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Stepping outside my perspective: An autoethnographic review of Indigenous literature in Walyalup/Fremantle, Western Australia

Abstract:
Autoethnographic processes are valuable for creative practitioners and researchers as they allow for an intensive analysis not only of the practice-led approach being undertaken, but of the practitioner's own personal and cultural impact on the artefact developed. I, as a white woman of migrant heritage, have undertaken a reflexive autoethnographic process during a review of Indigenous literature of the Walyalup/Fremantle area of Western Australia. This process required a deep, personal autoethnographic review of my own sociocultural context and biases, which resulted in key "epiphanies" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 276) that have informed the ongoing approach to my geocritical research and creative writing practices. The process of autoethnographic notetaking aided in the identification of epiphanies around the importance of language, the emotional response as a researcher, and the limitations of locational boundaries and available sources around the privileging of hegemonic perspectives. This article explores how an autoethnographic reflexive process strengthens place-based research, specifically in interactions with Indigenous texts as a non-Indigenous researcher.

Biographical note:
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Keywords:
Autoethnography, creative practice, Walyalup, Fremantle, Western Australia, Indigenous literature.

Introduction

I want to begin with an Acknowledgement of Country. This article was written on the unceded lands of the Nyoongar people of Beeliar boodja. I acknowledge their connection to the land, waters and culture, and wish to pay my respect to the Elders and storytellers, past, present and emerging.

This article reviews my autoethnographic process through which I learnt not only about the literature of Walyalup/Fremantle, but also about how my own socio-contextual framing can influence my role as a researcher, and ultimately as a writer. By undertaking a geocritical approach to the literature of Walyalup (the name of the land from the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation)/Fremantle (the colonial name given to the port city in 1829) I intended to maintain an objective stance as a researcher and literary theorist. However, no research is purely objective, and especially not when dealing with the topic of place, which is often deeply personal. As Dominique Hecq states, "[i]n order to *inform* the creative work and produce new knowledge, theory needs to resonate with the emotions as well as the intellect" (2013, p. 181). As a practice-led researcher/writer I intended to document the geocritical process and, as such, an autoethnographic reflexive practice appeared to be a good fit for practice-led research on creative writing. However, what I was not expecting was the degree to which such a process forced me to fully examine not only my practice, but myself as a writer and a researcher, both prior to and during the research process. It is this transferable knowledge that is the intention of this discussion: that to engage in place-based research in Australia, a researcher needs to begin with an honest autoethnographic review of their own perspectives and contexts.

This review was undertaken, along with the consequential notetaking processes and their reflexive review, within a larger geocritical project that intended to address the spatiality of place-based approaches to literary studies. The use of geocriticism as the methodology is due to the desire to focus on a geo-centred rather than ego-centred understanding of place (Westphal, 2011b, p. 113). I chose to begin the geocritical examination of the literature of Walyalup/Fremantle with an exploration of Indigenous texts, because the first stories of this land are Indigenous ones. I was aware of the vast wealth of oral storytelling traditions associated with Dreaming stories of the Nyoongar people, however, I did not believe I had any right to access these as part of a research project and instead focused upon publicly available published sources. Initially, I expected to find it difficult to locate written, published Indigenous texts; an expectation I admit came from my own prejudices and exposure to the sociocultural milieu of my own upbringing. To be frank, I expected little in the way of accessible materials, assuming that such stories were "sacred", private and not for "us" (white settlers), or that little value had been placed on the "Western" (connotatively used in place of right or correct) way of publishing stories. Please note that part of an autoethnographic process is to record real responses, regardless of how terrible or upsetting they are, or how far I have evolved from them or are now embarrassed by them. This was not a comfortable admission for any researcher, and one I do not believe I would have fully faced the limitations of if I had not pursued an autoethnographic process. This article explores how an autoethnographic reflexive process

strengthens place-based research, specifically in interactions with Indigenous texts as a non-Indigenous researcher.

