

2022 Fay Gale Lecture

Presented by Professor Chelsea Watego

‘No room at the Inn’: Rethinking critical race studies and its place in the Australian academy

00:05

[Chris Hatherly] Good afternoon, everyone. I'm here in Adelaide and online. My name is Chris Hatherly and I'm the CEO of the Academy of Social Sciences. We've got a very fancy AV set up here so that it will basically pick up on whoever is speaking. Before we begin though, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this unceded, colonized land on which we're meeting in person today are the lands of the Kaurna people, and to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this and other lands, past, present, and future. I pay my respects to my Indigenous colleagues here in Adelaide and online as well. And I'd like to welcome now, our guests here in person and online. I think we have 100 or more people joining us from all over the place now online. For those who are online, I'd encourage you, just in the chat there, to share the traditional lands from which you're joining the lecture this afternoon, from wherever in this country you are. It's my pleasure now, before we kick off, to introduce Professor Megan Warin, who will talk a little bit about the Fay Gale Lecture, and then we'll come back and introduce our speaker. Megan Warin, the Director of the Fay Gale Centre for Research on Gender, and a Fellow of the Academy.

01:30

[Megan Warin] As a fellow of the Academy of Director of the Fay Gale Centre for Research on Gender at the University of Adelaide, I'm absolutely honored along with Chris to be welcoming you to this lecture today. I'd also like to add my acknowledgments to the Kaurna people, who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which the University of Adelaide was built. The Fay Gale lecture is named in honor of the late Professor Gwendoline Fay Gale AO, the first female president of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, from 1997 to 2000. And she was an eminent Human Geographer, as many people will know, and well known for her contributions to academia, women in academia, Indigenous Studies, and juvenile injustice. Fay Gale was the first Honors graduate in Geography at the University of Adelaide. She was the first female professor and went on to become Pro Vice Chancellor, the first

woman in senior management at this university. She was Vice Chancellor of the University of Western Australia from 1990 to 1997. And when she was there, she initiated a raft of programs to eliminate discrimination against women and was a pioneer in developing programs for equal opportunity and equity in the university sector. She maintained very strong links with Indigenous communities throughout her personal and working life. And in 1989, she received an Order of Australia for her outstanding contributions to the social sciences. The Fay Gale Center for Research on Gender, which is named in honor of Fay and is cohosting today's lecture with the Academy, was launched in 2009. The center aims to enhance the quality and impact of interdisciplinary research on gender issues in both national and transnational context. Research themes – I mean this is not inclusive –include social justice, belonging, health equity and care, all intersecting things that are highly relevant to Fay Gale's advocacy and legacy, of course, to our speaker today. This lecture, inaugurated in 2010, is presented each year by distinguished female social scientist and is open to the public. And I'll now hand you back to Chris who's going to introduce Professor Watego.

04:00

[Chris Hatherly] Thank you, Megan, and thanks again to everyone for coming along. So, our Fay Gale lecturer for this year is Professor Chelsea Watego. Chelsea's just come down today to give this lecture from Brisbane. So, thank you again for making the trip. It's wonderful to have you in person. I've got a long bio and a short one, but I think we're more interested in hearing from you. So, I'll stick with the short one. Professor Watego is a Munanjahli and South Sea Islander woman with over 20 years of experience working within Indigenous health as a health worker and researcher. Her works has drawn attention to the role of race in the production of health inequalities. She's written extensively in the media. She's hosted a very challenging, thought-provoking podcast, 'Wild Black Woman'. She's been involved in lots of community organizations and research organizations in various capacities. And her latest book, *Another Day in the Colony*, I had a chance to read through the first chapter today – it's a wonderful read, I'm going to get a copy and read it and I'd encourage everyone here and online to pick that book up as well. So, that's enough from me, please join me in welcoming Professor Watego.

05:17

[Chelsea Watego] Thank you so much, I think we have our slides. Do I have to press something? I'd like to acknowledge country as a visitor to this place and pay my respects to the Kurna people. And

properly, I guess, acknowledge multiple people in this place who taught me so much about race. I wish I would like to acknowledge Brian, always helping make sense of that relationship between Indigenous and Western religions in a really generous way every time I'm here. I also like to thank Professor Lester Rigney, who we've just met with, for gifting us with Indigenous research principles, which has given me a frame of reference to do work that I wanted to do that I was told could not exist or should not exist. I also want to acknowledge Professor Irene Watson who, as a sovereign scholar, taught of the refusal to subscribe to performative illusions of progress, and my Tiddas, the Sovereignty Unbound Collective, [inaudible], and all the sister online, for showing the beauty and the power of black collective and the importance of building them.

