

Introduction

Something is not quite right.

The Aboriginal partner in a supposedly co-organized event doesn't show up on the day.

A highly committed and active white person, a key ally in a campaign, arrives for a meeting, but her heightened busyness and urgency seem not to leave room for those more directly affected by the issue to talk or be noticed in the space.

An Aboriginal-activist-type white person says after an event, 'Wasn't that great? It worked really well.' Yet Aboriginal people on the panel had seemed really uneasy and they even said 'I feel really uncomfortable doing this.' But the organizers and white people in the audience don't notice it and gloss over questions about it.¹

There are many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people involved in addressing Aboriginal community needs and agendas in Australia. This activity includes people working in state and federal government departments, schools and universities, in self-organized groups at the local suburban level, as social justice activists, as local council workers, via philanthropy, towards legal and constitutional reform, in land councils and in

1. The third observation is one made by Helen (interview).

Aboriginal community-controlled or other health and welfare organizations.

However, there is a discernible pattern in non-Aboriginal peoples' journeys of involvement in the field. For those who become concerned about gross inequality there may be initial passion to do something towards positive change. For some people, the passion fades relative to other concerns; others try to join with like-minded people, volunteer or search around for a way to make a difference. For those who make the effort, many seem sooner or later to hit a minor or a major sticking point. A project or initiative hasn't worked and they don't know why; they are flummoxed, even bruised, and have no idea how to channel their concern effectively. On having initial attempts to establish rapport rebuffed (Aveling, 2004a), or on having their practice challenged further along the track, some get hurt, angry or confused. Some retreat to look in the mirror, adopt a questioning attitude and reaffirm their determination to stay involved. Some walk away thinking 'It's too hard.' Some stalk away thinking Aboriginal people are ungrateful or unreliable.

From an Aboriginal perspective, there can sometimes seem to be a revolving door of non-Aboriginal people. Many of them will rapidly reveal themselves as a missionary, a mercenary or a misfit (Nicoll, 2000: 376). Is there anything to guide non-Indigenous people, a way of being beyond the limited repertoire of available subjectivities – guilty liberals, conservative nationalists or honorary blacks – that could be more appropriate for cultivating a collective, political project (Aveling, 2004a: 69; Maddison, 2011)?

This book provides an urgently needed new framework for action by non-Indigenous people in support of Indigenous

struggles.² It sheds light on the dilemmas facing non-Aboriginal people seeking to play a role in addressing the situation in which Aboriginal people find themselves in Australia today, exploring ways Aboriginal community leaders and non-Aboriginal activists have negotiated relationships of solidarity.

The book synthesizes and presents the politics of this particular solidarity project, and its complexities and challenges. Tensions inherent in such relationships of solidarity play out in the postcolonial setting of Australia, where, despite strident challenge, the vestiges of British law, cultural power and the tainted sovereignty of the Crown restrain the nation's emergence out of colonizing dynamics.

The lingering injustices of colonization and the need for a fresh approach to righting them are nowhere better reflected than in the Fourth World conditions, morbidity and mortality of Indigenous people in settler nations. The Indigenous experience within wealthy settler colonial nations such as Australia, the USA, Aotearoa/New Zealand and Canada is one of continuing colonization in which a particular process of genocide is proceeding, and against which Indigenous peoples' struggle is one for survival as peoples.³

This book was written and is situated historically and politically in a settler-colonial context in which Britain declared

2. The terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Indigenous' are used in particular but also overlapping ways in this book. The term 'Aboriginal' is used to refer to those nations, clans and language groups who are the original peoples of south-east Australia and whose contemporary political struggle is the anchor point of this book. The term 'Indigenous' is also used, usually to enable the argument of the book to be read in reference to settler-colonial settings worldwide. In Australia the term 'Indigenous' may be used as a convenient way to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

3. Settler colonies are the colonies in which the colonizers came to stay, containing and/or eliminating Indigenous peoples through various means in order to replace them on the land (Wolfe, 1994).

sovereignty illegally and against the interests of Indigenous polities on the continent now known as Australia. Following an initial invasion of coastal sites in the south-east, the various colonies and then the federated Australian state set about invading the vast territories of Australia, securing their claim of sovereignty bit by bit, and either killing or containing Indigenous people as a means and a consequence. This process of colonization is entrenched and continuing. Cognizant of these colonizing conditions, this book is concerned with interactions between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people who are at once struggling against two things: these overarching structural conditions, and their interpersonal expression. This book sets out what kind of politics could frame this two-part struggle. Solidarity should be directed to decolonization; and the way solidarity is undertaken needs to be decolonized.

As in Canada (Simpson, 2010: 19), Aboriginal peoples in the south-east of Australia maintain the longest running political movement in postcolonial Australia. At heart this has been a struggle against colonial invaders' murderous possessiveness in relation to land, and, crucially, for survival as distinct peoples. As part of this struggle, Indigenous peoples have created and nurtured relationships with supporters (see Simpson, 2010).

I am one such supporter. My approach to this support or solidarity work is strongly formed by four years of guidance from Gary Foley, of the Gumbaynggirr Nation; and nuanced through my overlapping and subsequent work with Krauatungulung/Djapwurrung man Robbie Thorpe. Foley and Robbie are Aboriginal community members and activist leaders in south-east Australia and key theorists of the politics of solidarity.

I have always been struck by the profound optimism that Foley's work expresses. He displays a high degree of faith in people's ability to learn and understand, believing that if provoked in the right way, and encouraged, they will find out for themselves what is wrong with the world and with their practices and work out what to do. In 1999 he invited members of a student collective I was involved in (Students for Land Justice and Reconciliation, SLJR) to witness the operations of another collective, the Melbourne Jabiluka Action Group (JAG). I went along to a number of JAG meetings. In that context I witnessed Foley challenge people's racism within a meeting, and instruct them to meet up at the pub after the meeting to talk with him about it. I observed him spend more time with people whose practices were problematic, explaining and educating, than with those whose practices were helpful.

