means being open and honest in a reflective process, while being sensitive to the cultural difference and acknowledging that these differences have an impact on practices and policies. This entails that non-indigenous researchers are self-aware regarding their own culture and positional power, including colonial contexts, that can serve to police or restrict the cultural norms or values of certain groups (Papps et al. 1996). An important example is decision-making within indigenous communities. Many indigenous cultures reach agreements by consensus rather than vote; the idea is to continue discussions until an agreement among all is reached. The right to vote or veto is culturally insensitive. Thus, a sensitive transparency research model will have to acknowledge this cultural difference and assign time and measures that can facilitate culturally sensitive discussions between the members of the indigenous group.

## **From Academic Peer-review to Community Peer-review**

Academic peer-review has been placed under critical lens recently, being labelled as flawed, slow, exploitive, and lacking in transparency (Hazen et al. 2016). Most importantly, it is seen as biased towards indigenous researchers, who struggle to make it through the review process in what are perceived to be internationally acclaimed journals. Yet, attempts to reform the review process need primarily to reflect on the need to devise and formalize community peer-review as an integral part of the review process (Liboiron et al. 2016). Communities affected by research need to be able to determine whether research may cause them harm. Communities have the right to both consent and refusal. Community peer-review could be achieved by having community conversations and sharing drafts in community meetings and analysing feedback for consent

and refusal. Community peer-review is premised on the idea that research can cause harm, and that those best able to judge this are the community members themselves rather than the researchers.

## From Research to Service

A core difference between indigenous and non-indigenous researchers is their calling, and not just their positionality. Most indigenous researchers engage in indigenous research for the explicit purpose of bringing benefits to their communities and their people, and they are usually prepared for such challenges. Yet, the challenges that some of us may not be well prepared to face are those associated with what seems to be recognized in the academy as 'acceptable' scholarly research, including definitions and descriptions from within a specific discipline. Community participatory research in some fields, such as Middle Eastern and North African archaeology, is still perceived as an add on process of 'engagement' rather than as acceptable research. Thus, our work will not translate into Research Excellence Frameworks, thus hampering our career progression opportunities. Indigenous intellectual work happens across multiple spaces and in multiple modes beyond North American and European peer-reviewed journals and monographs (Macharia 2015). Indigenous community work is as cutting edge and urgent as any research visible in the metrics and keyword measures of worth. It should count equally as research excellence.

## Final Reflections

Think of Others (Darwish and Shahin 2009)

As you fix your breakfast, think of others. Don't forget to feed the pigeons.

As you fight in your wars, think of others. Don't forget those who desperately demand peace.

As you pay your water bill, think of others who drink the clouds' rain.

As you return home, your home, think of others. Don't forget those who live in tents.

As you sleep and count planets, think of others. There are people without any shelter to sleep.

As you express yourself using all metaphorical expressions, think of others who lost their rights to speak.

As you think of others who are distant, think of yourself and say 'I wish I was a candle to fade away the darkness'.

This is a poem by indigenous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008). I grew up reading his anticolonial poetry to heal my feelings of inferiority and self-defeat. His powerful plea to think of others is an indigenous reminder of how we should be doing this decolonizing work and for whom. It is a reminder of our positionality and power as researchers of indigenous cultures and what we should be using them for.



Fig. 1 Returning the soul to the Egyptian character. A work in progress... Artwork by Hanaa el Degham 2013. Hanaa el Degham is an Egyptian activist, visual artist, and researcher in the history of art and societies and their relation to the present

