1. Introduction: ‘Ngapartji Ngapartji: In Turn, In Turn’—Ego-histoire and Australian Indigenous Studies

Vanessa Castejon, Anna Cole, Oliver Haag and Karen Hughes

Beginnings

‘To tell the history of another is to be pressed against the limits of your own’. Sara Suleri, ‘The Rhetoric of English India’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2002).

‘When I ask anybody where they are from I expect nowadays to be told an extremely long story’. Stuart Hall (The Stuart Hall Project, 2013).

These are stories, histories. They emerged in part from encounters between scholars from Australia and Europe that offered a transnational way to think about culture, class, ethnicity, identity, inbetweenness and whiteness in Australian Indigenous studies. Our intention was to weave together professional and personal accounts of studies that have Australia and Indigeneity at their heart. The origins of this book lie in a discussion between Anna Cole and Vanessa Castejon that took place after a European Australian Studies conference at the Universitat de Barcelona’s Centre d’Estudis Australians in 2008. Over breakfast they wondered why many of the Australian scholars speaking on Indigenous topics at the conference did not reflect on their role in representing Indigenous Australia in and to Europe, despite the achievements of self-determination and self-reflexivity. That this conversation took place one morning in Barcelona—the place that Vanessa’s parents had been exiled from during the Spanish civil war—was significant. The power of place to unlock stories and to allow them to be felt and have an impact was something we had learned to articulate from working alongside Indigenous Australian historians and cultural custodians. So Vanessa and Anna started with themselves, trying to understand more about how their histories fed their motivations to work in Australian Indigenous history. Subsequently Anna and Vanessa were invited by John Docker, Ann Curthoys and Frances Peters-Little to publish these ego-histoires in *Passionate Histories* (Peters-Little, Curthoys & Docker, 2010) and so began the process of taking ego-histoire out of its strictly European origins and into ‘a broader history of colonialism and postcolonialism’ (Curthoys, 2012).

In *Passionate Histories*, Vanessa Castejon wrote of how as a French scholar in Australia she had often been accused of exoticism because of the colonial past of her country (Castejon, 2010). People in Australia, she observed, tried to define her, impose an identity on her, and tell her whether she was French or Spanish (because of her origins). In Australia, as never before, people told her she was 'white', ignoring her feelings of otherness and marginalisation as someone who grew up in the red suburbs (or ghettos) around Paris. In her ego-histoire, she discusses the circumstances of her anarchist family's forced exile from Franco's Spain as a guiding influence on her reasons for choosing to later study Aboriginal political activism (Castejon 2002; Castejon 2003; Castejon 2005a; Castejon 2008), and her abiding interest in issues of conflict, war, violence, and claims of sovereignty. Alongside this, she further locates her interest in identity (Castejon 2005b; Castejon 2007) as coming from the fact that she feels as an 'in-between'. Understanding her position has changed her as a researcher, a process she identifies as 'extrospection' rather than introspection, serving to better illuminate facts as well as affects hidden beneath her research.

Anna Cole wrote about the relationship between her research on Indigenous urban cultural politics in 1960s Australia and her personal history of gender, class, migration and ethnicity (Cole 2010; Cole 2009). Part of a family who migrated from Britain to Western Australia in the late 1970s, her upbringing had involved a process of exile, re-invention and assimilation. Anna was curious about how her experiences fuelled her enduring interest in the processes of attempted assimilation of Indigenous Australians (Cole 2000; Cole 2003a; Cole 2003b) and, more recently, how her father's institutionalisation from the age of seven as a child in Britain had fed her long-standing commitment to documenting the processes that led to the institutionalisation of Indigenous children in Australia (Cole 1994; Cole 2005; Cole 2009). Anna and Vanessa went on to co-convene, with Oliver Haag and Karen Hughes, a conference entitled 'Researching the Other, Transfers of Self: Egohistoire, Europe and Indigenous Australia' at the Université Paris 13 in December 2011. We mention this here because, as co-editors of this book, we feel we cannot ask contributors to share their stories without sharing our own. Oliver Haag and Karen Hughes publish their ego-histoires for the first time in this collection.

