

# Anxieties of Belonging in Settler Colonialism

This book analyses the anxiety ‘well-intentioned’ settler Australian women experience when engaging with Indigenous politics. Drawing upon cultural theory and studies of affect and emotion, Slater argues that settler anxiety is an historical subjectivity that shapes perception and senses of belonging. Why does Indigenous political will continue to provoke and disturb? How does settler anxiety inform public opinion and ‘solutions’ to Indigenous inequality? In its rigorous interrogation of the dynamics of settler colonialism, emotions and ethical belonging, *Anxieties of Belonging* has far-reaching implications for understanding Indigenous–settler relations.

**Lisa Slater** is a Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies at the University of Wollongong.

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# Anxieties of Belonging in Settler Colonialism

Australia, Race and Place

Lisa Slater

First published 2019  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an  
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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Slater, Lisa, 1968– author.

Title: Anxieties of belonging in settler colonialism : Australia,  
race and place / by Lisa Slater.

Description: First edtion. | New York : Routledge/  
Taylor & Francis Group, 2019. | Series: Routledge studies  
in cultural history ; 65 | Includes bibliographical references  
and index. | Identifiers: LCCN 2018029646 (print) |  
LCCN 2018040614 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Australia—Race relations—History. |  
Belonging (Social psychology—Australia. | Women colonists—  
Political activity—Australia.

Classification: LCC DU120 (ebook) | LCC DU120 .S575 2019  
(print) | DDC 323.1199/15—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018029646>

ISBN: 978-1-138-35946-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-43373-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon  
by codeMantra

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# Preface

A few days before 2018 Australia Day, our official national celebration, I was listening to ABC radio. The presenters of *The Minefield* were asking the question: ‘Is there a morally credible case for not changing the date of Australia Day?’ (Aly & Stephens, 2018). Australia’s national day of celebration falls on the 26th January, the anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney Cove.<sup>1</sup> Or the beginning of colonisation. Familiar to many ‘national days’, there is a public holiday, flag waving parades, national honours, displays of modest, jingoistic to bellicose, racist patriotism, along with garish celebrations, BBQs and getting drunk. To paraphrase the present leader of the federal opposition, it can be an idiot magnet. *The Minefield*, hosted by public intellectuals Waleed Aly and Scott Stephens, does not shy away from contentious and highly political issues, although arguably the push to ‘Change the Date’ has become mainstream. The current Prime Minister might be staunchly opposed, but public opinion regarding the national public holiday is changing (Karp, 2018). According to a recent poll by the Australia Institute, 56% of Australians ‘don’t mind when the national holiday is held, so long as we have one’, while 49% said ‘it should not be held on a day that is offensive to Indigenous Australians’, and only 38% know why Australia Day is held on the 26th January (The Australia Institute, 2018). ‘Change the Date’ is no longer a fringe issue or ‘particular’ to Indigenous people.

There is nothing new about protesting Australia Day: it has long been referred to by some as Invasion or Survival Day. For many years, Indigenous activists, and those in solidarity, have called for the date to be changed. For at least eighty years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians,<sup>2</sup> and supporters, have gathered to mourn the invasion of their lands, celebrate their survival and protest the impacts of ongoing colonisation (Land, 2015). However, what is new, as *The Minefield* presenters illustrated, is the intensity, insistence and the unavoidability of the demand to change the date. Indigenous people have made it known to a too often complacent citizenry that celebrating on January 26th is highly offensive as it marks the onset of genocide, dispossession, injustice and is a day of deep pain. Celebrating Australian achievements

on the 26th January has become an affront to those non-Indigenous Australians who seek justice for and reconciliation with Indigenous people.

*The Minefield's* conversation then turned to the distinction between the gathering momentum to 'Change the Date' and the silence that met the Uluru Statement. In May 2017, over 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from across the country met at Uluru in Central Australia, on the lands of the Anangu people, to discuss and agree on an approach to constitutional reform and recognition of the First Nations (Australian Parliament, 2017). The summit produced the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart', a moving and eloquent demand for significant sociopolitical transformation. The delegates sought 'agreement making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history' (National Constitutional Convention, 2017). The Uluru Statement urged Australians to move beyond symbolism and called for substantial changes. Joining the hosts of *The Minefield*, Aly and Stephens, as their weekly guest was Gemma McKinnon, University of New South Wales Indigenous Law Scholar. Despite the growing support for some Indigenous issues, McKinnon lamented, her people went unheard. The Uluru Statement, the panel concluded, was roundly rejected and willfully disregarded by the federal government and mainstream Australia. It did not ignite the public imagination, Aly stated, or a public discussion. Very few people were engaged generally, and fewer still were saddened or outraged by the government, media and public silence. They concurred, 'Change the Date' is no cost. Uluru asks for much more, including a voice in parliament. When there are costs, such as Uluru demands, Aly identified, 'our fervency and passion dies away'. The Uluru Statement declares that the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 'has never been ceded or extinguished and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.... In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard' (National Constitutional Convention, 2017). It fell upon deaf ears.