06:28

I also want to shout to my brother, my brother who's been there in the health space with me for a number of years at different conferences. And as being someone that I can talk to about race in those breaks because of the silence that existed. I want to acknowledge the late Professor McDermott, during his time here that you're working with to forge more explicit conversations about how to deal with race in our teaching learning environments. [inaudible]

07:06

I want to acknowledge my sister, Auntie Susie Dixon, who in our time together reminded me so tragically of the importance of feeling race. I remembered that I struggled to hear their story physically and in doing so, I learned so much from her and her being about how to find a way to live amidst the racial violence that is so unrelenting in this place. And yet, in her pain, has so much love for our people. And it's a privilege to come to this place here, Kurna land, and reflect on race given the work that's been forged here by so many mob. I come not as a knower, but as someone who's interested in continuing a tradition of sharing and learning from each other.

07:58

As a guest in this place, I should also acknowledge that I've brought some colleagues with me from Meanjin, Dr David Singh, [inaudible] Indigenous Health Humanities agenda, and a respected friend, colleague, and mentor for me. I also brought my brother, Mr. Kevin Yow Yeh, a Wakka and South Sea Islander man and postgraduate student at QUT who is undertaking really important work around

therapeutic responses to racial violence and racial complaint. I want to thank the organizers for this invitation and for their care being so accommodating with this trip, which brought all kinds of challenges. I feel very honored to be invited to deliver the Fay Gale Lecture. I have to admit I was a bit surprised when I discovered it was typically delivered by a distinguished female social scientist. I'm not a social scientist, sorry about it. But I'll give it a go. I'd like to start however, not by positioning myself in relation to what I'm not, but what I am. I am a Munanjahli and South Sea Islander woman through the Williams and Watego families and was born and raised on Yaburara country. I belong to the Yugambah language group for my grandmothers and grandfathers' mothers that stretch across the southeast corner of what the colonizers call Queensland and northeast corner of New South Wales. My immediate family is situated between Tweed Heads to the north of the state around Bowen, Townsville, and of course many locations in between. Home for me and my family lives in the outer Southmost suburb of Brisbane called Inala. A community known for its material deprivation, of public housing and all of the associated imagery at such places allegedly arouse. Yet, I know it to be a proud close-knit community, rich, so rich that it was a place in which we chose to raise our five children, knowing that despite the limited course offerings at the local school, the employment opportunities at the local shops that house arrangement social services instead of actual shops, and limited recreational activities, it offered our children a place that was safe socially and culturally, physically and psychologically.

I'm a health researcher, not so much a social scientist, having first trained as an Aboriginal Health Worker in a three-year bachelor's degree program at the University of Queensland School of Population Health in 1998 at the age of 19. It would take over two decades working in Indigenous health to be appointed within the discipline that I was trained in, which was Professor of Indigenous health with QUT School of Public Health and Social Work, just last year. Part of his journey I want to speak to today is my call to rethink the role of race and its place in the Australian Academy, which I of course covered in parts elsewhere. And I don't want to rehash all of those stories. Instead, I want to reflect more broadly on the learnings from this journey in thinking about race in the academy, both in terms of its absence and its presence and the implications for those of us who choose to think about it, who choose to speak of it and write about it, particularly for a purpose that extends beyond that of intellectual curiosity. Basically, this is kind of my musings on race in this place at this point in time. And some reflections that I haven't really been to share because of my self-imposed social media ban.

11:08

I'll talk today about where I think is the place for Critical Race scholarship, drawing upon my own learnings in trying to find a location for work that undermines the violence of race first and foremost amongst Blackfellas. A place that's not dependent upon the validation of those who are going to benefit most from violence, because I've come to see it as the kind of beating our heads against the wall and working for someone else, that James Brown sings of. I reflect today as someone who has been denied a room at the inn, whether that inn was the Academy, disciplines of health or social sciences, the Coroner's Court, various Commission reports by the state, the Australian Feminist Law Journal, and all those other decision-making spaces where others have insisted I be denied a seat at the table. I'm not going to again go through all the details of them. But reflect on what I learned across those experiences. I want to think about the reality of there being no room for those who refuse to believe the liberal illusion of improvement. We choose instead to tell the truth of material and discursive racial violence. And I'm hoping that today is not like a misery memoir of hopelessness. But instead of call to rethink the importance of place as the manger, the place at the margins, which in my mind is not a home for the marginalized. Indeed, it's a place that is hard to occupy, but only because it's a place where we find ourselves charged with the task of theorizing the violence that's been brought up on our minds, souls and bodies, a place in which our blackness is marked by death, dying, despair, depression, and desperation. It's in those dark times. precisely in that place where radical and revolutionary scholarship erupts in response to sheer pressure, to be of service to those always deemed undeserving. It's too at the margins for those who have come to see it as a place where we choose to reside with pride, not just a temporary home having realized a particular racist moment or encounter. That it is in fact a place of freedom. In that we are not preoccupied with the task of appealing to an imaginary moral center held together for a denial of our humanity. We're not left grappling with hope or hopelessness, of grappling each night at the various concessions we had to make that day to get in the door. Because the reality is that what so many deem as an inferior place, the margins, is a place in which entry is dependent upon an unwavering insistence on black humanity. And it's only in such a place where we can truly sing "I'm black and I'm proud". I too, would rather die on my feet than keep living on my knees, like James Brown sang.