This project has drawn on many intellectual currents and, in part, on the trajectory of 'new imperial histories'. In the introduction to her book, *Empire in Question*, Antoinette Burton writes, 'I foreground my whiteness, my gender and my class position within the North American academy not as any kind of disclaimer, but as recognition of my own accountability and the ways in which it is shaped, without being fully determined, by the situations I occupy' (Burton 2011, p. 37). In particular, an important influence on this collection stems from the last three decades of life-story writing in a range of academic

disciplines and contexts, including, but not limited to, anthropology, cultural studies, oral history, historical anthropology, queer studies and, more recently, auto-ethnographical studies (Kaplan 1999; Kadar 1992; James & Marcus 1986; Alexander & Gibson 2004; Hornung 2013; Reed-Danahay 1997; Okeley & Callaway 2001). In part, this work was inspired in the 1970s and early '80s by women scholars in history and other academic disciplines who sought to reclaim the silences and omissions of 'universal', depersonalised histories by applying personal voices, applying 'situatedness' and 'standpoint' theory to interdisciplinary work, making explicit the standpoint of the 'knower' (including Olsen 1978; Harstock 1998; Harraway 1988; Collins 1991). This 'autobiographical turn' also reflects the interests of critical historiography since the 1980s in the ambiguous relationship between the present, the past, and the writing of history (Docker & Curthoys 2010). Such influences led, in Gillian Whitlock's words, to 'styles of scholarship that address the authority of experience' (Whitlock 2005). At its best, we hope a collective exploration of life history which the process of ego-histoire represents, including unearthing the history of the Stolen Generations in Australia, or the atrocities of the Spanish civil war in Europe, can recognise and value experiences that have been silenced and help individuals and nations heal from painful aspects of the past.

In Australia, Indigenous writers, historians, activists and cultural custodians have led the field in using life-story work to convey the politics of personal history (see Haag 2008 for a survey of this field). While Indigenous life-histories provide invaluable perspectives on Australian and Indigenous history, they expose Indigenous scholars to personal scrutiny in a way that is not comparable to non-Indigenous scholars. This collection hopes to go some way to balancing this, with themes that include Indigenous perceptions of Europe past and present, similarities and differences between Indigenous and/or ethnic groups in Europe, and including non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous reflections on the relationship between personal, family, or ancestral life and professional research.

Ego-histoire

'Ego, is not a dirty word'. Skyhooks, 1975.

'Ego-histoire' is a term introduced by French historian Pierre Nora in his collection *Essais d'Ego Histoire* (Nora *et al* 1987). Nora's intention was that ego-histoire would be a combination of a personal history, a broader social history and historiographical reflection. His original *Essais* invited seven distinguished French historians to apply their methods to themselves:

These are not phony literary autobiographies, nor pointless intimate confessions, nor abstract professions of faith, nor attempts at basic

psychoanalysis. The exercise was to clearly set down one's own story [*histoire*] as one would write someone else's; to try to apply to oneself, each with his or her own particular style and methods, the same cool, encompassing and explanatory gaze that one so often directs towards others. To explain, as an historian, the link between the history you have made and the history that has made you. (Nora *et al* 1987, p. 7)

Nora invited the French historical profession to respond to what he called 'the falsity of detachment ... revealed through two decades of historiographical debate', and saw ego-histoire as different from conventional autobiography partly because the different life histories are intended to be read side by side. Whereas autobiography can highlight the unique and personal, essays in ego-histoire invite comparison about the relationship and points of dialogue between personal and collective identities. In this way, ego-histoire can demonstrate, elegantly at times, both the close connection between individual and national identity and the inextricable intertwining of research methodology and outcomes, and subjective data.