Autoethnographic practice should be utilised *before* a researcher engages with geocriticism. However, it is necessary to establish the framing of my geocritical approach to understand some of the text selection decisions I discuss further in the article. Geocriticism is a relatively recent progression in spatiality studies, and I selected this process due to its focus on multiple sources when examining a real place. Based primarily on the works of Bertrand Westphal and Robert T. Tally, geocriticism proposes a focus on place as the referent: "thus the spatial referent is the basis for the analysis, not the author and his or her works" (Westphal, 2011b, p. 113). Westphal emphasises the value of exploring a place based on the literature about it rather than a review of specific writers. He argues that "the writer is always preceded by those who have fixed the referent" (Westphal, 2011b, p. 83). This concept of a place-focused approach is not uncommon in spatial theory, however, what geocriticism contributes to the field is a marrying of approaches. Much of Westphal's discussion aims to pull together the theories of Foucault, Bhabha, Bakhtin, and Lefebvre, to mobilise compatible methodologies (Westphal, 2011b, p. 121). Tally adds that the approach intends to utilise a spatiotemporal scheme; meaning geocriticism looks at real and imagined spaces across time in an effort to examine a geo-centred understanding of place (Westphal, 2011a, p. xiv; Tally Jr., 2011, p. 2). Tally (2013, p. 5) suggests that geocritical approaches offer valuable explorations of spatiality because they focus on space and places as historical locales with an understanding that space and perception change over time. Australia is not a country that can be examined with ignorance of its history, or of the changes that have occurred over time. To write about an Australian place "without mentioning the Aboriginal presence (current or historical) is to distort reality, to perpetuate the *terra nullius* lie" (Merrilees, 2007, p. 1). As such, I felt an approach that embeds temporality with the spatial is particularly relevant to discussions of Australian places.

Geocriticism resonated with my interest in exploring place through a range of sources including everyday texts, instead of privileging published novels or academic sources. It also takes away an onus to examine, in literary studies, a single author's perception of place. It further allows for a focus on the connection of geography and culture "without privileging any particular textual form" (Mitchell & Stadler, 2011, p. 54). Thus, a textual study of space can be open to a variety of perspectives expressed without limitation of genre, form or medium. As such, a geocritical review of Walyalup/Fremantle allows for the inclusion of novels, poetry, websites, songs, journal articles, historical documents and more, to capture a sense of the spatiotemporal striated impression of its place. Such a range allowed for the removal of particular overprivileged selections of texts that may exclude Indigenous or other minority contributions. Westphal acknowledges (as I also quickly realised) that a comprehensive review of all works about a place, especially a contemporary place in a digitally rich era, is not realistic. Therefore, I have limited my review to a representative sample of published literature that spans a range of sociocultural contexts and time periods.

It is common to engage in reflexive practices in creative writing studies as the act of practice-led research requires critical reflection on the process being engaged with (Kroll & Harper,

2013, p. 115). The particular approach to the reflective process tends to vary and is often informed by an individual's preference. The tools of ethnography, the study of people in naturally occurring settings, are increasingly appealing to practice-led researchers (Bartleet, 2022, p. 137; Ellis et al., 2011, p. 275; Gilbert & Macleroy, 2021, p. 260; Rambo & Ellis, 2020, p. 2). Theorists and practitioners Ellis et al. (2011, p. 273) give a clear definition of autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experiences (auto) in order to understand cultural experiences (ethno)". At its heart, the act of writing is one of personal and cultural experiences. Therefore, to understand place-based literature there needs to be a recognition of these experiences.

The act of writing autoethnographic journals is considered both a process and a product (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). Part of the appeal of autoethnography in practice-led research is that it acknowledges the "innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 274). It also focuses on the cultural practices that inform context; and encourages researchers to act as participant and observer of the sociocultural influences that informed their practice. As such, it can incorporate a retroactive reflection of the writer's process, which encourages a reflection on how that experience informed the overall practice.

There are a number of different forms of autoethnographic practice. The selection of a particular approach is often determined by the emphasis placed on other, self, or interaction. The approach I chose is reflexive ethnography, which concerns the way a researcher changes as a result of the practice (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 278). This allows for a layered account of the experiences of the practice to be examined alongside the produced artefact. However, the approach used for my geocritical review was more focused on cognitive epiphanies (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 276) rather than social processes (Lee-Price, 2021, p. 1). I feel that utilising this capture and analysis process, undertaken in stages, helps to heighten the understanding of the practice itself (Bartleet, 2022, p. 133; Lee-Price, 2021, p. 11). In practice, I largely followed a field note ethnographic process; however, the object of study was my own actions, thoughts, and conversations around the act of constructing a list of Indigenous texts for a geocritical review. This was, in practice, focused on my own cognitive processes as a researcher, but it must be noted that I am a product of my sociocultural context; although these autoethnographic observations are mine alone, they also represent a larger field of practitioners. However, it is important that each researcher and writer conduct their own personal autoethnographic review to identify personal biases and blind spots that may not be perceived any other way.