Now, some may say I came to race intellectually late in my career, and on the one hand, I guess you could say that's true. My undergraduate training of three years of five days a week didn't teach us about, but in a small class from about 15 students, most of which were mob, and many mature age, we did

think about race. It was just a knowing that would never be assessed against in the classroom. Such theorizing was to be undertaken in the smoke breaks between lectures and tutorials. And we've been trained to instead attribute all of those racialized health inequalities that fall so heavy upon our bodies, as anything and everything but racial violence. Typically, it was via a failing of black bodies and minds, black culture, black communities, black policies, that we would understand ourselves. And I still remember my first year of Uni at 17, being shocked to discover how sick we are as a people, because I've never known myself in such a way. And it's not because I was not aware of the health issues facing our people. Wasn't [inaudible] stupid? [inaudible] sovereign, and in this learning environment we were being disciplined to think of ourselves in the way the state had imagined us.

14:51

And while there was no engagement with race intellectually in the coursework, race was ever present and revealed in the unspoken and the assumed taken-for-granted knowingness of mostly white teaching staff. And this was a really progressive kind of a program for its time and did lots of things very differently. It was a wonderful learning environment. But its silence around race and racism was a concession to the status quo and a sign of complicity with the institution that housed it. I remember as a 17-year-old, hearing and watching the silence being disrupted on the daily, particularly by those more senior Indigenous people in the classroom who were contesting those accounts of us, and not through their supposedly newly acquired intellectual tools, but through their embodied knowledge. I remember feeling strong when they did it, but also confused about the authority of knowers and white knowingness, being. as I was, the first in family to attend an academic institution. It was this confusion that I learned to better wrestle with at this time of discovering an account of us that just didn't align with how I knew myself to be, which I think at times as a teenager, I had maybe been too willing to accept and perhaps the failing was mine and not theirs. A lot of Blackfellas experience this at some point in their lives. This is what dispossession is. I remember that feeling of being assessed on my ability to speak of myself in a way that was disconnected from what I knew of my social world. I remember that feeling of sickness or sadness and not in a trauma kind of way, just the sorry kind of way that mob know of. And being required to produce an account that offered the most narrow window into a world that never do justice to the lives that we live in a sense. What I learned about race, not as part of the curriculum, but in my meeting with other Blackfellas in that room each day, was the power of black resistance. It was found amongst the most senior people who are deemed least educated in the Western

sense, who are presumed to be most in need of pastoral care and extra tutoring. That stubborn sense of sovereignty just could not be disciplined out of them, it seemed. As such, they were my most influential educators. They taught me about the reality of race that it was in their being that I was reminded of our power in the moments when they expect the least of you. So, I wish to acknowledge the great Smokin' Joe Kilroy who gave so much himself in ways that have never been properly recognized, my sister Teresa Fisher who to her word went back home [inaudible] to work for her people. My sis, Dr Beth Campbell, going away to the College of Obstetrics and Gynecology while raising four children. My brother, Harold [inaudible] with the special kind of laugh. And Auntie Buddi Smith, the matriarch of Meanjin, who told me too much to speak of here. It was in this black intellectual collective that a most sophisticated and intimate understanding of race would emerge despite every best effort to get us to accept the inferiority of our nation.