Nora's short introduction to his original volume is published here in English for the first time, with thanks to Stephen Muecke for the translation. Nora's longer essay, reflecting on the first ego-histoire collection some years after its publication, 'L'Ego-Histoire est-elle possible?' (Nora 2001), is published here as an appendix to this volume. Nora rather grandly claimed ego-histoire as a 'new genre, for a *new age* of historical consciousness'. The 'old age', as Luisa Passerini and Alexander Geppert noted in their 2001 collection, *European Ego-Histoires: Historiography and the self, 1970–2000*, 'had been that of canceling the writing subject of the historian, of dissimulating personality behind knowledge, and of escaping to other epochs, and had been dominated by illusions of impersonality and objectivity' (Passerini & Geppert 2001). Nora's *Essais d'Ego-Histoire* invited just one woman historian to participate and issues of French colonialism were marginalised in his volume. As Richard Vinen notes: 'The Ego-histoire collection ... belonged to a specific time and place. It went with a group of historians who belonged to a certain generation (born between 1917 and 1936, with a special concentration of those born around 1930) and who were associated with particular kinds of institutions' (Vinen 2011, p. 553).

We think ego-histoire, in a broader historical and postcolonial context, has insightful application for scholars writing in the area of Australian Indigenous studies. In this volume, we employ ego-histoire as a useful tool for researchers seeking to engage with a range of post-colonial questions. For example: How does our sense of nation, class, gender, and generation, among other identity markers, shift and take on different meanings in Australia and outside it, in Europe, for example? What impact do national histories implicitly have on one's sense of self? How as a non-Indigenous Australian researcher do you find an ethical way

to acknowledge your family's personal investment in colonial history and live in Aboriginal country and engage in research that is decolonising, politically purposeful and genuinely collaborative? How as an Indigenous researcher do you find ethical ways to work within academic disciplines, including Indigenous studies, that have sought to 'know' Indigenous Australians? For Indigenous intellectuals, does Europe represent a regressive space, representative of the colonial metropole, or a liberating one, removed from the every-day taken-for-granted racism of settler-colonial countries (although replete with racism all of its own), or something in-between or something else altogether? What could ego-histoire reveal of European researchers' motivations to work in Indigenous Australian studies? Could they be seeking to 'liberate' Indigenous Australians, 'the great white hope', in Frank Doolan's words (see Gillian Cowlishaw, this volume), or themselves from the tyrannies of colonial history? What about those 'in-betweeners' who feel they are not from one culture or another but a mix of many?

We invited scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds to write their version of ego-histoire, applying it as a useful methodological tool to explore transnational influences on scholars and their work in Indigenous studies. Unlike Nora's original collection, we eschew a less rigid definition of what or who makes history, inviting anthropologists, literary studies scholars and cultural studies scholars, alongside professional historians from different ages and stages in their careers, to reflect on their 'ego-histoire'. Many of the contributors to this collection reject, either explicitly or implicitly, Nora's 'cool, encompassing and explanatory gaze', yet all seek, in one way or another, to make a link between the history or scholarship they have made, and the history that made them. As Gillian Whitlock observes, 'Nora is speaking specifically about ego-histoire, however his observations about memory work triggering self-reflexive forms of scholarship has wider application' (Whitlock 2005, p. 339).

The project of applying ego-histoire to Australian Indigenous studies has been utilised here by a number of Indigenous scholars drawing on a historical method resonant with long-standing Indigenous pedagogies of telling and interpreting histories from the standpoint of the self and collective self, inclusive of place or country. The application of the concept of 'ego-histoire' to Australian Indigenous studies is not meant as a model for Indigenous scholars to engage in self-reflexivity. Diverse Indigenous cultures have prior and sovereign concepts of storytelling and history that rest on complex relationships to country, genealogies and personal/familial connections (for example, Moreton-Robinson 2002, p. 16; Wilson 2003). As noted, 'autobiographical stories' or 'life writing' have a strong intellectual tradition in Indigenous Australia, and are arguably different in ontological conceptions of relatedness, identity and history from Nora's concept of the 'self' in ego-histoire. But in bringing

European and Indigenous life-story work together, new perspectives are gained. In some Indigenous contributions in this collection, the Eurocentric premise of 'Europeans studying the Aborigines' is turned on its head. Instead, Europe is studied through Indigenous ego-histoires, and in the process 'provincialized' (Chakrabarty 2000).

