

Weaving the future of journalism? Re-examining journalistic epistemology through an indigenous lens

Dr Bissie Anderson (Robert Gordon University)

Dr Nour Halabi (University of Aberdeen)

ECREA Journalism Studies Conference
University of Sheffield

12 April 2024

Who gets to be a journalist? Whose knowledge? Whose voice?

- History of journalism: White, male, Western-centric, extractive, colonial (Callison & Young, 2019; Usher, 2019)
- Voices from the Global South and indigenous contexts have been marginalised when it comes to journalistic roles (e.g., the stringer vs the journalist)
- Boundaries of journalism: who is included? Who is excluded?
- “Symbolic annihilation” (Tuchman, 1978): omission, trivialization, condemnation
- Journalism’s epistemic authority is eroding (Carlson, 2017).
- Scholars (e.g., Callison & Young, 2019) have called for a reckoning with journalism’s settler-colonialist past, recognising the epistemic violence and trauma it has inflicted on marginalised communities such as indigenous people.

“Pioneer journalism”: Who gets to be a pioneer?

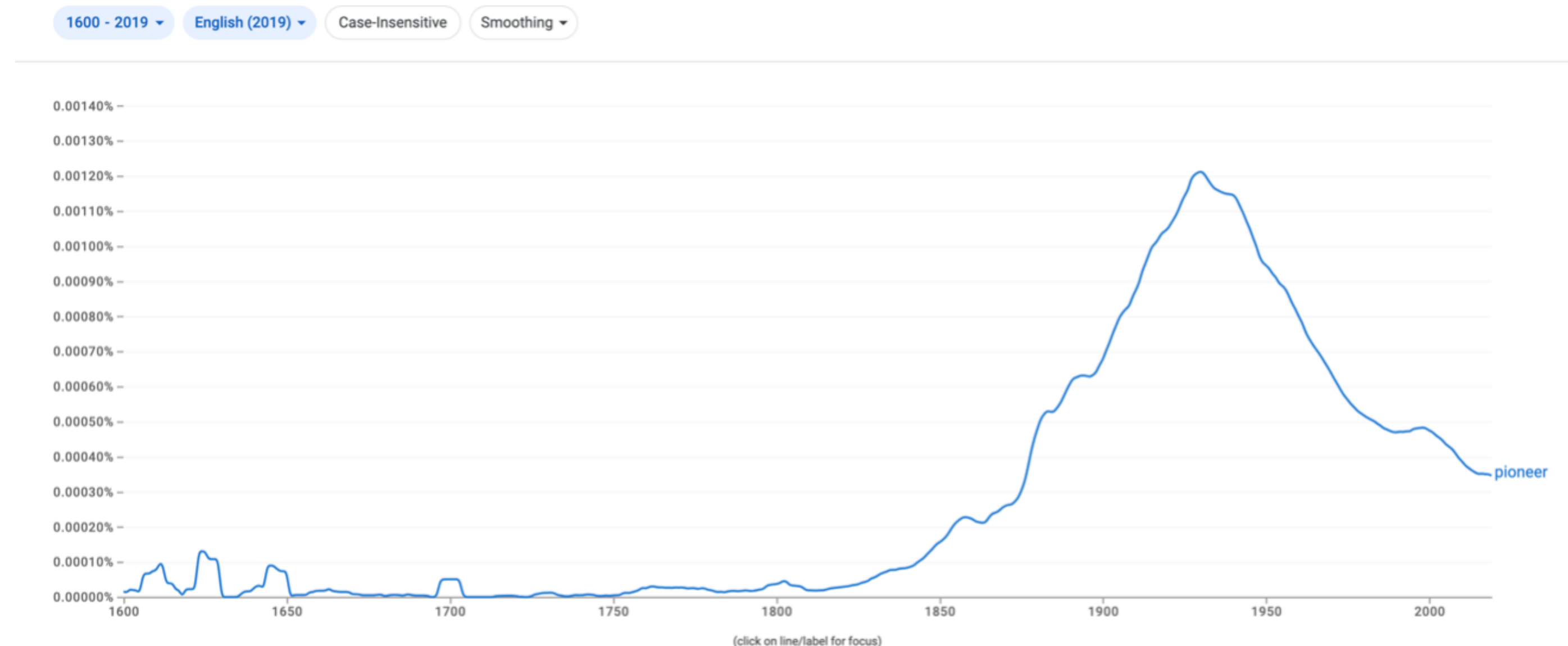
- “The re-figurations of [journalism’s] foundations” in a deeply mediatized ecosystem (Hepp & Loosen, 2021).
- Extant studies of “pioneer journalism” have almost exclusively studied the concept in Western contexts (Anderson, 2021; Hepp & Loosen, 2021, 2022; Ruotsalainen et al., 2023).
- Potential to “bring about media-related change” (Hepp, 2016, p. 927) => “pioneer journalism” can be liberatory and boundary-breaking in the agencies it offers marginalised communities such as indigenous and post-colonial communities.
- The notion “pioneer journalism”, however, has been almost exclusively applied to future-focused journalism communities in the Global North.
- How do we weave indigenous voices, experiences and epistemologies into the conceptualisation of “pioneer journalism” to make journalism better suited to the concerns of global audiences?