Now, it's not lost on me that this course and others like it that sprung up in the 90s were in the aftermath of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and were very much a consequence of it. An enquiry that was prompted by Aboriginal protest movements well before this place that heard the cries of Black Lives Matter. This inquiry has been well known but come to find that no one was responsible for 99 Black deaths in custody between the 1980 and 1989. Having expanded the initial Terms of Reference beyond investigating the individual circumstances of each case to include related underlying social cultural legal issues in what Commissioner [inaudible] said, "moving beyond understanding how each person died, of why that person died", they were able to rule out foul play, such as the unlawful and deliberate killing of Aboriginal people and instead attributed these deaths to disease, self-inflicted hangings, external trauma and drug and alcohol use. It was not the state, despite its supposed duty of care, it was black disadvantage by over representation in custody and ill health that was now the cause. Those working in Indigenous health today would do well to remember that it was by black resistance that this investment arrived, not black compliance. The aftermath of this environment sees the state respond not in addressing the violence perpetrated at their own hands, but instead on remedying the black body in all of its lack, its trauma and disadvantage. And despite the observed failure to implement so many of those recommendations, we did see at this time, the emergence of a range of Indigenous specific investments in health and education specifically, ultimately to get more black people working for the state in roles that had traditionally brutalized us. Yet in this small program that sought to remedy the ailing black body, I saw the everyday refuse that Mohawk scholar Audra

Simpson speaks of, a refusal to have our knowing disciplined out of us. The lesson here is in how the state so swiftly and efficiently, domesticates black resistance and activism, while performing benevolence, in essence, which is most likely to replicate in our appeals to [inaudible] scholarship to be given a home in the academy. Not that there could ever be trust. But anyway.

19:39

Last year as we marked the 30th anniversary of the report there was little fanfare, just a story about implementation from predominately black news media, and another report of recommendations in the New South Wales State Government. Now this report recommendations they offered on the anniversary of the handing down of the Royal Commission Deaths in Custody report was what they said was their response to the global Black Lives Matter movement. And it made no recommendations in relation to race, racism, or racial violence. And despite the numerous submissions that's spoke explicitly about the role of racism in the unacceptably the high rates of deaths in custody since the enquiry, the government's response to the report also made no reference whatsoever to race or racism. Not so quiet were mob on the streets, on the steps of Coroner's Courts, on those who fronted up to the United Nations and spoke so clearly about the role of racism in preventable deaths of Blackfellas in custody. And indeed, laws were changed as a result from the banning of spit hoods here in South Australia, to the work led by Latoya Aroha Rule in response to the death of her brother Wayne Fella Morrison, the decriminalization of public drunkenness in the state of Victoria led by the children of Aunty Tanya Day, who too died in custody. It is in their being that grieving black families reject the discourse of dysfunction, the predicative attached to us, and led far more revolutionary work in undermining racial violence than any book or peer reviewed journal article I've read. Now this work is typically framed as activism fueled by anger and grief. But this kind of work is the most critical intellectual labor demanding of theorizing, strategizing, and organizing that I presumed was supposed to be at the heart of Critical Race scholarship. It is a labour that that never offers these families justice or peace that models of generosity to the generations that are following.

This was the same year that pastoral feminists were advocating a change to the rule that would inevitably lead to more Blackfellas being detained in custody, including Aboriginal women who were themselves victims of violence. It's hard to fathom how the criminologist who you would think would be well versed in the repeated recommendations could intellectually rationalize introducing new laws that

will result in more incarcerated Blackfellas. Because after all, it was supposedly the issue of overrepresentation that caused all these deaths. Now it's one thing being missing in action when it comes to supporting structural changes, but it's a whole other thing to be actively working against [inaudible] of our communities, who, in the midst of unrelenting violence, are forced to fight with little to no resources to affect change for a most ungrateful public. In my home state of Queensland on the 30th anniversary, you would see academic showing up not for black families, but to credentialise a Queensland Police Union Conference, appearing before me in front of police union branded benefactors. Some of you may be aware that during this time a story went out from this conference about intervening on crime in kindergarten. And in that story, all of the kids featured were our kids, in handcuffs or walking alongside police. Accessorize by academics, that piece reinforced or legitimized all of the racialized imaginings about Aboriginal people, families, parents and communities. Rightly so it received backlash and was pulled, but not because of how it made Aboriginal people or black children look, but for how the academics appeared, having been exposed so blatantly as accomplices to this racist nonsense. And in doing so, they showed us exactly whose side they're on when it comes to race – their own. And sure enough, the following week, the new youth justice reforms were passed in Queensland Parliament, that make no mistake about the kids which they would be targeting – ours. The timing of the police union conference with the thirtieth anniversary of the Royal Commission was no error. And the academics that burnish his credentials are normally a part of the racial violence that Blackfellas continue to endure. I still recall the day of the anniversary outside New South Wales parliament. The family of Tane Chatfield asking why hanging points at Tamworth Correctional Center remained. The reason, it would seem, is that the center is a heritage listed building, apparently making it too difficult or too expensive to remove. Indeed, to attend to racial violence is difficult and fraught with reprisals, and there is a heavy price to pay for those who pick the right side. Tragically in this time, there are too few social scientists willing to relinquish the rewards that come with being a part of the intellectual apparatus that works to largely launder the actions of this most settler-colonial state. How could we then trust them to teach race, to study it? When they know too well the rewards and protections they are granted to sustain the racial hierarchy.