The conversation about solidarity politics, of which this book is a part, is directed towards eventual solidarity. The conversation is not about being accused of being good or bad, right or wrong. In this, the generosity of people like Foley who invest so much in those who locate themselves as supporters or potential allies, but who inadvertently display their privilege and power, should inspire others engaged in the conversation to be similarly generous with each other, or at least to think about what the end goal is. One of the tactics for achieving the end goal is to build and nurture the support base, to get more people onside and get them to understand the issues and in turn become good, strong, well-informed, effective organizers. The work of educating those who are giving you headaches is debilitating – non-Aboriginal people should be helping Aboriginal people out by educating each other, taking responsibility for each other.

I can remember deciding to believe what Foley said about how I should work even though I didn't know the political importance of that 'how' in 1998–99. The political importance of Foley's instructions is something that I have come to understand over a long period, including during the research for this book. The book is an exploration of how to work and a discussion of why it is important to work like that.

I first met Foley in 1998. I worked with him particularly intensely in 1998–2002 while I was an editor of the student paper at the University of Melbourne and then as a member of SLJR. I also worked closely with him in 2005–06, during the Black GST/Stolenwealth Games campaign. Foley has written the Foreword to this book, and I refer to his published work often in what follows. Along with writer and historian Tony Birch and community practitioner Marjorie Thorpe, Foley provided guidance and feedback on the book's development as part of a critical reference group (CRG) established to review the research plan (who to interview and what to ask) and to safeguard the interests of the political community of which they are a part.

Robbie Thorpe's voice is presented in this book in implicit conversation with, and often challenging, mine. This presentation is based both on a recorded discussion between Robbie and me about our work together, and on the sense I have made of the weekly conversations I've had with Robbie across the panel at 3CR, a left-wing community radio station, since 2004. The conversation takes place both live-to-air and while the mics are off as we co-present a radio programme, a collaboration Robbie instigated.

Despite my sensitivity to the voices, guidance and challenges of members of the political community this book supports, I

remain the author of this text: the power over the text remains mine (Richardson, 1995: 200). At points throughout the book I show how I have been influenced by Robbie and by members of the critical reference group, but others' voices never approach authorship over the text, for which I accept responsibility.

As a prominent member and intellectual of the Aboriginal land rights movement, Foley gets asked a lot by fellow Kooris,⁴ 'Why does it often seem that some of our best white friends behave like some of our worst enemies?' He argues that 'One of the greatest causes of underlying tension and dispute between Kooris and their non-Koori supporters is how these support groups and their members relate to Koori people' (Foley, 1999: 1). He identifies 'patronizing and paternalistic' treatment as a common experience, and suggests that supporters fail to understand 'the importance of "Aboriginal control of Aboriginal affairs" to indigenous people'. Elsewhere, Marjorie Thorpe (of the Gunai and Gunditjmara nations) has invoked Aboriginal sovereignty as an ideal in the activist context (Black GST, 2006), making it clear that the paternalism and tension in relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous activists are, at heart, generated by colonial conditions.

The work of dealing with such issues is debilitating and over the long term a cause of frustration for Aboriginal people (Foley, 2000: 86). Foley provides a case study from the campaign against the Jabiluka uranium mine proposed for a site within the World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park – during which the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation and the Mirrar people

4. 'Koori' is a word that 'means "man" or "people" in numerous languages of south-eastern Australia'; its variations are found in the north coast and Riverina districts of New South Wales, south-western Victoria and Lower Murray in South Australia (Horton, 1994, vol. 1: 559).

‘sought a greater say’ over the operations and actions of their ‘support groups’, arguing:

So, without even realising it, members of JAG [Jabiluka Action Group] in 1999 are in the course of a struggle identical to that which occurred among their counterparts at the Aborigines Advancement League thirty years before, in 1969. Is it any wonder that long term Koori activists get frustrated at having to re-invent the wheel for each new generation of non-Koori supporters? (Foley, 1999; 2000: 86)

Sharing the hope that the problems Foley outlines could be ‘eliminated for future generations of Australians’, I was driven to find out more about the problem, more about the context, and more about the politics of the endeavour of working together. The particular impetus for this book arises from my own observations of non-Indigenous people attempting to engage with south-east Indigenous peoples through activism, community development, and the philanthropic and social-service sectors.

Experiences and reflections: towards a new framework

This book is the result of interviews with long-serving activist leaders and supporters in south-east Australia. Specifically, I interviewed Aboriginal people who engage politically with and work to educate non-Aboriginal people, and non-Aboriginal people who are regarded by the Aboriginal people in my critical reference group, or whom I interviewed, as reflective about the issues at stake. They are members of a particular political community – Aboriginal people from south-east Australia who have pursued land rights, community control and sovereignty – and their supporters. The contradictions inherent in relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the

context of struggles for land rights, sovereignty and community control are particularly stark because people are positioned in opposition: as colonized and colonizer; as dispossessed and beneficiary; as community members or not. My focus on this particular context enables a consideration of the impact of colonizing societal conditions on interpersonal relationships in a context in which these conditions are explicitly the focus of critical attention. The site-specific nature of this book is necessary to its decolonizing ethic. Its grounded specificity to a particular place, struggle and practice provides a credible basis from which to theorize. It also gives the book the ability to be read from and be applicable to other contexts, as the local specificities of readers' situations will be evident to each in their contrasts with the south-east Australian situation.

Most of the Aboriginal people I interviewed were aged 50 years and over, whereas there was more of a spread in the ages of non-Aboriginal people involved. Among everyone I interviewed, one man identified as gay and one woman as lesbian. Among the non-Indigenous people were participants who understood their family backgrounds as Anglo-Irish Australian; British Raj-Indian; Maori, Samoan and Tongan; Welsh; Iranian-Scottish; Greek and Polish-Jewish; and Polish-German. All the Aboriginal participants elected to be named in the research, and to have documentation of their interviews (transcripts and recordings) archived. Most of the non-Indigenous people did the same.⁵ Where this was not the case, I provided

5. There was an interesting dynamic around anonymity, Indigeneity and privilege in the research process. Five non-Indigenous people wished to remain anonymous. In one case this was couched as a concern about being harassed as a result of observations made about other white people. Arguably, in some of the other cases, requesting anonymity was a strategy for avoiding criticism for the views expressed.

a changed first name and omitted the last name in an attempt to maintain these participants' anonymity. Where interviewees named third parties in their interview, I either made up names for those third parties or asked their permission to be included by name in the transcripts.