“Futures thinking” requires reckoning with the settler-colonialist past

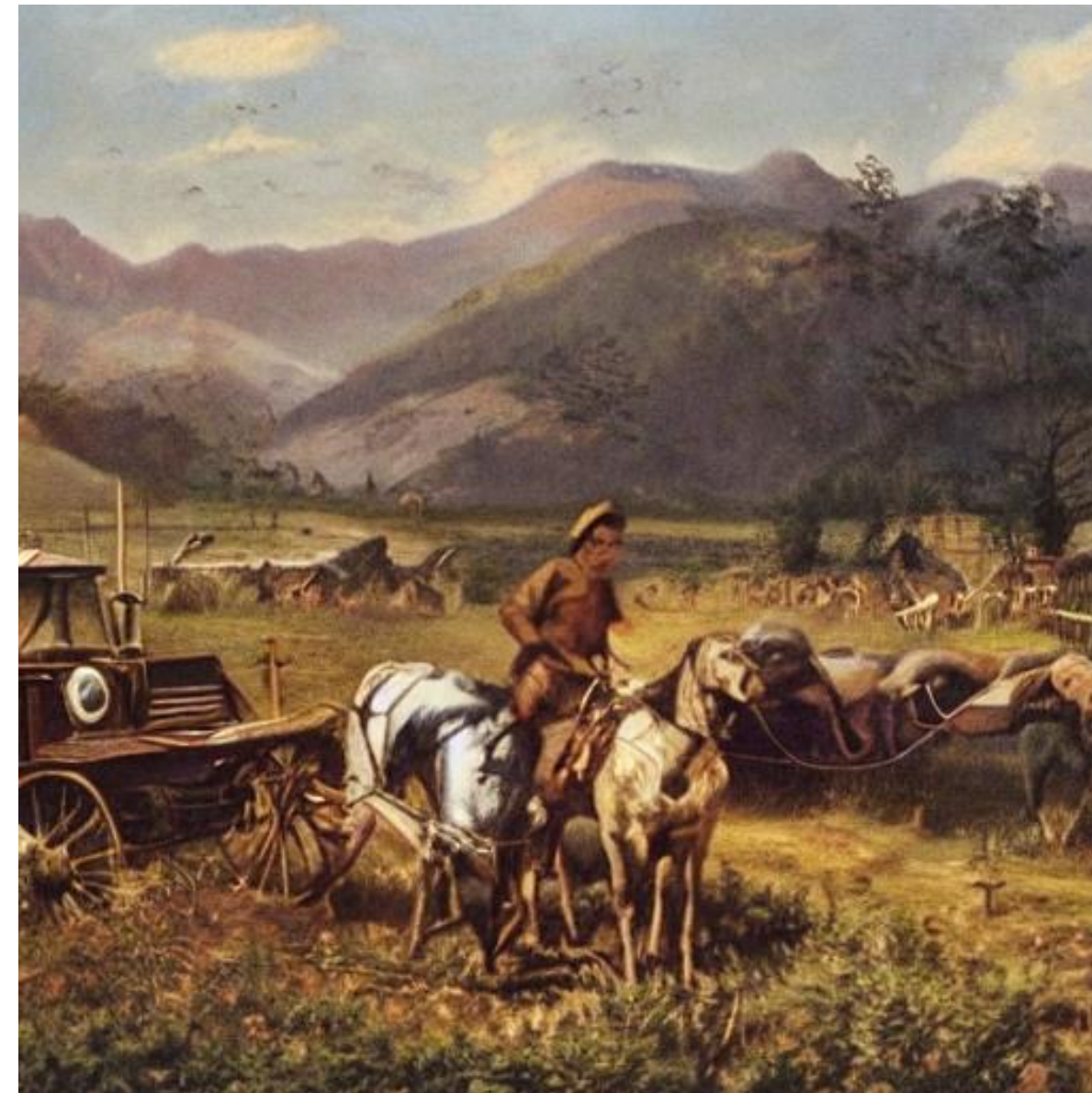
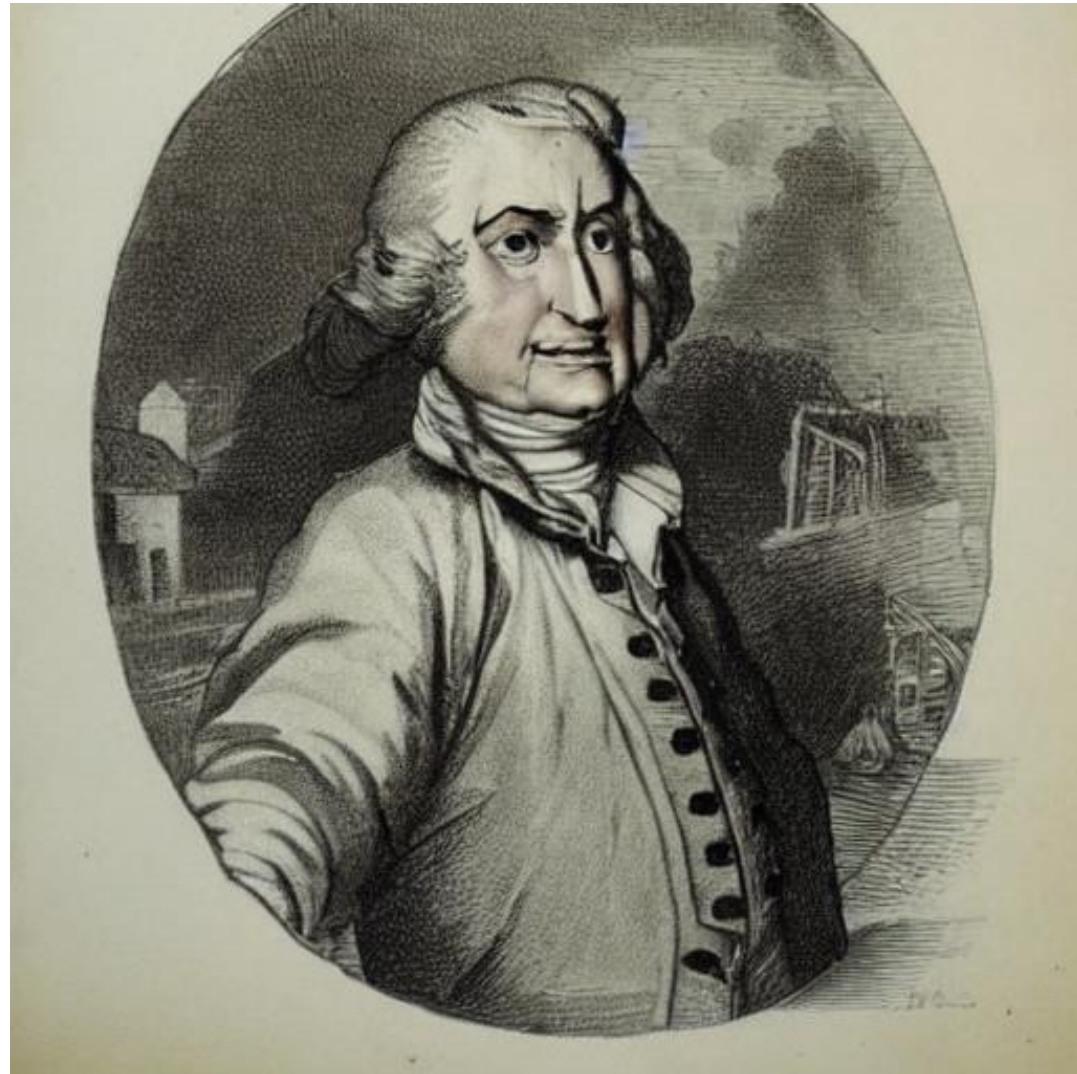
- Relationality, reflexivity, and systems thinking: Indigenous epistemologies have powerful potential to reimagine journalism’s relations with audiences, communities, land and water (Callison & Young, 2019).
- Decolonising approaches: centring indigenous concepts of knowledge; “open[ing] up possibilities for understanding and knowing the world differently and offering different solutions to problems caused by colonialism and the failure of power structures to address these historic conditions” (Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, xiii)
- Racial equity is not an adequate frame when researching indigenous communities; “recognizing and challenging systems and structures that underlie ongoing colonization and maintain inequity” is needed (Gordon & Around Him, 2024).

What/who is a pioneer? A restorative historical approach

- The term is steeped in a history of use, dating back to the 1500s; *pionniere* (French): foot soldier
- Associations: conquering territory, raising flag, building walls as a threat of exclusion and violence (Halabi, 2017)
- Its use in books begins to decline around the time of the colonial liberation movements (Google Ngram)
- A postcolonial divorce from its etymology and history?








Well, not quite...