So, I'm no longer making an appeal for inclusion of Critical Race in the academy. Not that I don't believe it should be but it's kind of like the 26th of January being commemorated as Australia Day. By and large, Blackfellas aren't chanting "change the date". There isn't appeal for inclusion in the settler

colonial project but rather insistence on our independence as First Nations peoples to operate on our own terms. Today, we don't make an appeal to be seen, but we assert of sovereignty that is unceded.

24:27

And that is the place where the most useful race scholarship resides. There's not so much a location but it's a place nonetheless, one where new political paradigms are being forged. I used to think that Critical Race scholarship needs to have a home of sorts, where we might gather, where we might build, and I thought that we could carve out a space in the academy somewhere. That if we were just smart enough, either in the work that we produce or in the cunning of our strategy, a physical location could eventually be found. And in doing so, I made some critical mistakes which offered me insights into how race works in this place. I remember the shock of last year still of having been awarded that \$1.7 million research grant, only to be told there was not even office to accommodate me. And it wasn't like I wasn't used to being placed in all sorts of strange offices that did not meet the grounds for what would ordinarily be considered an acceptable workspace or research environment. But I remember the indignity of packing up my box in the rented office that the School of Social Sciences had housed me, having had to source nine boxes to carry those books home, traipsing up and down the lifts with my colleagues and friends, Dr Singh, Dr Mukandi, and [inaudible], and I remember the looks on their devices that revealed far more anguish than I had felt at the time. They too could not believe the lie that there was no room at the institution, not even a crappy rented office somewhere in that center. But it was on the quiet drive home that I realized that my excellence and all of my hyper-productivity would not protect me. The inclusion or exclusion or critical approach to race was not a matter of academic excellence, or even economics. But one of ideology, and one in which so many of my colleagues were willing to sustain and enact. And I'm kind of done with the public silence of progressive academics who voice their horror of the violence only ever in those private spaces. I'm done with that look of horror too at the mere suggestion that race might be a matter of intellectual curiosity for social scientists, that too greets me when I suggest that Indigenous scholars may know some shit about this thing that they built their career on and [inaudible]. And I have to admit it took me a while to come to this place in my thinking, I still mistakenly had thought the academy was place in which it was possible to transcend race, and it isn't. Even the most acclaimed scholars among us can never escape those damned indignities visited upon us, not just from the senior executives, but even from the [inaudible] administrative officer. I, too, mistakenly had thought that in mastering a knowing of it, I could somehow master the harm that would follow.

More recently, I found myself in work that has immersed me in depth, as though my understanding of and articulation of race might do something to affect change, even if it's a change that has arrived too late. And yet, in my knowing, I too know how efficient and how effective and how outrageously shameful this place is in its ability to disguise the reality of racial violence. And I'm gonna do my bidding. I'm just taking my turn that those before me has done for me to speak truth regardless of cost. But I'm still left wondering at times, what is the point of this intellectual labor? Critical Race scholarship should have offered a place in which I did not question my sanity, but it did not save me from stormy emotion. Sometimes it made me more wild, making more visible what it is that I felt we didn't have the words to express. But what does our knowing of it better do better to better our conditions? Is it just another way in which you might be tormented by the reality of this place? Ignorance is bliss to the saying, the more we know the more we must strategize the way in which we carry that burden of knowing while simultaneously trying to fight it. Morrison was right when she said racism, a distraction. I think it's more than that. A kind of distraction that my colleagues will never actually know. despite their teaching loads and the usual school politics and our family situations. But then we must turn up to work and smile at work as though the work we do is just work. and that professional advance and new knowledge are our sole motives, not knowing that we carry an accountability of our people, including those who return home to at night, including the generations that will follow that will steeple this ancestor or that, when it was our time on the front line. I don't know in this moment whether this is the best use of my labor and I'll be honest about that. I'm not sure.