The interviews enabled me to gather together reflections on collaborations, alliances and support relationships from those best placed to comment thoughtfully on this. I was attentive to accounts of the effort it took to work across differences in social location. The collective reflections of these experienced activists, read alongside relevant academic theorizing, are the grounding for the politics and theory that I suggest can more consciously, and therefore productively, inform activist practice. The use of interviews and small group conversations was intended as an intervention into activist spaces; these were an experience of and a model for future reflective conversations that support conscious and critical practice (Denzin, 2003; Margaret, 2009).

The book also draws on my own experiences and reflections before and during the research; on discussions within community forums on the topic, with the CRG, Robbie and my research supervisor and with activist and academic peers in Melbourne, Auckland and Berlin; and feedback from the examiners of the Ph.D. thesis that is the basis of the book.

This book will be of interest to both experienced and newer activists wanting to reflect on the practice of solidarity in their own particular context and situation. There is no protocol or rule book to follow; the work is context-specific with a number of inherent dilemmas, as befits an imperfect, because colonizing, scene. The core of the activist aptitude and practice

of the people I interviewed was their ability to decide which among a range of possibly competing priorities needed to be upheld in particular situations. The importance of historical, political and geographic context for the politics of solidarity is demonstrated by the ways in which the specific history of non-Indigenous support action has played out in south-east Australia. The detail in which the historical context is recounted in the opening chapters of this book is necessary for two reasons. First, it is necessary to show how the politics of solidarity outlined in later chapters are inflected by their context. Second, it indicates what sort of contextual knowledge is needed for those wishing to come to grips with the politics of solidarity in different contexts.

The politics presented in this book were discerned in conversation with people who have maintained a long-term political involvement outside of paid work and independent of institutional structures, even if they have at times also worked in government bureaucracies or social-service-sector organizations.⁶ This was to allow me to unpack the tensions and dilemmas specific to those who were involved through dedication, not because it was their job.

Of course, many people working in Aboriginal Affairs settings are highly committed and feel that is where they can best make an impact on the injustice that drives them. The politics set out in this book will be very familiar and applicable to such settings. Institutional and employment obligations

6. Where an organization was activist-based (as the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service was during its early years), or where a staff member did significant unpaid activist work beyond the paid hours, they were included. I also included two non-Aboriginal former student activists who were at the time of the interviews employed in Aboriginal-related jobs.

generate particularly acute tensions and dilemmas for people working across Indigenous–non-Indigenous difference. This is because there is usually some tension between the policies and urgencies of the institution or employer and the ideals held by the worker and the community about how work should be done. Almost always the burden of this tension is shifted onto the community, and the worker is stuck in the middle. Tess Lea (2008: 158–9), in her ethnography of bureaucratic culture, has demonstrated how the dictates of ‘central office’ target conflict with the ‘community development’ maxims dearly held by health professionals in Aboriginal community settings in the Northern Territory. The need to establish partnerships or conduct consultation with Aboriginal people in order to give credibility to or generate community ownership of a programme that government has dictated has to happen obviously conflicts with the conditions for genuine community control and is a common source of angst.

The book speaks to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, but places an emphasis on exploring the kinds of self-questioning that non-Indigenous people are asked to perform. In this way the book is particularly useful in suggesting ways for more recently involved non-Indigenous activists to come to grips with the politics of solidarity.

Now more than ever, Aboriginal people in south-east Australia are aware of the need to garner critically informed support. The Aboriginal Embassy established on the lawns of the Federal Parliament in 1972, the 1991 Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and the sixty-day occupation of King’s Domain in Melbourne which hit international headlines during the 2006 Commonwealth Games

with the slogan 'Stolenweath Games' have perforated Australia's image as a lucky country. The response of the state has been to orchestrate a reconciliation process and issue an apology. These have worked to restore a sense of comfort to settler Australians but are empty of structural or material redress for Indigenous people. Working against this complacency, and striving for substantive change, a key strategy in Aboriginal struggles for land rights, self-determination and economic independence in south-east Australia is to nurture a critical and committed support base among settler Australians.

Indeed, this book is envisaged as being supportive of this Indigenous strategy as it is expressed in the social justice activist community in south-east Australia. It is intended as a resource to support the efforts of Indigenous people who have had to contest with each new generation of non-Indigenous supporters the mode of their solidarity. Knowledge of genuinely productive and transformative modes has until now been discerned by individual actors largely through a process of repeating the mistakes of the past. The book clearly explains the modes of solidarity that Indigenous people have identified as problematic, and explains the alternative frameworks they offer. This includes a critique of romantic, sometimes ignorant, conceptions of Indigenous people that are expressed in the national settler pastime of worrying about Indigenous people and that underlie the impulse to 'help them'.

The dynamics and dilemmas negotiated by Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people in the social justice activist world play out against state and national government manoeuvres in Aboriginal Affairs. Debates about how Australian federal and state governments go about engaging with Indigenous people

were reignited in 2007 by the controversial ‘Northern Territory Emergency Response’. That non-consultative programme, instigated by the Liberal–National coalition federal government, relied on the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975. It involved military personnel, compulsory health checks and the delivery of welfare payments on a Basics Card whose value is redeemable only at major supermarket chain stores. In 2012 it was extended for another ten years by the Australian Labor Party (ALP).

However, these debates were smothered by a related government move: the apology delivered by then-prime minister Kevin Rudd (ALP) on behalf of the Federal Parliament to the Stolen Generations in February 2008. While on a rhetorical level this belated apology concluded a long period of overt government hostility to reconciliation, an apology and native title – which had inspired the establishment of many white support groups in the preceding decade (Burgmann, 2003b: 85) – it did not mark a significant change in government policies or practices (Foley and McKinnon, 2008; Fredericks, 2010; Hinkson, 2008: 3–4; Maddison, 2011).

The dynamics between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people in the social justice activist world also play out in relation to the recent history of that world itself. The recent political history of this community has generated a legacy with which non-Indigenous activists may not be familiar but which nevertheless shapes the contemporary politics of solidarity. A key political antecedent to the contemporary situation is ‘Aboriginalization’, a process through which Aboriginal people wrested control of organizations from non-Aboriginal members (Victorian Aborigines Advancement League, 1985:

91). While the importance of Aboriginal control of Aboriginal affairs gained wide acceptance from the 1970s onwards, in some cases the appearance of Indigenous people being up front belies a more complex reality of interdependence, or lack of Indigenous decision-making power (Batty, 2005; Melbourne Kungkas, group interview; Gary Murray, interview).

