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# Aboriginal Women, Law and Critical Race Theory Storytelling From The Margins

Nicole Watson

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*This book is dedicated to the matriarchs in my life, who have provided me  
with love, encouragement and humour.*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Nicole Watson** is a member of the Birri Gubba People who hail from Central Queensland and the Munanjali of Beaudesert, Queensland. Nicole is a legal scholar, a former columnist with the *National Indigenous Times*, and she has also published a crime novel. Nicole is the Director of the Academic Unit of the Nura Gili Centre for Indigenous Programs, University of New South Wales.



## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

**Abstract** This chapter begins by acknowledging the nexus between the research that evolved into the pages of this book and the author's own story. That story springs from a childhood that was immersed in vibrant oral histories, and influenced by wise and powerful Black matriarchs. It is because of her own story that the writer was drawn to critical race theory; a revolutionary movement that challenges the prevailing racial hierarchy with the stories of those who live on the margins. This chapter moves on to provide a summary of the content of the remaining chapters.

**Keywords** Introduction · Indigenous women · Law

## INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is fundamental to Indigenous cultures. It is through stories that one generation teaches the next how to care for the Country that sustains us. Within our stories are the journeys of the ancestral beings that shaped the lands and waters, and left laws that govern relationships between all living things. Stories are also sources of theory and methods

of research.<sup>1</sup> One of the precepts of Indigenous research methodologies is that knowledge is situated. The researcher's culture, life trajectory and ways of seeing the world all have an impact on the development of the story that becomes research.<sup>2</sup> The nexus between self and story is understood by scholars who write themselves into their work, and thereby render themselves accountable for their own biases.<sup>3</sup> The act of sharing stories also makes us vulnerable, and therefore, conscious of the need to treat the stories of others with sensitivity and respect.<sup>4</sup> It is with these truths in mind that I will share my own story.

As an Aboriginal person from Queensland, I call myself a 'Murri'. From my paternal grandfather, I inherited my connection to the Birri Gubba of the Bowen Basin. My paternal grandmother belonged to the Munanjali of Beaudesert. But long before I came into this world, they had created a life for themselves and their six children in the state's capital, Brisbane. It was in Brisbane that their eldest son, Sam Watson would meet the love of his life, Catherine de Gunst. They would go on to have two children, Samuel Wagan and me.

The adults of our childhood were master storytellers. It was through their words and gestures that my brother and I were introduced to the stories of cherished grandparents, aunts and uncles. Our Elders survived family separations, removal from their Country and the callous indifference of those within Queensland's Indigenous affairs bureaucracy. Even though some of the violence that they suffered continued to be inflicted upon their children, our Elders never lost hope.

It was through stories that my brother and I came to revere strong Black women such as my paternal grandmother, who we called 'Nanna'. One of the stories that Nanna shared with us concerned her certificate of exemption. The certificate provided relief from the provisions of the

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts* (University of Toronto Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Fast and Margaret Kovach, 'Community Relationships Within Indigenous Methodologies' in Sweeney Windchief and Timothy San Pedro (eds), *Applying Indigenous Research Methods: Storying with Peoples and Communities* (Routledge, 2019), 21, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 26.