28:38

Our royal blackness, Angela Davis, reflecting on her struggle to define how she came to be an activist. She states, "people have often asked me over the years, 'what made you decide to become an activist?' And for years and years I've thought about it... I came up with various explanations, events, pivotal events in my life, and final, after struggling with this for years, I decided that there was really no particular moment when I decided to become an activist. As a matter of fact, I grew up with the idea that in order to live in segregated circumstances... that my parents basically taught us that we had to be critical of the way things were. Otherwise, we could not affirm our own humanity. And we had to dedicate our lives to the kind of transformation that would make this a better world to live in for all of us. So, I guess I've learned that wherever I am, wherever I happen to be doing at that moment, I had to

fulfil that commitment for the rest of my life. So, I want to begin by suggesting that whoever you are, wherever you are, whether you're a student, an academic, a worker, whether you're a person involved in your church, whether you're an artist, there are always ways to gear your work to progressive radical transformation.”

I want to speak to the place for Critical Race scholarship, drawing upon on my own experiences, but no longer through the lens of exclusion from the academy. I want to speak of the places we build, wherever that happens to be. I draw here upon work in building an NGO in my community, Inala Wangarra, an organization that albeit small and under resourced is punching well above its weight. It's a small organization that's fighting to exist in a policy era of new paternalism that refuses mining or gambling funds and child protection work and subscribing to a service delivery model that demands of us the surveillance of black behaviors and the contractual silence about that the conditions that cause us most harm. It's an organization that is among the last of its tribe in terms of the landscape of Indigenous service delivery, and we have no peak to represent us. But it is a place in which I'm tested the ideas that I espouse. How does this translate in a real sense in the lives of the people I know and love? Is our work any different? Are we feeding from the same trough under the guise of this idea of community control? The other place is the Institute for Collaborative Race Research. My colleagues are here with me as well as co-directors. It is a private research institute which is more of a community than a business because race scholars don't make for the best capitalist as it turns out. But it is a place to think about race among those who are still not stuck on contesting its realness all the while remaining silent about how they're gonna benefit from it. It's a place that's founded in shared values, values that don't pay the light bill, which is made even more problematic given the work is done after hours on weekends and very late into the night. But it is work that reminds me not who I am, instead, why I'm here. It's a place that engages in work that I can't speak to fully for legal reasons, but I'll speak about in more general terms. Neither of these accrue any personal financial benefit, but I really feel a little more richer for it. And its why last year I publicly called out that article from those sociologists who in their newly published books help authorized [inaudible] about, and I quote, “doing the work when it comes to race, indigeneity and sovereignty”. I won't reference the article or the authors, as I don't want another complaint to my institution for being an academic. But I've used it as inspo if you will, as a launch pad, for outlining what I've come to understand thus far about the most useful place for Critical Race scholarship in this particular moment. And it's not the social sciences, sorry. I want to draw on Walter Rodney's chapter,

'The Groundings with My Brothers' in which he reflects upon the decision by the Jamaican government to ban him as a professor from re-entering the country, having attended the 1968 Black Writers Conference in Montreal. I want to speak on this place of Critical Race scholarship, not as a location, or this discipline over that, but as a place of being, wherever you happen to be in whatever particular moment. Here goes. Critical Race work is not a place for academic career advancement, but one of cause. And look, as I say, I'm conscious as I stand here as having a Professorial appointment in this moment.

32:43

So, clearly, I've carved out a career, but I think it's come because the commitment to the cause and not at the expense of it. It has not been a smooth road, as some of you may read about. But the scholarship I feel is all the better for it, better for those bumps that came along the way. Those that seek out that smooth ride, that nice house, front lawn, car, and reasonable bank balance will find out they've traded far more than the sum total of all those supposed nice things. It is in the commitment to the cause that we end up making decisions that are far more benefit to more of us than the few of us. And you'll find that there are people who will come to race having been forced to reckon with their own personal racial encounter. Some may stay the course, while others move on up when that moment has passed, or when they can pass for them as one of the palatable and moderate blacks who are no longer seen as a threat to the institution or the white people in the tearoom or the boardroom. These people will be rewarded with a lucrative posting and their success will be articulated by membership to places we have long been denied, as the first and often only. But of what cost to the rest? It is a place that exists not just in the discipline you are trained to believe to know what's best, but a place in which Blackfellas reside. As much as some might complain about the absence of Critical Race in the social sciences, it doesn't own race, and its location within it should not be the sole parameters in which we understand the vital race work that is happening here. The thing is, it's actually the Health Sciences ironically, that are leading the way, not because we're given the tools to understand it, but because there's this critical black mass of radical thinking emerging that provides a space in which people draw courage to speak of it. It's kind of laughable that sociologists frame this work as not equating to scholarship writ large, and it has been experiences of black health professional that they've harnessed to emboss their scholarly credentials. It is in our lack of disciplinary knowing that enables our refusal to adhere to the rules they've set for us that makes the work all the more useful. Because we've found a place to speak more freely, to think of things

we're not permitted to write about. It is precisely our discipline deviance and deficiency that sovereign black thinkers make the best teachers. If you're a settler scholar, in Critical Race or otherwise, don't for a second think you have something to teach us about sovereignty, not in this place.