Show drafts  



A pioneer can be a person who does something first in a few different ways:

- **Explorer or settler:** This is the classic idea of a pioneer, someone who ventures into a new, uncharted territory and paves the way for others to follow.  They might be colonists or frontiersmen. 
- **Innovator:** A pioneer can also be a person who comes up with a new idea or method in a particular field.  They are like inventors, but they also develop the idea and put it into practice. For example, Marie Curie could be considered a pioneer in radiation research. 
- **First mover:** Someone who is among the very first people to enter a new field of study or business could also be called a pioneer.  These people may not necessarily invent something new, but they help to define and develop the field.

Check completed • [Understand the results](#)



Give me an example of a pioneer.

Show drafts  



Sure, here are two examples of pioneers depending on the definition you're interested in:

- **Explorer:** Sacagawea, a member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, served as a guide and interpreter. Her knowledge of the land and ability to communicate with different Native American tribes was crucial to the success of the expedition. Sacagawea played a pivotal role in opening up the American West.
- **Innovator:** Satoshi Nakamoto (thought to be a pseudonym) is the anonymous creator of Bitcoin, the first decentralized cryptocurrency. This invention revolutionized online finance and created a whole new asset class. While the true identity of Nakamoto remains a mystery, their work has had a profound impact on the world.



↩

what does a pioneer look like?



ChatGPT

The appearance of a pioneer can vary greatly depending on the context in which the term is used. In a historical sense, pioneers were often depicted as rugged individuals wearing simple, practical clothing suitable for outdoor work, such as sturdy boots, trousers, shirts, and hats to protect against the elements. They might carry tools or equipment used for clearing land, building shelters, or farming.

In a more metaphorical sense, a pioneer can be anyone who is leading the way or innovating in a particular field. In this context, their appearance might not conform to any specific stereotype but could range from professionals in business attire to scientists in lab coats, depending on their area of expertise.

Ultimately, the appearance of a pioneer is less about their physical attributes and more about their actions and contributions to society or a particular field.

Digital archival research (International Newsstream)

Location ×

Include	Exclude	Location	Count ▾
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	United States–US	42,768
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	United Kingdom–UK	28,281
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	India	22,119
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Australia	18,670
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	China	14,571
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Europe	9,941
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nigeria	8,365
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	New York	8,000
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Singapore	7,393

Names that collocate with “pioneer” in the international press

Still associated with mostly white Western males:

- No women in Top 10
- Eight women in Top 50
- 13/50 males are non-white
- No women of colour in Top 50

Person ×			
Include	Exclude	Person	Count ▾
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trump, Donald J	1,984
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Musk, Elon	864
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Obama, Barack	789
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Modi, Narendra	728
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Xi Jinping	654
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Johnson, Boris	611
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Blair, Tony	537
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bowie, David	490
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Turing, Alan	414

“Pioneer” collocations with Meghan, Duchess of Sussex

- Not a single reference to Meghan herself as a pioneer
- Negative, facetious, sarcastic tone
- Gendered discourse: private domain, fashion, pomp and circumstance
- Marijuana collocation: her “cannabis-growing nephew” who is “pioneer in the production of the drug in California” (Telegraph, 7 May 2019)

Include	Exclude	Subject	Count ▾
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	queens	54
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	actors	24
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	royalty	23
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	marriage	20
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	weddings	20
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	social networks	19
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	celebrities	18
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	environmental policy	18
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	marijuana	15

“Pioneer” collocations with Donald Trump

Subject ×			
Include	Exclude	Subject	Count ▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	political campaigns	277
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	presidents	266
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	social networks	172
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	presidential elections	129
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	prime ministers	121
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	investments	84
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	politics	79
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	climate change	72
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	tariffs	72

Centring indigenous epistemologies

- Built-in biases: “pioneer” is (still) a White, male, Western, colonialist concept.
- To avoid using the term uncritically, we need to recognise its socially constructed conception in the public imaginary steeped in White, exclusionary, gendered etymology and history of use.
- If we fail to reckon with its history, we will perpetuate practices of wall-building in journalism and replicate historical patterns of exclusion and symbolic annihilation.
- To weave indigenous and post-colonial voices into the fabric of the field, we need to recentre the epistemologies of indigenous people, which requires a completely different methodological toolkit.

Conclusion and next steps

- “Pioneer journalism” offers an opportunity to transgress the traditional colonialist boundaries and create more inclusive communities of practice that enrich journalism.
- We can only harness this opportunity if we are cognisant of the gendered and racial boundaries of the term “pioneer”.
- A restorative justice approach is needed to harness the radical potential of the concept “pioneer journalism”. To move toward *futures thinking*, however, we need to recognise the epistemic violence patterns of the past, so that they are not replicated.
- “Encounters”: partnership, cultural understanding, community benefit, and reflexivity (Gordon & Around Him, 2024; Smith, 2021).