This book is relevant to parallel situations overseas, where there is growing interest in yet still not a large scholarly literature on solidarity relationships. Activist and researcher Jennifer Margaret has found that certain characteristics of ally relationships in North America resonate with those in Aotearoa/New Zealand and North America, namely:

- *Coalition as a microcosm of colonial relationships* – Issues of power and control which are manifest in the broader context of colonial relationships are present and manifest within alliances.
- *Coalition as a site of learning and transformation* – Being part of alliances generates significant learning for those involved, particularly for non-indigenous people.
- *Coalition as a site of pain* – Working to address the impacts of colonization can be a hurtful and difficult process for both indigenous and non-indigenous people. (Margaret, 2010: 9–10)

Margaret has recently extended her analysis to Australia, again affirming that similarities exist in settler–Indigenous ally relationships in these parallel settings (Margaret, 2013). Recent contributions from the closely related settler-colonial contexts of Canada, the USA and Aotearoa/New Zealand offer much to understandings of the Australian context (Land, 2011a).

Yet works primarily concerned with the attempts by white people to come to terms with the fact of living and working in

a ‘disputed Black sovereign space’ remain uncommon (Kessar, 2006: 348). Lynne Davis writes of the Canadian situation that there has been much written on Indigenous–non-Indigenous relationships in general, both contemporary and historical in focus. However, she points out that ‘one of the under-explored areas of research remains relationships between Indigenous peoples and social movement organizations such as social justice groups, the women’s movement, environmental organizations, and organized labour’ (Davis, 2010: 4).

By contrast with Davis’s assessment of the Canadian literature, in Australia there has been some important writing on relationships between Indigenous peoples and other political actors – such as feminists, trade unionists and the nationally influential Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) (Burgmann and Burgmann, 1998; Paisley, 2000; Taffe, 2005). However, the writing is mainly historical and, with the exception of work by Foley (2012), Howell (2013) and Paasonen (2007), is not explicitly self-reflective. In anthropology it is harder now to pretend that the ‘field’ contains ‘only Aborigines’ (Cowlshaw, 2000: 112). In some cases this has led, productively, to studies of the cultures of those who are interacting with Aboriginal people, such as bureaucrats and health workers (Kowal, 2006; Lea, 2008).

Davis’s observation in Canada is that it is the people who are engaged in Indigenous–non-Indigenous political alliances who are contributing the most to understandings of it. This seems to hold in Australia: activists themselves continue to be the key theorists of their own practice. This theorizing happens in solo private reflections and conversations with other activists; it is synthesized and presented in this book.

Doing and writing about solidarity

It is my activist involvement, my interactions and discussions with and consideration of the challenges made by Aboriginal community leaders, that generated questions and led to the writing of this book. My involvement has been focused on supporting Aboriginal-led campaigns and has comprised collectively organized work towards self- and community education about Aboriginal struggles and colonial history in south-east Australia.

Without this background of involvement, I would not actually have been able to write this book – no one would have talked to me. One Indigenous participant commented that she would normally hold research and researchers in general or specific suspicion. However, because she knew about my activist background and commitments, she was happy to do the interview. Another Indigenous participant questioned me for half an hour on the phone when I rang her to discuss the prospect of an interview, before deciding that she was willing to do it. She then went on to promote my project to other people she thought I should interview. I was very moved by her full support for my project – beyond just involving herself, she was prepared to back me with other people close to her. One non-Indigenous person turned down my interview request because her experiences of the issues under study felt too raw. Another non-Indigenous person with whom I had no connection prior to requesting an interview exchanged emails with me about her hesitation to be interviewed (because of the emotional toll she expected it to take). She attended a public workshop I gave on my topic, following which she emailed to say that although she had some issues with the way I presented

she was happy to go ahead. It was clear to me that in cases where I knew or had been introduced to a potential interviewee by mutual acquaintances this greatly facilitated my research. If I was a relatively unknown quantity, my involvement in activism and my approach to the topic at hand were investigated with some rigour before people agreed to be interviewed.

At the time I conducted the interviews I was twenty-eight weeks pregnant, expecting my second baby, which was duly born at term. One interview I was attempting to schedule during that time did not go ahead because our dates kept falling through and I ran out of time before the birth. The fact of my pregnancy impacted on the research in this practical way. Further, being obviously pregnant during the period of conducting the majority of the interviews impacted on the way the people I interviewed saw me, and the generosity they showed me. People felt they could ask me things about being pregnant. This was beneficial for me as an interviewer because of the methodology I chose. The method was predicated on the values of reciprocity, and I emphasized that conversation, not a one-way interrogation, was encouraged. If I had chosen a more ‘alienated’ methodology, my pregnant embodiedness would not have had the same impact on the research. Being pregnant was a visual way of telling people something about my life, and provided an opening for people to ask me about my pregnancy, any other children, and my family, and likewise to tell me about their families, or their hopes for having children, or their own pregnancies and births. This is not to suggest that experiences of pregnancy and mothering are ‘cultural universals’ or politically neutral, as Lisa Maher points out (2000: 222–3). In the context of a slightly awkward social

interaction before turning on the recorder and starting the formal interview proceedings, I believe my embodied pregnant state served as an ice-breaker, and broke down barriers.

In one instance, the fact of being pregnant and also parenting a twelve-month-old infant led to one of my participants, Wayne Atkinson, relinquishing his principle of agreeing to interviews only if they are conducted on his Yorta Yorta homelands. While I respected Dr Atkinson's stance, and his right, and was willing to do the interview on Yorta Yorta country, I had to admit that being pregnant and having a child already would indeed have increased the difficulty of organizing the interview at this location. It would have involved travelling three hours each way, and organizing my partner to come with me in order to look after our child (who was still breastfeeding), so that I could be freed up to conduct the interview once there. Although I agreed to do it, and said I would look into a time it would be possible, Wayne Atkinson came back to me and offered to undertake the interview at his office at the University of Melbourne. This was a situation in which I suspect his knowledge of my personal situation, and his consideration of the degree of organization that travelling would entail, and perhaps a protective concern for me as a new mother, a former student, a personal friend, all worked to make him decide to compromise on his homelands principle. This was an offer I felt was given with no resentment. I accepted the offer, but with some ambivalence politically.