Europe and Australia

One of the ideas that motivated this collection was to ask European scholars who work in Australian Indigenous studies why they are committed to a field so geographically removed from Europe? Such geographical distance adds difficulties to research. It is not easy to practice regional and local histories other than in focused field-work trips, nor to sustain personal connections and friendships from the other side of the world, although the digital age has shrunk some of these expanses. Scholars based in Europe researching Indigenous studies are confronted with charges of participating in the European exoticism and primitivism of other cultures that occurred through a long history of colonial objectification in human exhibitions (Bancel et al., 2002), as well as Europe's ubiquitous involvement in the slave trade at the nexus of Empire (Poignant 2004; Jahoda 1999; Hiller 1991; Nederveen Pieterse 1990). Next to outright racial denigration, there is also an escapist tradition from European modernity that seeks notional refuge in different, seemingly 'pre-modern' cultures. Some of the European translations of Marlo Morgan's *Mutant Message Down Under* (Morgan 1991), for example, are still advertised as 'Aboriginal literature', influencing European popular cultural consumption of Indigenous Australia (Haag 2009, p. 8). 'I've read Marlo Morgan', is a frequent, disturbing and earnest comment made by European students when disclosing their knowledge of Indigenous studies. Long-held constructions of Indigenous 'difference', influenced by 'New Age' culture, still abound in Europe. Such claims to difference, resting on primordial and primitivist othering, are different from Indigenous concepts of sovereignty and the politics of self-determination. Translating concepts of self-determination into contemporary European discourse, as Oliver Haag's essay in this volume shows, is complicated by invisible and unspoken boundaries of culture and 'race' that can become visible again through the process of ego-histoire. Ego-histoire, in an Australian context, goes some way to rectifying the imbalance identified by Aileen Moreton-Robinson: 'the writer-knower as subject is racially invisible, while the Aboriginal as object is visible' (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p. 81).

In this collection we ask explicitly, could the distance between Europe and Australia also be productive? European scholars have a range of different motivations for working in Indigenous studies, often precipitated by their different social, class, gender and ethnic backgrounds and their relationships

to other colonial or diasporic histories. By analysing these differences through the lens of ego-histoire, different conceptions of social and apparently 'racial' categories in Europe (or, rather, the many Europes) and Australia (or, rather, the many Australias) are brought to the fore. This works to add fresh insight into the rich scholarship on European representations of Indigenous cultures (including Summo-O'Connell 2012; Jurgensen 1995; Thomas 1994). Ego-histoire can render racial and other identifications visible and act as a political strategy of decentring the asymmetrical power-relations in academic knowledge production. It is also of analytic merit for understanding the complexity of constructions of racialised, as well as gendered and classed positions. Ego-histoire, we argue, allows for more complex understandings of European 'writer-knowers' than is given by the cover of invisibility. Racial, cultural and gendered 'opposites', this book shows, simply do not hold. Complexity and reciprocal exchange borne of relationship are at work in our ego-histoires.

Essays

Ego-histoire is different from conventional autobiography in that different life histories are read side by side, in the spirit of 'serial data', in Nora's words. Essays in ego-histoire invite comparison between individual and collective identities as they explore relationship and points of dialogue. While none of the essays in this book were written to fit into the sub-headings below or explicitly in dialogue with each other, we grouped them together because of their perceived common themes. We invite you to read them as part of a whole, noting that place, relationship and, at times, the ineffable nature of research, plays a part for each. In this volume, essays are grouped into three broad sub-groups. The first, 'Self and History', includes six essays that reflect on influences from early family life and the passage into adulthood on subsequent research and writing. Victoria Grieves's contribution opens this section. Like many of the other writers in this collection, she alludes to the 'outsider status' that has fuelled her intellectual work. Grieves relates theoretical interventions, such as Walter Mignolo's border thinking, to her personal history in order to emphasise the opportunities for critical analysis produced under the intense personal and political pressures of colonial racism and assimilation. Following on from her personal and theoretical account of New South Wales history, Bill Edwards' essay describes his personal journey with Anangu history, a journey that stretches from the late 1950s to the present. He reflects on his role as interpreter, including during the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara, Uluru and Maralinga land rights claims, and as a lecturer in the first Indigenous tertiary education unit in Australia. His essay gave us the title for our volume, 'ngapartji, ngapartji, in turn, in turn', a significant and primary concept from Anangu culture expressing the importance of reciprocal exchange.