There is no specific requirement of the length of notes or the manner in which they are collected. The focus of the act is simply to "record as much as possible of what is perceived to be relevant to the research project" (Walford, 2009, p. 127). As is common in this practice (Anderson, 2006, p. 373; Walford, 2009, p. 127), I used handwritten notes that were then added into a digital document, along with direct copies of any email correspondence. Whenever possible, I completed the reflection while the practice was being directly engaged in, or as soon as possible afterwards, as there is a limitation to memory. This process was not always consistently maintained due to time constraints and interruptions, but I did find that often I

returned to the notes to add further points that I had been mulling over and processing. It was often from these later notations that I was able to clarify my thought processes. An autoethnographer needs to be clear in establishing their practices and making note of any inherent limitations encountered. To this end, it is worth acknowledging that this article only incorporates a small portion of the larger record collection that was made and focuses mostly on the transferable aspects of this approach.

The following section is an analysis of the reflexive autoethnographic process undertaken during the text selection stage of a geocritical review of Indigenous literature in Walyalup/Fremantle. The final artefact, or product (as provided after the reference list), is the list of selected texts that will be used for the formal geocritical review, from which the findings will be used for a creative writing piece about place in Walyalup/Fremantle. My focus here is not on the value of the end product, although one may find this interesting if they are writing on Walyalup/Fremantle, but rather on the use of the autoethnographic review that helped guide its construction. One example of where this practice has been already used, although not named as such, is in Merrilees's (2007, p. 2) discussion of the representation of Indigenous characters by non-Indigenous writers. In her work she provides a discussion titled "A white Australian story" which details her own context. This discussion helps to position her understanding of the topic, and her following discussions of the complexity of the issue, through the lens of her experiences. She observes the value of this understanding by arguing that "part of the way we unlearn our white racism is by telling stories". Although autoethnography is not a new approach, and represents only one component of my own research practice, I would suggest to all researchers and writers of place that it needs to be the first stage that is conducted before analysis of texts is applied; it is a vital step in addressing personal and sociocultural biases.

Stepping outside my perspective: The autoethnographic review of self

To begin, an autoethnographic process requires a positioning of self (Baker, 2014, p. 1) and an openness to a reflexive turn (Pelias, 2022, p. 123). Rambo and Ellis (2020, p. 1) suggest that a researcher "construct an account of their own lived experiences as starting points for inquiry". As such, I offer the following autobiographical note about myself as pertains to this project. A statement of self usually begins with your name, and perhaps a good starting point is to look at the cultural identity formed by my birth surname: Cornes Mannolini. Already those with an onomatological interest can make predictions from the origins of these two names. Cornes, from my father, comes from England (Anglo-Saxon) by way of New Zealand, while Mannolini, from my mother, is Italian. However, my maternal grandfather of that name died when my mother was young, so the strongest influences were from my grandmother, who was nee Miolin, which is Croatian in origin. To our collective family knowledge, our family does not carry bloodlines from the first peoples of New Zealand or Australia, and as such our heritage is one of migration.

A note needs to be made here considering the social implications of an autoethnographic approach. We, as humans, are not formed of a singular or individual history. When we speak of *I*, it is actually *our*. As Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011, p. 281) point out, "researchers do

not exist in isolation", and consequently "we implicate others in our work". These relational ethics are important to be mindful of. In creating the first, and following, autoethnographic reflections I already recognised that I could not speak of myself without talking about the family who shaped me, and beyond that the influence of other individuals. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011, p. 281) recommend that autoethnographic writers show their work to those implicated, allow them to respond, and acknowledge how they responded to their representations in the text. This is a practice I followed with my mother, who has been the most directly involved in this process and is referred to in the autoethnographic review. I have added additional notes throughout where she has responded to this review.