There are many instances – both historically and in contemporary settings – in which Indigenous activists have claimed the right to direct or shape in some way (or in major ways) the nature of the involvement of non-Indigenous people in their

struggles or their business more broadly. Responding to arguments put by Gary Foley (1999) and Lillian Holt (1999), among others, the book attends to the history of non-Indigenous support, and to the activist project of interrogating and critically reconstructing white and non-Indigenous selves.

The book is envisaged as a kind of reply to Indigenous people's assertions about the nature of non-Indigenous support or engagement with their struggles; part of an ongoing conversation directed towards understanding the challenges, dilemmas and even the impossibilities of this work and how these can be shifted, worked through or lived with.

I set out to see how Indigenous activists might talk about these dynamics, what non-Indigenous people knew about these dynamics, how they reflected on these things and what kept them involved despite the challenges and difficulties. Through an early conversation with a member of my critical reference group, I came quickly to recognize that Indigenous people 'put up' with a lot from non-Indigenous people. I have come to think of the forbearance of Indigenous people in dealing with their supporters as under-recognized *work*. I had at first seen Indigenous people as doing the 'easier' job of challenging, and non-Indigenous people the 'harder' job of interpreting, these challenges and 'sticking around' despite the criticism. The need to challenge – usually done in a studiously encouraging way – is borne, of course, from the pain of dealing with supporters' 'whitely' ways, ways of relating that are dominated by white stereotypes of Indigenous peoples. To be whitely is to embrace 'habits and dispositions that reproduce racial hierarchy and white privilege'; not all white people are whitely and not all whitely people are white (Pease, 2010b: 121, citing Frye; S.

Sullivan, 2006). Instead of reading the times when conflict is absent as the absence of a problem, I now read the periods of interaction between the moments of conflict, or challenge, as often being enabled by Indigenous forbearance. In this reading, challenges are made when the whitely ways of non-Indigenous activists become too much to put up with. This picture is complicated by the potential for Indigenous people to behave in whitely or exploitative ways too. It is also complicated by friendship, such that Aboriginal people may put up with more from people they like, even if they are racist.

My own participation in political work in support of Indigenous struggles provides a participatory research character to this book. The period of researching and writing the book was in turn an elongated moment of reflection and learning in an ongoing commitment to collectivist political action. It was necessary for me to conduct the research reflexively and to include auto-ethnographic text in the book in acknowledgement of my own involvement in the phenomena I am writing about (Ellis, 2004; Etherington, 2004). My project would lack integrity if I did not ask the same questions of myself as I did of those I interviewed. I do not attempt or pretend to objectivity; rather, I attempt to interrogate the form of my own partiality. To leave my own social locatedness unnamed would be to imply the universality and objectivity of my argument. Further, I weave through the book a 'learning-story' which attempts to make visible my understanding of how the research changed me. This strategy takes as its cue Richardson's (1995) idea of a 'writing-story'. I also accepted the proposal from Robbie that I become a participant in the research by joining him as part of a paired interview for the research. These might be considered

as strategies for other researchers developing methodologies for the sociological and ethnographic study of whiteness and people positioned as colonizers in the Australian context.

A key preoccupation for me in this research was to consider the implications of attempting it as a white, non-Indigenous person. The project of being a white critic of whiteness throws up many questions (Probyn, 2004). For instance, is it possible to be a white critic of whiteness? Is it possible to gain sufficient critical distance from whiteness to contribute usefully to its critique? Is the earnest attempt useful, for whatever reason (for example, for its failures as much as any possible insights yielded)?

The challenges issued by non-white people, activists and scholars about the way whiteness impacts on non-whites, as well as how white lives are racialized, demand a response. White people, including scholars, are exhorted to work to understand, critique and confront the workings of white privilege. Yet such projects are taken up less often in favour of research or projects which focus on subordinate groups (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006: xiv; Moreton-Robinson, 2006: 231; Pease, 2010b: 32).

My engagement with the workings of my own whiteness and my own colonial complicities in both my research and my attempts to contribute to Indigenous struggles is an informed and crucial element of my critique of whiteness. It recognizes that I am 'very much part of the problem that [I am] trying to articulate' and that 'doing critical whiteness studies as a white necessitates that we place ourselves in it, otherwise we've missed the whole point' (Probyn, 2004: para. 17).

However, there are many potential pitfalls of including a personal voice in my white critique of privilege. To write

about a struggle with privilege risks becoming confessional, redemptive, self-serving (Roman, 1997). It is necessary to find an auto-ethnographic voice that does progressive political work.

I have struggled with questions such as, how can I include (the right amount of) my own story without this reading as confessional or redemptive? Will an account of my learning about racism in activism and research ‘amount to’ or ‘do any’ anti-racist work? (See Ahmed, 2004.) Like queer- and critical-whiteness scholar Thomas Viola Rieske (2008: 108), ‘I wanted to produce a text of a kind that I like the most in the field of critical whiteness studies: one that interests me, ashames me, unsettles me.’ Yet works in critical whiteness studies and ‘anti-racist’ projects can so easily, though not inevitably, function to *reinscribe* white privilege (Ahmed, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2006; Pease, 2010a; Probyn, 2004).

That privilege could be discursive and material; there are obvious ironies in being/becoming a white academic comfortably advancing one’s career through the critique of the workings of privilege. Further, if one does ‘succeed’ as a personal narrative writer, one’s very ability to be reflexive and self-critical and to write in this way can attract more prestige to oneself (Pease, 2010a).

In attempting to avoid the various pitfalls, my approach was to ensure that auto-ethnographic content in the book should never become its major preoccupation. It was important to work against a personal account that was self-serving; it is very tempting to construct a narrative that is redemptive. The personal narrative should be ‘a form of confession not of sins but of the experience of power and the resistance to it’ (Rieske, 2008: 109). This is a way through the problem whereby ‘The

white critic of whiteness consumes the Indigenous critique of whiteness by attempting to become a good disciplinary subject who is sometimes “bad” (Probyn, 2004: para. 30).⁷ That would be confession gone wrong, confession framed around who is ‘good’ and who is ‘bad’, rather than being about successes or failures at resisting complicity and the exercise of power.