## References

- Abd el-Gawad, Heba, and Alice Stevenson 2021: Egypt's Dispersed Heritage: Multi-directional Storytelling through Comic Art. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 21(1):121–145.
- Abd el-Gawad, Heba, and Alice Stevenson 2023: Egyptian Mummified Remains: Communities of Descent and Practice. In Biers, Trisha and Katie Clary eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Museums, Heritage and Death*. London: Routledge.
- Abd el-Gawad, Heba. Forthcoming. 'Those Who Tell their Stories Never Die': On Being an 'Indigenous' Egyptian Researcher in the Current Increasing 'Local' Inclusion Turn. In Blouin, Katherine and Ben Akrigg eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Classics, Colonialism, and Postcolonial Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Boyer, Wanda 2010: Empathy Development in Teacher Candidates. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 38:313–321. DOI: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10643-010-0419-8>, accessed October 20, 2023.
- Brassel, S., E. Shaffer, E., and D.J. Travis 2022: Emotional Tax and Work Teams: A View from Five Countries. *Catalyst*. <https://www.catalyst.org/reports/emotional-tax-teams/>, accessed October 20, 2023.
- Carroll, S.R., E. Herczog, M. Hudson, et al. 2021: Operationalizing the CARE and FAIR Principles for Indigenous Data Futures. *Sci Data* (8)108. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41597-021-00892-0>, accessed October 20, 2023.
- Cassam, Quassim 2021: H. R. McMaster, Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World. *Society* 58:439–443.
- Coetzee, Carli 2019: Ethical?! Collaboration?! Keywords for our Contradictory Times, *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 31(3):257–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2019.1635437>, accessed October 29, 2023.
- Darwish Mahmoud & Shahin Mohammad 2009: *Almond Blossoms and Beyond*. Northampton, M.A.: Interlink Books.
- Egypt Exploration Society (n.d.): *Mentoring for Egyptian and Sudanese Authors*. <https://www.ees.ac.uk/mentoring-for-egyptian-and-sudanese-authors-mesa>, accessed March 27, 2023.
- Elmgrab, R. A. 2011: Methods of Creating and Introducing New Terms in Arabic Contributions from English-Arabic Translation. *International Conference on Language Literature and Linguistics IPEDR* 26:491–500.
- Hazen, B. T., S.E. Fawcett, J. A. Ogden, C. W. Autry, R. G. Richey, and A.E. Ellinger 2016: Addressing a Broken Peer Review Process. *The International Journal of Logistics Management* 27(3):622–628.
- Krusz E, T. Davey, B. Wigginton, and N. Hall 2020: What Contributions, if Any, Can Non-Indigenous Researchers Offer Toward Decolonizing Health Research? *Qualitative Health Research* 30(2):205–216. doi:10.1177/1049732319861932, accessed October 20, 2023.
- Louie, D. 2019: Aligning Universities' Recruitment of Indigenous Academics with the Tools Used to Evaluate Scholarly Performance and Grant Tenure and Promotion. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de l'éducation*, 42(3)791–815.
- Liboiron, Max, Alex Zahara, and Ignace Schoot 2018: Community Peer Review: A Method to Bring Consent and Self-Determination into the Sciences. *Preprints* 2018060104. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints201806.0104.v1>, accessed October 20, 2023.
- Lynch, B. 2013: Reflective Debate, Radical Transparency and Trust in the Museum, *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 28(1):1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2012.754631>, accessed October 20, 2023.
- Macharia, K. 2015: *Visiting Africa: A Short Guide for Researchers*. <https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/visiting-africa-a-short-guide-for-researchers/>, accessed October 20, 2023.

- McMaster, H. R. 2021: *Battlegrounds: The Battle to Defend the Free World*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Maadad, N., and M. Tight eds. 2014: *Academic Mobility*. Bingley: Emerald.
- Musila, G. A. 2019: Against Collaboration – or the Native who Wanders off. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31:(3):286–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2019.1633283>, accessed October 20, 2023.
- Papps, E., and I. Ramsden 1996: Cultural Safety in Nursing: The New Zealand Experience. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care* 8(5):491–497.
- Poole, Roger 1972: *Towards Deep Subjectivity*. London: Allen Lane.
- Rafeh, N., Williams, J. and H. Nagwan 2011: *Egypt Household Health Expenditure and Utilization Survey 2009/2010*. USAID Egypt. <https://www.hfgproject.org/egypthousehold-health-expenditure-utilization-survey-2010/>, accessed October 20, 2023.
- Reyes, Victoria 2014: The Production of Cultural and Natural Wealth: An Examination of World Heritage Sites. *Poetics* 44:42–63.
- Sarr, F., and B. Savoy 2018: *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics*. Philippe Rey: Paris.
- Simpson, A. 2007: On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, ‘Voice’, and Colonial Citizenship. *Junctures* (9):67–80.
- Simpson, A. 2016: Consent’s Revenge. *Cultural Anthropology* 31(3):326–333.
- Sukarieh, M., and S. Tannock 2019: Subcontracting Academia: Alienation, Exploitation and Disillusionment in the UK Overseas Syrian Refugee Research Industry. *Antipode* 51(2): 664–680. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12502>, accessed October 20, 2023.
- Shrinkhal, R. 2021: ‘Indigenous Sovereignty’ and Right to Self-determination in International Law: A Critical Appraisal. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 17(1):71–82.
- Travis, J.D., and J. Thorpe-Moscoon 2018: Day-to-day Experiences of Emotional Tax among Women and Men of Color in the Workplace. *Catalyst* (15):1–28.
- UKRI/UK Research and Innovation 2022: *Research Partnerships with Indigenous Researchers*. <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/research-partnerships-with-indigenous-researchers/>, accessed July 5, 2023.
- Vanclay, Jerome 2009: Bias in the Journal Impact Factor. *Scientometrics* (78):3–12.
- Waapalaneekweew (Nicole R. Bowman-Farrell, Mohican/Lunaape) 2018: Looking Backward but Moving Forward: Honoring the Sacred and Asserting the Sovereign in Indigenous Evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation* 39(4):543–568.
- Wain, T., M. Sim, D. Bessarab, et al. 2016: Engaging Australian Aboriginal Narratives to Challenge Attitudes and Create Empathy in Health Care: A Methodological Perspective. *BMC Medical Education* (16):1–7.
- Weber-Pillwax, Cora 2001: Orality in Northern Cree Indigenous Worlds. *Canadian Journal of Native Education* (25):149–165.
- Yorke, C. 2023: Is Empathy a Strategic Imperative? A Review Essay, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 46:1082–1102.