Returning to the autobiographical note: I was born in the early 1980s and grew up first in Fremantle (note the name change as I was not aware of the language of Walyalup growing up), and later in my teen years in the southwest of Western Australia. My parents worked hard, but we lived a middle-class lifestyle and attended "good" schools. University pathways were an expectation and I have largely lived a life as a privileged European white woman. The inherent racism in Australia had moved further away from the "wogs" label of my grandparents' time to focus on Asian and Middle Eastern heritages. Nevertheless, an overall understanding that "racism is a powerful negative force in this country, and is, and has been, directed systematically against Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander people" (Merrilees, 2007, p. 1) did exist for me. Overall, although I have experienced sexism and personal hardships, my sociocultural experience has been one of privilege.

While this understanding of privilege was not a new realisation, it was necessary to the framing of my position as a researcher. The second realisation was an inherent bias towards migrant stories and experiences, particularly those of the European context. My childhood was significantly influenced by my grandparents, their communities, values and perceptions of being Italian in Australia. I heard as many stories about the beauty of vine-clad hills, blue waters, opera singers and lush fabrics, as I did of my grandfather's first experiences in the Wheatbelt; of its heat, dust and hardships. Growing up in Fremantle I saw the restaurant my family owned, the parks and river I visited, and the houses of family friends with "formal" furniture and rich foods. I visited limestone buildings such as the Round House (a prison) and Fremantle Art Centre (an asylum) to admire their beauty, but never spoke of the horrors and atrocities on which they sat, and attended art and culture events that were strongly Eurocentric in focus. The schools I attended were visited by local white artists and writers, and I read predominantly European stories. Although I did spend a year living in the small town of Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley region, I was too young to remember the experience. But in her review of this article my mother notes that this was the first period in her life where she had experienced being a minority. Overall, this is the perspective I had, and it limits my ability to consider a range of experiences in the scope of the geocritical review. These realisations are the value of the autoethnographic review. I had to wade through the waters of my own assumptions to be able to see the reality of other's experiences. As Pelias (2022) points out, I need to acknowledge "how I might be complicit in whatever I critique, always wanting to accept reasonability for my problematic actions and always hoping to construct alternative possibilities" (p. 123).

To suggest I am only a product of my context diminishes my autonomy. I could have chosen to read more widely, or to push myself out of comfortable boundaries. I did not. I read within the comfort of my echo chamber, and it is telling. Rambo and Ellis (2020, p. 2) comment that "[w]riting about one's own experience might resolve some of the ethical issues that arise in covert research". Not that I am intending to engage in covert research, however, I need to acknowledge that by examining contexts that are not my own, I could do indirect harm through my representations. Is this realisation enough, though? Can I say that I have reflected on my own limitations and that absolves me from assumptions and generalisations in the othering of those who do not share my context? Of course not. An autoethnographic approach does not end with the self-review. The process of continuing this procedure during my research and writing, while being aware of my context, is the point: I need to continue looking for those alternative possibilities outside of my inherent biases.

What does the purpose of this review then serve? It establishes the foundational issues, limitations, barriers, and biases inherent in the personal lens I am using as a researcher. In the exploration of literature by Indigenous writers of Walyalup/Fremantle, I needed to begin from a position of insight. I needed the creation of an image of self to help identify what may have previously been invisible (Kurtzer, 2003, p. 2). A key understanding is that I am coming to spatial research as a non-Indigenous person, and as Kurtzer suggests, an awareness needs to be present of the "competing desires of the hegemonic culture and its understanding of Aboriginality" (p. 3). To approach any discussion of Indigenous texts without an understanding of the inherent issues of Australian history is beyond naive and reinforces desires of a hegemonic white culture (p. 1). This autoethnographic review is the first stage. Next, I need to reflexively return to this review through the duration of my geocritical research to ensure that these epiphanies are consistently in mind.

Findings on Indigenous texts set in Walyalup through an autoethnographic lens

The following discussion applies the autoethnographic lens of the researcher to the process of place-based research with the intention of highlighting the need for an autoethnographic approach to be present. Autoethnographic notetaking and journalling was used during the entirety of the process of finding and reviewing texts set in Walyalup/Fremantle. This discussion of findings represents only a small excerpt of a larger process, but it highlights the key epiphanies (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 276) that emerged through this process: the importance of language, and in particular labelling; emotional resonance and the mapping of personal responses; and the limitations of locational boundaries in sources, and the availability of sources.