I came to better know, feel and understand the relative importance or unimportance of my project alongside the intellectual and political concerns of other activists through an interaction with Robbie Thorpe. I showed Robbie a draft case study I had written of Camp Sovereignty, the focal point for the Black GST protest that we had both been heavily involved in just prior to my embarking on this research. The case study – being prepared at the time for publication – set out to analyse some of the Indigenous–non-Indigenous interactions around a particular happening at Camp Sovereignty, which I saw as encapsulating many of the central concerns of my research. I was really nervous about Robbie’s feedback, (a) because he is very incisive and I really value his opinion; and (b) because when he read the piece he smiled and handed back the pages without a word. When Robbie finally spoke he did not comment directly on my draft. Instead he told me what he had been concerned about at the time of the protest. His concerns had nothing to do with interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists. This is an excerpt of what I wrote after that conversation:

7. This metaphor of eating and consuming echoes Irene Watson’s (2005) deployment of cannibalization: Watson sees white people in various ways consuming things Indigenous in the attempt to become Indigenous. This attempt to legitimize our flawed sovereignty always fails, but its appropriative approach to Indigenous people is a continuation of white approaches to Indigenous land, culture, knowledge and everything else (Watson, 2005).

When Robbie spoke like that, I realized that the focus of my research, while of some value as a subject to analyse, was just my own preoccupation. *His* preoccupation was on sovereignty. For one thing, this exchange gave me insight into the different concerns we had during the action. Secondly, it pointed to an intellectual and real project about the assertion of sovereignty that Robbie undertakes. And finally, it was a case of a quiet and powerful message delivered in an indirect way.

So, while I mount an argument for the rationale and importance of my research project for academic and activist audiences, I maintain a sense of perspective on the relativity of this valuing. This experience with Robbie was a significant moment in coming to know, feel and understand my research as contingent (see also Tedlock, 2000: 466–7). While my approach to research accepts contingency as a premiss, I find it necessary – as part of a struggle to undo the privilege I accrue most particularly as a middle-class white woman and a colonizer – to critique the limitations that my partiality and situatedness place on my research, to uncover the oppressive work of my partial vision; that is, the creation of yet *more* stories from a colonizer perspective which remains unnamed.

I acknowledge that I am changed by the research: in particular, the workings of my own privileges have become more apparent (although not fully transparent) to me throughout the research project. It will be apparent to the reader how the project and the text reflect those ways in which the workings of my own privileges remain opaque to me. I understood the interrogation of my own position as activist and researcher as part of my response to the ethical issues thrown up by a project of this kind.

Progressive non-Indigenous research

The politics around research related to Indigenous peoples has significant implications for the way I thought about and went about my research. As Smith (1999: 1) demonstrated in her influential book *Decolonizing methodologies*, research itself is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism: ‘The word itself, “research”, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary.’

Given the implication of research in the colonization of Indigenous peoples and the appropriation of Indigenous knowledges, the prospect of undertaking research in connection with Indigenous peoples is problematic. I needed to ask myself, why do I want to interview Indigenous people? Is this appropriate? Would it be appropriate to do this project without interviewing Indigenous people? What safeguards are in place?

In seeking to avoid recolonizing Indigenous participants via my own research, I designed the research to correspond with principles, where they have been articulated, for culturally appropriate research by non-Indigenous researchers.⁸ In a formal sense, I gained approval to undertake the research included in this book by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project EC 330–2006) while I was a Ph.D. student

8. I gave local protocols, chiefly the report *We Don’t Like Research... But in Koori Hands It Could Make a Difference* (VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit, 2000), the most weight, while critical Indigenous methodologies were also informative (in particular Smith, 1999: 177, which heeds Maori concerns). *We Don’t Like Research...* lays out key principles, which are found to be echoed, along with more detail, by guidelines issued by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* (2000), and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999: Part 8, Research Involving Collectivities). More recent local contributions by Aunty Joan Vickery et al. (2010) and the work of Noonuccal scholar Karen Martin (2008) significantly develop ideas of remuneration for community investment in research and researcher protocols and accountability (see also Denzin et al., 2008). On recolonizing, see Villenas as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2000.

there. The ethics plan for the project covered a broad range of issues, including consent to participate, strategic and political considerations of the research, and returning research to communities. One of the key strategies in line with the relevant guidelines was to establish the critical reference group.

I also drew on my own sense of ethics (partly learned through harmful transgressions) to establish additional boundaries. Specifically, I sought to interview and be guided in the research by Aboriginal community members who had engaged politically with and worked to educate non-Indigenous people. This criterion would ensure that those with whom I was trying to engage were at some level willing to engage with non-Aboriginal people as a strategic political project serving their own interests. Further, there was a basis for a shared understanding of the research process (see Fontana and Frey, 2000: 664). Aboriginal people have used various forms of research in their repertoire of social change strategies. This includes collecting oral histories, documenting police harassment, assessing community health needs, producing radio, film and theatre, and conducting Indigenist academic research in what have been politically informed, community-controlled strategies (Atkinson, 1989; Foley, 2012; Howell, 2013; Nathan, 1980).

Second, I sought to be appraised of, cognizant of, informed by and working to promote, or at least not undermine, an Indigenous research agenda (Smith, 1999) in developing my research questions and priorities. That said, I don't imagine that my work could necessarily advance that agenda. If non-Indigenous activist work supporting Indigenous rights is ideally located in parallel with, and informed by, the Indigenous decolonization agenda, then I see it as necessary, in a moral and

intellectual sense, to have the same orientation to Indigenous research agendas in proceeding with my research. Martin's (2008) work on Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji regulation of outsiders and researchers demonstrates how the two are related.

In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith goes beyond explaining techniques for harm-minimization in research to explore, from an Indigenous point of view, how research might be decolonized, and how Indigenous peoples may use research to further their political interests. Given that Smith identifies a strategic research agenda as part of the global Indigenous movement, it is necessary for researchers like me to understand this agenda and examine my research in relation to it. This involves considering a further issue: how my work might contribute towards understanding how white researchers may be able to serve the interests of Indigenous people through research.