I no longer subscribe to the story that I came to race late intellectually. From an early age, growing up in a black home and being raised intellectually among a cohort of black students, we knew of black power, not by the texts that we read but in our being. Through this I've come to know that the best race theorists aren't found in the academy. The best race theorists sit in our homes, at kitchen tables, in our communities, on sidelines of football fields, on the walls of art galleries, on stairs of Coroner's Courts, on top of police cars, all kinds of stages. These are the same sorts of people that the academy has fought so desperately to discipline us to think differently and disparagingly about.

It's not a place for egos, but it's most certainly a place where mistakes are made so long as you're prepared to own them. Critical Race scholarship is a place that demands a certain humility, and that comes more easily to those connected to our own communities because we have no choice but to be humble. Mob will make sure you are, as a gift of love, and not the lateral violence claimed by those who remain committed to demonizing Blackfellas. And I have plenty of black people that hate me, don't get me wrong. But what they do for me every day is to think deeply about the place in which I come to this work. Even the most violent attacks have been a gift. You see, to receive black critique or attack demands a relinquishment of that racist belief that black people are inferior and undeserving of better, or not deserving of the asking for more. It means relinquishing the idea that black people are incapable of knowing, because they haven't read as closely as you the text you decided that was worthy of being read. Now I decided to take time off social media earlier this year, not as a retreat from the fight but a kind of regrounding, in the way described by Rodney in *The Groundings with My Brothers*, the black consciousness like power, the role of accountability, intellectual work, colonialism and liberation coalesces [inaudible] of methodology.

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Throughout, the work didn't stop, and there's been no retreat to self-care of bubble baths and face masks, but rather a retreat to a training ground and one that has required me to attend less to likes and comments and quips about race, to reckon with some work that's been shockingly violent. And in that violence, I

found a new purpose and courage, new tools and techniques and a new way to do this work and to think more deeply about our responsibilities away from that noise. It's also on my brother's that are here with me today. In checking ourselves and our egos, we are giving ourselves permission to be human, to be flawed and to make mistakes. This work is hard, and our knowingness doesn't protect us against it, as much as doesn't make us better than other black people. The power of race is such that it's constantly transforming, constantly finding ways to keep itself firmly cemented in place. Logic, reason and evidence base, those things that we're trained to believe in, don't work in this work. So, we are bound not to get it right, and not to get the wins even when we get it right intellectually. To never make mistakes is to never learn and to never share them is to never teach. The academy as a place has too much room for ego and not enough room for community, despite its claims as being a place of teaching and learning. Critical Race scholarship is also a place of death. And it's a place of love. And a place of life. To work on race is to be in a place where death features daily. It means grappling always with the knowledge that we've arrived too late to do that work. I talk to any Blackfella who speaks of unjust loss through racial violence. They really are seeking reclamation, but a more just place for those who follow. It is in this place of all places that we've witnessed an Indigenous humanity that the academy has stubbornly refused to know, whatever discipline you're in. This work wounds in as much as it inspires, and it should hurt. It must tire the body and mind. To not feel it is to have relinquished one's own sense of humanity. And how can we speak of the humanity of others if we've lost our own in the process? But it was through the intellectual work of Critical Race scholar Amy McGuire, who some of you know is award winning black journalist, that I've been able to better grapple with this tension. Amy's PhD research, which you get insights into by via her Substack account [inaudible] as part of her approach to her thesis, has been thinking through, in real time, the violence of media representations of the average woman who experiences violence. Specifically, she's been examining the stories told about murdered and missing Aboriginal woman and in these accounts, she has shown the unrelenting violence they've been subjected to even in death. What she offers is not simply analysis of death and violence, it's from that place of [inaudible] that she insists on a restoring of their humanity. She refuses to speak of details of body parts brutalized. She instead speaks of their lives and their fullness, even in death. Her scholarly work around presencing is one example of a radical race scholarship taking place in real time. It is in this work that Amy is being met with all sorts of what once would have been described as strange coincidences, but she has found the place to speak instead of spirit. And it's not my right to speak of that in detail today.

But which reveals an Indigenous sovereignty and humanity that is always here. Never lost or past, and one that refuses the separating out of this world from another.