> "It is Whadjuk Nyoongar."
> "Sorry?" I responded.
> "You've just written 'the Noongar people'."
> "So? Did I spell it wrong?" I respond, becoming defensive and embarrassed at having made a mistake.

> "Yes, but also Nyoongar is the language, Whadjuk is the people of the place, and you need to acknowledge both."
> (S. Mannolini-Winwood, personal correspondence, December 15, 2021)

A first realisation was that I did not know a lot of fundamental information about Indigenous language, and this was an issue from the start in the research I was conducting. Where I am searching exclusively for Fremantle as a key term, I am essentially looking only for a word imposed on the land by colonisation. The name itself is taken from the captain who took possession of the river mouth area. The Swan River is the same: its first name is the Derbarl Yerrigan. I am searching using language that is not relevant to the context but is restrictive terminology specific to colonisation. This first understanding was a fundamental shift in the research process, absolutely embarrassing, and would not have come about without the conversation I documented above. I had made such a basic, biased assumption founded in my own context. These were the words I knew, so I privileged them over others in my research focus. This realisation helped to shift my approach. I spent time reviewing information I should have known. I read the information provided on local websites, such as Derbal Nara (https://www.derbalnara.org.au/whadjuk-boodjar), books such as Marcia Langton's *Welcome to Country: A travel guide to Indigenous Australia*, as well as articles within my field of creative writing by Indigenous authors.

This small example represented a series of moments of reflexive realisation that occurred due to an autoethnographic process. The application of autoethnographic notetaking was used to keep track first of search terms, and then of the variety of language around such terms. For example, the area of Fremantle is known in Nyoongar as Walyalup. The city is also colloquially called Freo, referred to often as The Port City, and in early colonisation it was called the Swan River Colony; each new label widened the scope of relevant sources. This is a basic part of research processes, but these findings came from a series of reflexive questions specific to place-based considerations. What was it first called? What would locals call it? How is it referred to in promotional material? Has the name ever been changed? Was there dispute around the naming? Is it known by another colloquialism? Each tier of questioning was designed to push out from the personal review first with the opening question being: what do I know it as? There is a risk in place-based research where local knowledge exists that a researcher can fall into over privileging their own perspective, and this is commonly true of language use. It was by examining assumptions, engaging in collegial discussion, and reflecting on reasoning that a recognition of hegemonic privileging was addressed.

I returned to my search (moderately) better armed with a clarity of language and found more useful information. Where the initial searches had yielded little information beyond the more famous names of Sally Morgan and Kim Scott, which was problematic as neither author identifies as being from Walyalup but rather other areas of the Nyoongar nation, now I began to find other Nyoongar authors who were specifically writing about Walyalup, such as Graeme Dixon, Cassie Lynch and Elfie Shiosaki. This period represented, in my notes, a breadth of reading of Indigenous authors looking for specific connections to Walyalup. I have always known intellectually about the atrocity of colonisation and the Stolen Generations, but I did not

understand it. Yet as I began to read the stories and autobiographies from *Heartsick for Country* (Morgan et al., 2008) and *maar bidi* (Shiosaki & Martin, 2020), I realised I had only really learnt this information through history books and non-Indigenous authors. As Borghino (2003, p. 46) wisely observes, "[i]t is difficult for non-Aboriginal novelists to deal adequately with Aboriginal experience". I think Kwaymullina speaks an important truth when she says, "our vulnerability means our resources have all too often been exploited by others, and this includes our stories" (2014, p. 25). I had heard Dreaming stories and read novels such as *River Child* (Logan, 1995) which had painted a particular picture of Indigenous culture, but I had not heard these stories from the voices they belong to. As I began to immerse myself in these texts, I made autoethnographic notes of the feelings they evoked in me: of grief, and of guilt. I will not pretend that I will ever understand the generational pain, but I began to see the reality of a context not my own and find meaning in these stories beyond myself.