The global Indigenous movement can be seen to be pursuing a number of projects within a strategic research agenda (Smith, 1999: 116). In the Australian context, an Indigenous, decolonizing research paradigm both tells marginalized Indigenous stories and encourages 'Mununga [white people's] stories that interrogate whiteness and its accompanying privilege' to be told too (Kessar, 2006). In certain contexts and under certain conditions, research by progressive non-Indigenous people can support Indigenous research agendas towards decolonization (Martin, 2008; Rigney, 1999).

This book contains the stories of privilege-cognizant white and non-Indigenous peoples and is, overall, offered up in support of Indigenous agendas, albeit indirectly. It is probably best understood as making a contribution to an imagined progressive non-Indigenous research agenda. I would conceive of such an

agenda as supportive of Indigenous agendas, and as contributing to these indirectly. To seriously develop such progressive non-Indigenous research agendas would require accountability constructs to be established so that non-Indigenous researchers were located as challengeable by Indigenist researchers.

This book can be considered as a response to Indigenous agendas across the projects of *indigenizing*, *intervening*, *reading*, *reframing* and *restoring* identified by Smith (1999). In terms of the *indigenizing* project, which works to disconnect ‘many of the cultural ties between the settler society and its metropolitan homeland’, and to re-centre the ‘landscapes, images, languages, themes, metaphors and stories’ in the Indigenous world (Smith, 1999: 146), I highlight the importance of non-Indigenous people examining our complicity in colonialism, including by interrogating who we are in terms of identity, culture and history, and the shape of our lives. This is part of a practice of critical self-reflection and of dealing honestly with the impact of dominant culture on Aboriginal people. This is a non-Indigenous effort in parallel with the Indigenous project of *indigenizing*.

Projects concerning *intervention* ‘are usually designed around making structural and cultural changes’ (Smith, 1999: 147). This research is supportive of the Indigenous project of *intervention* through its clear structural concerns and its attention to strategic questions about what will engage and maintain the contribution to meaningful social change by members of dominant groups. Further, the research for the book generated reflection among participants, and, parallel with the research, Robbie and I co-convened a forum which aimed to widen the conversation within the broader activist community (Land, 2011a). It was clearly directed at questions of non-Indigenous

people's responsibility to change ourselves and our institutions, rather than 'changing indigenous peoples to fit the structures' (Smith, 1999: 147).

The project of *reading*, connected to postcolonial and cultural studies, involves a 'critical rereading of Western history', and an attempt to understand what has informed both colonialism and neocolonialism – a genealogy of ideas and practices. In relation to this, my research has engaged with key debates about colonialist identity thought and the colonialist binary distinction between 'Indigenous' and 'non-Indigenous', demonstrating a particular sensitivity to Indigenous-authored theoretical insights. This includes looking for Indigenous ways of addressing difference that innovate against imperialist ways of addressing difference. This could be seen to engage with the Indigenous project of *reading*, as well as that of *reframing*. For Smith (1999: 153) one part of the project of reframing occurs 'where indigenous people resist being boxed and labelled according to categories which do not fit'. Some Aboriginal people – notably Robbie Thorpe – challenged the way I framed the research according to the binary distinction just mentioned. Part of the journey of the research became to develop a more ambivalent address of this binary. In this way I promoted a recognition of Indigenous efforts at *reframing*.

Finally, my research in a broad sense acknowledges the Indigenous project to *restore* Indigenous well-being. Specifically, the research challenges the lack of understanding by non-Indigenous people of their/our collective and individual impact on Indigenous well-being, and their/our inherent privilege.⁹

9. Although I write as a non-Indigenous person, I use 'their/our' (and related sets of

Progressive white racial projects and their dangers

To understand white privilege should also be to consider ways to undo it. There is some debate over the proper aims and methods of the progressive white racial project – that is, the endeavour to challenge systems which create white privilege and maintain white supremacy, including anti-racist white activism as well as activism which supports Indigenous struggles in settler nations. There are some dangers among the variety of forms for the progressive white racial project that others have articulated and pursued. These need to be considered in order for a more nuanced practice to be developed.

Out of the extensive literature on how whiteness shapes white people's lives and how to challenge systems which create white privilege and maintain white supremacy, some of the progressive white racial projects that appeal to me include:

Trying to unlearn whiteness. (Sullivan, 2006)

Cultivating a character that predisposes a person to animate privilege-cognizant instead of privilege-evasive white scripts. Developing such a character is like cultivating a virtue: through habit, not nature; and it includes the experience of travelling between 'worlds'. (Bailey, 1998: 38)

Practising a playful 'world'-travelling. (Lugones, 1987)

Hyper- but pessimistic activism (pessimistic because of danger of ontological expansiveness). (Sullivan, 2006)

Acting politically with self-understanding. (Frankenberg, 1993)

What unites these projects is that their proponents are all sure that at this moment in history it is not possible, and it is

pronouns) in this and other instances so that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers might feel addressed by this text.

harmful, to attempt to ‘abolish whiteness’, or to ‘move beyond race categories’. In supporting these projects I suggest going beyond a polarized debate that opposes the two main strategies for critical white people – those which seek to ‘abolish whiteness’ and those which suggest ‘moving beyond race categories’. I’m constructing an alternative to these positions, which are both problematic. I talk about reconstructing whiteness rather than abolishing it.

As Alcoff (1998: 18) argues, ‘Racism appears to be deeply sedimented into white psyches in a process that is newly reinforced [*sic*] each day.’ This means one can see white racism as at once very difficult to transform, yet possible to transform (by working to slow down, halt or even reverse that daily reinforcement of racism). Alcoff (1998: 24) asks, ‘Should we not move beyond race categories? I doubt that this can be done anytime soon. The weight of too much history is sedimented in these marked bodies with inscriptions that are very deep.’

In the project of reconstructing whiteness, attentiveness to the dynamics of gentrification is important. To transform whitely subjectivities some scholars suggest the practice of excursions out of white/Anglo ‘worlds’, into an engagement with non-white spaces. Such relocation can be a powerful way of ‘disrupting and transforming unconscious habits of white privilege’, but it can also work to reinforce them, for example by increasing that person’s ontological expansiveness (tendency to take over) (Sullivan, 2006: 10). The many dangers are cause for pessimism, but despite this the urgency of challenging white privilege animates hyper-activism.