Roslyn Poignant reflects on her decades of involvement with Indigenous history and sketches a path from Maroubra, ‘when the sand dunes opposite our house stretched all the way to Botany Bay’, to her training and aptitude for visual literacy and later marriage to Axel Poignant, to the coincidental wrapping of Little Bay on a return trip home to Sydney, and the record of a death found easily in the British Registry Office in the early 1990s. Drawing on memory together with extracts from her research diary, she sketches a historiography of her best-known writing and curatorial work. An entry in her research diary highlights what might be the impossibility of not writing ego-histoire: ‘To write the *seeing* ‘I’ out of the narrative is to represent the mirror-field as if a portion of it has been obliterated by a retinal blind spot’. Karen Hughes reflects on the process of reciprocity of knowledge in settler-colonial contexts, noting at the beginning of her essay that her forgotten or silenced family history of cross-cultural interaction with Indigenous families ‘is recuperated not through my family’s stories but through the stories of Aboriginal neighbours’. She describes the metamorphosis or transformation of identity and a more complex sense of belonging that came from relating her family stories to those of her Indigenous neighbours. Franca Tamisari sketches her intellectual journey from Italy to remote Australia and back again, and argues for the foundational importance of ‘starting from your own story’, as Yolngu thinker Keith Lapulung advised her many years ago. Citing the foundational work of Italian ethnographer Ernesto De Martino, she argues that scholars should not hide their passions and choices, but assert them without being afraid of becoming unfaithful to truth: ‘On the contrary this attitude [could] open up the research to a new dimension of fidelity to the real’ (De Martino 2002, p. 92). This section concludes with Jan Idle’s challenge to herself: to feel ‘history’s breath’, to slow down and, amidst the felt-sense of shame for her non-Indigenous family’s settler-colonial past, create enough space to ‘feel, acknowledge and speak the violence of contact between settlers and Indigenous people’.

The second part of this collection, ‘Out of Place’, borrows its name both from Helen Idle’s essay in this section and from Edward Said’s memoir, an intellectual fellow traveller for this volume on ego-histoire. The six essays in this section reflect on the impact of the experience of ‘being out of place’ on the authors’ scholarship. Oliver Haag begins by discussing the difficulties—at times even impossibilities—of translating Australian meanings of ‘race’ into the German-speaking context in which he became a scholar. The silencing of ‘race’ in post-Holocaust German-speaking academia, especially in leftist circles, became noisy in Australia where Oliver found he had suddenly ‘inherited’ more than one race. The re-translation of these discourses into German-speaking contexts meant again a loss of ‘race’ and proved a struggle of cross-historical interpretation. For Barry Judd, a research trip to Papunya and Alice Springs, the open inquiry of an overseas colleague and a new relationship to what is for him an old and