This experience of documenting emotional responses, along with a conversation with my mother, was a turning point in understanding the purpose that I want to ground my creative writing practice in. I began to see why Westphal's (2011b, p. 122) multifocalisation (the multiplication of points of view) matters to a spatial study. I began to see that a striated textuality should not necessarily be taken as a truth in this process; although events and stories can be pinned to a chronological point they cannot be confined there. They are not static; they bleed and spread across lines. One note I made concerned the story "Blood Love" by Shiosaki, which in fact is a story my mother found and passed onto me for this project. In an email she wrote to me:

> The second story in called "Blood Love" refers to the unmarried mother's home known as Hillcrest in North Fremantle where Grandma worked. I used to spend a lot of holiday time at the home and now remember a significant proportion of half-caste babies. (J. Mannolini, personal correspondence, December 12, 2021)

One note on this email is the use of the word "half-caste": I have vacillated between leaving this as per the original or editing it out. On reflection, I found this an interesting expression of generational language. Technically, she is using the correct term, however, connotatively there is so much laden meaning that online dictionaries will flag it as offensive language. She did not intend it to be perceived as such, but it did make me uncomfortable to include it in this discussion. That very discomfort became an important realisation: to remove the word would be to deny the existence of latent racism in language used around Indigenous people from within my own family; to change the word would be to edit reality; and to leave the word would acknowledge an ongoing issue around deficit language in relation to Indigenous experiences.

In discussion around "Blood Love", my mother later added that my grandmother worked there as a nursing assistant and that Hillcrest Maternity Home was known as an unmarried mothers' home from which children could be directly adopted. My mother remembers helping out in the summer holidays with feeding and dressing the babies, and that some of the sisters (it was run by the Salvation Army) and nurses, as well as the mothers, were Indigenous women (Western Mail, 1945). In reflection what she most remembers is an "overwhelming sense of sadness"

for the babies who were rarely held and then dressed up for "viewings" (Personal correspondence, January 2022). When I discussed this with her further, she emphasised again this connection, and added that she was born at this hospital. For her, this made the story more meaningful because it connected to her own family history. I will admit that this connection predisposed me to empathise with the story. However, I must be careful not to overfocus on that which aligns to my biases but recognise that common ground invigorates and inspires. Walyalup/Fremantle is a place of many peoples' stories.

It may seem strange to advocate for a subjective connection during research, however, there is no true objectivity in literary studies of place. Every researcher is bringing with them a sense of place already laden with personal and sociocultural contexts. By engaging from a position of empathy there is at least an opportunity to consider the experience pertained in the text as common rather than other. The collection of these notes in an autoethnographic journal also helped to indicate changes in emotional resonance to different pieces based on personal connections. I grew up hearing stories of Hillcrest and it would have been easy to simply incorporate these into my own engagement with the story without actively reflecting on how the striation of stories contributed to my own reading of this text. Moreso than simply documenting an analysis of themes and concepts related to place found in the story, the act of reflexive notetaking forces a researcher to identify where the personal overlaps with the social/cultural and with the inferred meaning of the narrative.

However, as promising as it was to begin to discover texts that tell Indigenous stories of Walyalup, two key limitations began to emerge repeatedly throughout the autoethnographic journalling process. A primary concern is the lack of published literature that privileges different perspectives. This is not only limited to Indigenous authors, but in all categories of ethnicity, culture, gender, and perspective. Repeated throughout my notes are dead ends: texts that are written about but not by Indigenous people, or the repetition of the same narrative published multiple ways. This should be obvious, but when months are spent on a singular topic it can be difficult to recognise that the field is limited. Of the thirty odd sources listed in my notes, only 11 made it to the final list. However, there is a progress in the awareness of the needs for access to diverse works, and Fremantle Press, Magabala Books and university presses are striving to overcome this and advocate for the work of a range of authors. Kwaymullina's advice to "begin by reading" (2014, p. 32) is a common recommendation by Indigenous authors, but not always the easiest to follow. This is why a geocritical process can be useful to place-based studies as it does not privilege the novel over other sources. This process of text selection needs to be balanced with the autoethnographic checks on decision-making. It can become easy in research to follow well-worn paths, or to stay within genres that are expected. For instance, many great Indigenous works tend to be autobiographical in style (Kurtzer, 2003, p. 6) and are not shelved or categorised in the same way as other sources concerning place. This also encouraged my wider exploration of local stories contained within wider collections, such as *Heartsick for Country*, or in the collation of academic reports. The joint use of an autoethnographic recording process and the wide net of geocritical text selection (from fiction to non-fiction, to non-literary, to the everyday) worked well to provide range and scope that was previously treated as an act of interdisciplinary complication.