My approach to the question, ‘what should white people do?’, the question posed by Alcoff, is one that springs from the

conviction that race, while socially constructed and without basis in biology, is nevertheless real, a social fact. I keep returning to the disposition Jane Belfrage – a middle-class, tertiary educated Australian of Anglo-Irish descent who is a musician and a single parent – brings to her identity, revealed in our interview: ‘I’m gonna be stuck with that. I’m going to move, you know, from one space to another within it ... But I accept it. Cos that is, you know, who I am in this time and place, in this lifetime.’ This excerpt from the interview with Jane indicates a profound internalization of an Indigenous view of whiteness, a recognition of the historical and political specificities of the moment in which it is salient (likely to be a long moment), and the struggle to overcome the self-hate that can flow from that. Indebted to Jane, I consider the progressive project of reconstructing white subjectivities in the Australian context as ‘moving from one space to another within colonizer identity’.

Overview of the book

The first chapter sets out who and what the land rights, Black Power and avowedly sovereign political community in south-east Australia is, its inspiring history and its significant though unfinished successes in confronting the legacy of British colonization. It explains why the way the history of these struggles has been written and taught is a political issue with real consequences. It also explains the political moment in which the book was written: the era of bureaucratization in Aboriginal Affairs, and in the wake of the long-awaited – yet ultimately disappointing – government apology. It shows that this political community has long nurtured its non-Indigenous support base and regards this as a strategic necessity.

Chapter 2 sets out a genealogy of non-Indigenous people's support action for the struggles already introduced, providing the historical and political context for the work of the non-Indigenous people interviewed for the book. At the outset it reminds readers of Indigenous people's solidarity with each other's struggles within Australia and internationally. The history of non-Indigenous solidarity in south-east Australia includes the work of the Communist Party of Australia, church-related groups, unionists, civil rights organizations, university students, feminists, 'white' support and 'reconciliation' groups, environmentalists and emerging areas of support such as anti-corporate globalization and anarchist groups. It discusses instances in which Indigenous people contested the nature of non-Indigenous support. Often without newly involved activists being aware of it, this history impacts on the terms for solidarity relationships today.

Chapter 3 shows how binary identity categories (colonizer/colonized, Indigenous/non-Indigenous) are invoked within the social world of people pursuing social justice against the workings of settler colonialism in south-east Australia. These categories are at different times used, refused and critiqued, and, crucially, innovated against: not so much blurred as departed from. Their use reflects 'social facts': that is, their social and material consequences. However, their refusal does important work against colonialist discourses and is part of bringing into being a world in which decolonization would be realized structurally, materially and culturally.

Chapter 4 throws into doubt the positive connotations of 'collaboration' and 'dialogue' as ways of dealing with structural difference in community sector and activist settings.

The discussion is sensitive to strategic tensions negotiated by Aboriginal people and includes: consideration of parties' readiness to enter dialogue or partnership; questions about the desire for collaboration and whose interests it serves; exploration of ways to manage a working relationship in the context of lack of trust – such as protocols, partnership agreements and accountability constructs. It also cautions against the common desire among prospective allies for friendship as an outcome of solidarity work. Throughout, awareness of the political necessity of optimism about prospects for collaboration is maintained, while limits to and/or the impossibilities within the project of dialogue are held in view.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the three key elements of the practice of solidarity with Indigenous struggles. Chapter 5 explains why it is necessary for non-Indigenous supporters to act politically with self-understanding and how to get to that point. Questions for reflection and forms that political action can take are presented by bringing together interview and secondary material – this grounds the chapter in activists' experiences and in relevant theory. This chapter is a serious engagement with the kinds of challenges Indigenous people have articulated about the nature and form of non-Indigenous support for their struggles, and articulates the political significance of these challenges. It also explores some of the dilemmas and challenges negotiated by solidarity activists. These include the dynamic of humility – how much is too much?; knowing enough but not too much about politics internal to Aboriginal communities; and the importance of being a long-term ally for this long-term struggle.

Chapter 6 presents a moral and political framework for non-Indigenous people's solidarity, which hinges on the political

necessity of reconstructing non-Indigenous people's interests. This involves non-Indigenous people interrogating our/their sense of our/their interests and understanding them as served by support for Indigenous struggles, and social justice struggles more broadly. The chapter shows why it is important for non-Indigenous people to develop their understanding of Indigenous struggles before they rush in, on an impulse, to fulfil their desires to 'help' Indigenous people. Indigenous people, scholars and activists are clearly working to shift would-be allies' understandings of what the 'problem' is and of the broader context of social change. This underscores the importance of non-Indigenous people developing a moral and political framework through which to be supportive of Indigenous people. Strategically, reconstruction of interests is seen to create a healthier (less paternalistic) basis on which to build solidarity. It is also seen to lead to a greater determination by non-Indigenous people to fight for social justice.

Chapter 7 shows that non-Indigenous people are challenged to confront complicity – to confront the ways in which we/they are 'wedded to the system' both culturally and economically. It argues that this is what produces a fundamental reluctance among non-Indigenous people to change the system, and sets implicit limits on what would be done or given up in the name of solidarity. The challenge in reckoning with complicity is to admit it, to resist it, to undo it, yet also to see how it provides opportunities to resist the workings of colonialism. The hard work of reckoning with complicity springs from the recognition by non-Indigenous people that the place where one lives and works is Aboriginal land. For non-Indigenous people, this recognition should not only inform our public political

action (particularly attention to local, not only far-away, issues), but should also be reflected in the shape of our lives. Non-Indigenous people might ask, how does the shape of my life keep the system intact? How does the shape of my life reflect the acknowledgement of sovereignty and/or the dismantling of privilege? The chapter considers strategic and political debates around the contradiction of living comfortably in the system, yet being an agent for changing it.

As is evident in the elements of personal narrative that I have included at points in the text to follow, the experience of undertaking this project – the research and the writing of this book – has changed me as much as it has generated the ideas set out. I now undertake to return these ideas to fellow activists and those who have challenged, worked with and educated me.