known place, opens a space to reflect both on theoretical paradigms as well as his own role of 'native informant', as he dryly calls it, in the university sector. Judd draws attention to the potential of work from earlier postcolonial scholars, such as Fanon and Césaire, in laying the groundwork for decolonising approaches to Indigenous history in Australia. Jane Haggis, a British immigrant to Australia as a child, finds herself unable, as an adult, when requested at a Whiteness studies conference in Queensland, to tell a story of genealogy unknown to her: 'stuck in the mud of the Thames'. She wonders if the 'awkwardness of the contact zone' that her post-migration family story attests to might be a place for entangled knowledges to emerge. John Docker explores ego-histoire from the viewpoint of both his settler-colonial and diasporic consciousness. Diaspora consciousness, he explains, inheres in a sense of relating to more than one history, to more than one time and place, more than one past and future. He relates the story of his family background to make connections between his personal story and wider Australian social history, reflecting along the way on the methodology and historiography of ego-histoire. Helen Idle writes of her embodied experience of viewing artworks from 'home out of place' to wonder aloud at the ways of viewing Aboriginal art available to her from a European perspective. She reflects, from Europe, on her settler-colonial connection to country and the possibility of contributing, from out of place, to new public interpretations and displays of Indigenous Australian art internationally. This section concludes with Rosemary van den Berg's reflections on her experiences of being away from Australia, living in the Netherlands as a young mother, and the decisive impact of this experience on her subsequent career as a scholar back in Australia. Her contribution suggests that Indigenous autobiography and biography need to be understood in familial, local, regional, national and transnational contexts. These contexts are not separate, but interwoven.

Contributions to the third and final section of the collection, 'Tales of Mystery and Imagination', have in common a sense of the vitality and significance of personal relationships to research trajectories, and reflect on the ineffable and, in some cases, numinous aspects of research, which elude straight-forward strictly common sense explanations of research careers. Jeanine Leane's ego-histoire challenges temporal linear versions of progress and alludes to the unexpected reciprocity between the literature of Europe and Indigenous Australia, citing Alexis Wright: 'Non-fiction is often about the writer telling what it is safe to write' (Wright 2002, p. 13). This seems a good way to describe one of the boundaries that ego-histoire, when done well, pushes against in other essays in the volume. Gillian Cowlshaw offers a personal account of the nature of her ethnographic research among Indigenous people in Sydney's western suburbs, precipitated, in this case, by a loud rap on the door of her 'comfortable Glebe home'. Her approach makes a case for ethnography where personal relationships are at the core, 'with all the risks and responsibilities they entail', and accepts

the inseparability of knowledge from its knower. As in other essays in this collection, Cowlishaw highlights the central importance of *experiencing*, in her case, particular social conditions and specific social relationships; an embodied experience that is likely to ‘change your mind’. The collaborative essay by Frances Wyld and May-Britt Öhman brings together Indigenous intellectual traditions and historical experiences from Aboriginal Australia and Indigenous Europe. Based on the authors’ own embodied experiences, this collaborative essay applies the methods of ego-histoire to call for ‘a new version of history as academic discipline; a discipline which includes ... embodied vision and experience’. Stephen Muecke’s contribution reflects on multi-linguality, metamorphosis and exchange, and builds the challenges of ego-histoire methodologies into the structure and style of his contribution, as does much as his subject-matter, something learned from Paddy Roe and the Kimberley elders he has collaborated with since the 1980s. It captures the distinctive mix of informality and formality, borrowing, homage and learning, which characterises ceremony, relationships and research, and in its shape reflects something of both the writer’s experience and the impact of self-reflexivity on research. Philip Morrissey’s essay wonders about a book washed up in a river, plays with the stereotype of the custodial elder, and argues against Deleuze and Guattari’s presupposition of ‘a collective enunciation’ to point to the detailed revision of history embedded in fragments of remembered stories from childhood, read against the grain. Morrissey writes both of metamorphosis and of the body as a site of knowledge, felt and understood. This section concludes with Gillian Whitlock’s essay, ‘Nourishing Terrains: An Afterword’, a place to catch our collective breath and reflect on the achievements and difficulties of ego-histoire.