The other key limitation is the problem of boundaries, and this has been an area more difficult to overcome. My initial search for stories of Walyalup was confined to the location boundaries set by Fremantle Council. This is an area that I have needed to disregard; instead, I stretched the boundaries to surrounding suburbs and islands, and allowed authors to set their own boundaries. Even this does not address the issue of displacement for Indigenous people due to early colonisation, government policy, and generations of removals and land clearing. As such, there are Indigenous stories from people who would call Walyalup home, but their removal meant many of these stories have been lost, or that they have instead embraced the stories of the land they were moved to. To an extent writing about Indigenous contexts is a political act (Wilkins, 2011, p. 136) and it is necessary to note that these types of limitations are the direct result of displacement due to colonisation (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 3). Kurtzer writes of the difficulties some Indigenous writers face when trying to write an "'authentic' Aboriginal life story when they had been removed from their families, or grew up separated from their communities" (2003, p.7). The consequences of colonisation mean that boundaries of place become difficult to establish; some stories that may not dominantly fit within the Western boundaries of a place may still be about that same place. For instance, Sally Morgan identifies as belonging to the Palku and Nyamal peoples of the Pilbara, which is where her grandmother was taken from, but her novel *My Place* is set in the early section in the colonial designations of the City of Fremantle and the City of South Perth. Such privileging of colonial thought about place boundaries needs to be disregarded in the face of the Indigenous author's own identification of personal place. This realisation was aided by the collation of both a source's references to place, and an examination of autobiographical information of the authors. Ultimately, a final stage could be the act of directly asking an Indigenous author if they perceive their work as "belonging" to the place of Walyalup and respecting their decision, including choosing not to give an answer to such colonial positioning of place.

In reflection: Autoethnography as a process

The process of engaging in autoethnography has helped me realise the important role that reflective thought plays for researchers and writers. As Baker states, "[e]veryone has a story, and each story matters … [t]he more stories we hear, the more we add to our knowledge and understanding" (2014, p. 3). I do not believe I could have, nor should have, engaged with Indigenous texts set in Walyalup/Fremantle if I had not undertaken an autoethnographic approach. The act of engaging in reflexive autoethnography has helped me to critically reflect on my own role within the research, and how this process is shaping and framing me as a writer. It has not been an easy process and looking deeply at yourself (warts and all) is not always pleasant. But I believe it has helped me uphold my practice-led values in this undertaking. The act of engaging in autoethnography has also helped identify questions that emerged during the process (Bartleet, 2022, p. 138) of the geocritical review that will inform my creative practice, one of which is a fixation on the topic of "where" rather than "whom".

Practice-led research methods require the diligence of documentation. Although it is not possible here to show the range of notes that were part of the autoethnographic process, the

small inclusions of their use hopefully demonstrate their value. For me, the key observations that emerged during the process centred around the issue of language, of boundaries and colonial thought, and of the availability of sources. It is this transferable knowledge that is the intention of this discussion: that to engage in place-based research in Australia, a researcher needs to not only follow autoethnographic processes, but to also document them when sharing their research. Research about place should provide a clear framing of the researcher's own processes and context, as this is information that does inform decisions present in the research itself. I believe further demonstrations of this would be valuable to other researchers, not only in autoethnography studies, but for practice-led approaches in general.

Autoethnographic practices have gained popularity in the creative arts as they offer an avenue for reflexive practice that accounts for the researcher and writer's own context. As Pelias states this does require "careful and rigorous thought [that is] outwardly located" (2022, p. 123). It is uncomfortable to reflect deeply on cultural contexts in Australia. I could have shied away and focused instead on migrant stories only, but such a choice would feel like a deliberate "sin of omission" (Attebery, 2005, p. 385). The autoethnographic review helped me identify starting biases, privileges, and perspectives. However, it was the process of reflexively engaging with the documented notes and incidences, framed by my personal review, which enriched the project. I have presented a dialogue of my experiences in this process not as an objective truth or as a single path to follow, but to contribute to the larger discourse on the value of autoethnographic processes for research, especially for those writing outside their own perspective.

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Acknowledgements

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