Critical Race scholarship is a place of accountability. It's a place where we hold to account while also be accountable, that demands a relationship that includes both respectful and antagonistic relationships. Critical Race scholarship must be a resource to the legal and political work that holds the state accountable for its violence. What is the point of your theory if it's never put to work for such purposes? And of course, it's not without consequence, it might mean ministerial briefings discrediting you and your little NGO offer a five-minute radio interview. It means always being in an antagonistic relationship with those that you know have the power to visit all kinds of repercussions on you. Yet at the same time, we must think deeply about a different kind of relationship [inaudible]. Critical Race scholarship must be a place that first and foremost is of service to the struggle of black people, and as such cannot be divorced from the struggle. So, we must be in a different kind of relationship, shifting between these stances of binding and bracing and caring in any given moment, the transitions of which are only made possible when we remember whose side we are on, remembering that our job is a matter of wresting power away from those who visited it upon us so violently and not seeking proximity to it.

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Rodney reminds us of [inaudible] Jamaican patriot Paul Bogle. "Remember your colour and cleave to the black." The race scholar has no special right to extract black stories whether in order to perform theoretical prowess, or their human rights credentials, whether we're Blackfellas or not. Black people everywhere and anywhere must deal with the violence of exploitation, and it's a risk that is no smaller in the space of Critical Race work. Again, Rodney declares we are all enemies of the people until proven otherwise. It's too frequently here the practice of extracting and claiming black testimonies alongside the erasure of black theorizing and this itself is a form of violence. The Critical Race scholar has to be as much if not more antagonistic relationship with their own practice as they are with the state. I will always be in close relationship with mob, and we see that so powerfully in Amy's work. In this process, she has modelled what it used to be in relationship in a different way with the people from whose tragedy come to things people write about. In working to this notion of presencing, Amy has had to be in a meaningful relationship with mob. Black people are not cases or numbers, and their names, images and words aren't seen as free for the taking. And you really feel it in her work. In her writing. The

strength of her work intellectually, politically, and personally is a reflection of the strength of her relationships, simultaneously intimate, antagonistic and accountable. Critical Race scholarship is a place of war. Make no mistake, this is a war and those who forget that simple fact are those who know nothing of it when the day is discussed at the kitchen table. If race is principally an intellectual endeavor for you, for which you are bent on providing the most sophisticated articulation, then you'll find that those holding the line against racial violence will have no need for you. The complicity, the solidarity with white supremacy is strong here, but no stronger than the unceded sovereignty of Blackfellas in this place. And when I say unceded sovereignty I don't mean every Blackfella in this place. I speak specifically to those whose sense of work, either as a Blackfella or as a scholar, is not bound up in inclusion in their places. The refusal or rejection of these locations is not anti-intellectual, it's just pro-Black, pro-Indigenous. And the fact that entry into the academy typically demands rejection of that stance speaks to its unwavering commitment to sustaining racial order. It is what has led me to invest my intellectual labour and pursuits that sit outside of my day job that occupy a small footnote in my PPR under service, that in which the work I feel has been of most use, where the war is being waged by those far more courageously than even some of my colleagues up the corridor of whatever faculty or institution I've sat at any given time. This war has always been best placed in the hands of those who have the most to gain from dismantling it. The war on race is not won by the advancement of one, but when more of us cleave to black. For this is the place where the community is built, a place that we all need to rest, to fight, and to think. That's why we sought to build Indigenous Health Humanities as a place, not in a discipline or an institution, but as a place, nonetheless. Over the next few years, our little community seeks to merge into a much larger community, brought together through the values expressed here, and will be trialing ways in which to build intellectual collectives that remain committed to foregrounding Indigenous sovereignty and humanity in their work, wherever that work resides, even if it's outside of the academy through a range of writing retreats, symposia, and a forthcoming podcast, among other things. I don't want to say watch this space. It's definitely the place to be. A place where we take up the task that Dr. Little Watson calls an imagining of future as far ahead of us as the past behind us. And such an imagining sounds nice, but it's not easy. I found that as much as people like to speak of change, most people are really afraid of it. That's why I'm skeptical of the discourse of progress. It functions to maintain the current order of things, to keep things how they are on the basis of looking how far we've come. It insists that we stop and be satisfied, or be grateful of what's been achieved, never wanting, or never expecting more. It is to think of ourselves in a struggle that came before us and will

continue long after we left. And in doing so it must let go of those ideas of what it is to be a good academic. And instead think deeply about what it is to be a good ancestor in what is our time, not just as the one, but as one among many. Thank you.