Endings: Impossible Possibilities

‘I think identity is an endless, ever unfinished conversation’.
Stuart Hall, 2013

Editing this book across four countries, Australia, France, Britain and Austria, has presented practical difficulties, and this volume has had a long gestation and production process. Along with the sometimes complex logistics of working together from different time zones, academic semesters and summers, it revealed to us that the word ‘transnational’, which sounds like a word that might glide, sounding a little like ‘trans-fats’, is ‘in fact’ harder to live and work with than to theorise about. Differences in opinion about what was deemed important, even who was deemed important, inside and outside of Australia, led to long conversations, mostly over email, that kept us busy and made us each question our assumptions about what ego-histoire could be and its value. We also found that writing ego-histoire makes us vulnerable in a way that writing about ‘the

other' does not. Perhaps more than other topics, such as the state, literature, politics, culture, history, or anthropology, writing one's own ego-histoire reminds us of that old post-modern 'truth', that there is no one definitive truth, and that truth and power are in such close proximity that it is often hard to see one for the other.

As authors of our own ego-histoires, we became aware of how we may consciously and unconsciously choose to ignore central aspects of our own stories that we perceive may make us vulnerable in the eyes of our readers. As editors, we saw how a referee's report could at times read less as a critique of an argument and more as a critique of a life, or person. In some cases, we hit upon longer than usual delays in getting re-writes returned, as authors realised the sort of critiques they may be exposing themselves to by publishing in this collection. We conclude from these experiments with ego-histoire that, despite many years now of the 'reflexive' turn in the social sciences and the growth of a high calibre genre of literary memoir, most scholars are still more familiar and comfortable with recording, analysing and writing the lives of others than their own. As editors, we became aware that there still lies, at the heart of much academia, an intolerance for anything that smacks of narcissism. But we remain convinced that, especially in academia, 'in pursuit of selflessness, attention to self can go underground and become an unconscious and corrosive attachment to pet theories and values' (Moore 1994, p. 71).

After a long-haul process, this manuscript is completed the same week that news of Stuart Hall's death reaches us. John Akmofah, director of 'The Stuart Hall Project' (2013), remembered:

For my generation in the 1970s [Stuart Hall] was one of the few people of colour we saw on television who wasn't crooning, dancing or running. His very iconic presence on this most public of platforms suggested all manner of impossible possibilities. With him and through him we began to ask the indispensable questions: Who are we, what are we, and what could we become?

In essence, these are the questions that initiated the call for papers that formed this collection. We felt we had come to a place, historically, where it was useful—vital, in fact—to ask these kind of questions of ourselves regardless of our skin colour, national position, geographic origin, class, gender, family background or culture, in part to help us move away from the suffocating racial definitions and nationalism that served as a rationale for the brutalities of settler-colonialism that continue to haunt Australian Indigenous studies and scholars to this day. Toward the end of his life, Stuart Hall said: 'we always supposed that something would give us the definition of who we really are. Our class position, or our national position, or our geographic origins, or where our grandparents came

from and I don't think that any one thing any longer will let us know who we are.' By undertaking a collective exploration of who we are, we sought to expand received ideas of what it means to be Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, Australian or European, and to open the field of enquiry, not to forget history, but to look forward to impossible possibilities.

If ego-histoire is an academic tool that applies the historical methods normally used on others to oneself, the form of the exercise here may appear less academic than usual. When Nora reflected some years later on his original ego-histoire volume, he suggested that perhaps ego-histoire's real value lies in its failures, its license to explore, to defamiliarise, to produce forms of writing that do not obey existing generic boundaries. In exploring identity in this volume, some of the chapters are full of passion, some only partially 'unveil' their subjective interest in their research, and some reveal sharply, powerfully and vulnerably how digging around in one's own story to meet the other across diverse cultural and transnational divides can be difficult and sometimes deeply painful. The writing in this volume takes various forms, some autobiographical, some experimental, and some auto-ethnographical, and all are embodied in different ways in the lives of the authors.

Please read these stories with respect and kindness because, uncommonly, you might have a glance at the researchers' souls. We hope they will show you that not only our intellectual perspectives but also our backgrounds influence, but do not define, our identity and writing, and we hope they will give you a fresh scope on Australian Indigenous studies.

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Ngapartji Ngapartji, In Turn, In Turn: Ego-histoire, Europe and Indigenous Australia

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