The preoccupation of this book is progressive, settler Australians who cannot be moved, or stirred to action, by collective Indigenous political agency, yet are routinely moved by the national pastime of worrying about Indigenous people (Land, 2015). A great number of Australians are willing to support 'Change the Date' but simultaneously choose not to engage in public discussions about substantial constitutional changes Indigenous people are calling for such as the Uluru Statement. To paraphrase Aboriginal activist Gary Foley, it is as if notions of Aboriginal agency and self-determination are incomprehensible even to well-meaning, anti-racist settlers (Land, 2015, p. x). I share other settler scholars' commitment to examine the 'settler problem', analysing contemporary expressions of benevolent colonialism (Mackey, 2014; Regan, 2010). Unlike other recent studies however, my protagonists



are not activists, self-consciously anti-racist or allies, or professionals working within the 'Indigenous sector' (Kowal, 2015; Land, 2015; Lea, 2008). My focus is a more generalised condition of everyday progressive settler Australians, and their emotional responses to Indigeneity. In particular, I zero in on anxiety, the much renowned, but now little examined, settler condition. I turn the readers' attention to the blind spots: settlers' embrace of Indigenous culture and the ceaseless worry and concern for Indigenous people, coupled with an evasion of Indigenous political will. I refer to this conflation as settler anxiety. My protagonists are left-leaning settler Australians who want to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and social issues. Rather crudely, I refer to them as 'good white people'. More pointedly, my subjects are anxious white women. Intimate, complicated and highly emotional 'feminised' spaces, such as those discussed in the following chapters, are often overlooked as political encounters that provide insights into the 'settler problem'. Focusing upon white women's emotional responses to Aboriginal people and politics is uncomfortable, to say the least. It risks re-centring settler experience. But we need to stay with the trouble (Haraway, 2010) to enable a deeper understanding of how settler care and concern works to maintain colonial power relations.

To borrow from Irene Watson, mine is a meditation on discomfort. She questions, '[i]s there no possibility of a political space to be heard on the concerns we hold as Aboriginal people?' (2007, p. 36). Despite their good intentions, progressive settlers continue to respond to Indigenous politics and efficacy as a provocation. In response to Watson's concern, I explore how settler anxiety neutralises or displaces Indigenous agency. Worrying about Indigenous people, together with the embracing of forms of Indigenous culture can act to deny the political encounter. Throughout this book, I trace the anatomy of a particular cultural subjectivity that largely goes unanalysed in Australian society and, however inadvertently, works to contain Indigenous political difference. That subjectivity (good white people) displaces political engagement. Indigenous people, who are economically marginalised, have extremely poor health, high suicide and incarceration rates, and low education and employment are not being listened to by government and broader Australia. The chatter and worrying about Indigenous people continues to drown out the voices of Indigenous people themselves, their concerns and visions for the present and future. Blocking the space to be heard, be it at a national or more personal level, contributes to making too many Indigenous people's lives unendurable, by limiting, frustrating and immobilising the collaborative struggle for social justice and Indigenous self-determination. Notably, I am identifying two modes of anxiety. First, the guilt, fretting and pity, which displaces the political encounter with the familiar settler response to worry about and try to fix the 'Indigenous problem'. Second, an encounter with the political that

disturbs settler authority, interrupts certainty and brings good white people undone. The latter can be harnessed to create political spaces in which Indigenous people might be heard.

I was listening to *The Minefield* while walking along the headland close to my home in Wollongong, New South Wales (NSW), on Dharawal country.<sup>3</sup> To the west, I can see Mt Keira, which Dharawal refers to as mother mountain, a place of learning. The University of Wollongong, where I work, sits at its base. Looking south-east, out into the Pacific Ocean, are the Five Islands clustered just off the coast where the once-booming steelworks still billow industrial steam. Not far to the south is Port Kembla, and the Aboriginal community of Coomaditchie, located on the old mission grounds. There is a children's book, beautifully illustrated with artwork created by the children of Coomaditchie, which tells the Five Islands creation story (*The Children of Coomaditchie*, 2016). No doubt there are Dreaming stories<sup>4</sup> throughout this country, rich in fish, fresh water and natural beauty. The stories I'm more familiar with are of colonisation. In the early 1880s, British colonisers travelled south from Sydney to 'open up' the country and to exploit the rich pastures and resources (Organ & Speechley, 1997). Colonial history would have it that the explorer Charles Throsby, and his convict servant Joe Wyld, with the support of two Aboriginal guides 'discovered' the Illawarra in 1815 (NSWNPWS, 2005). Not long after, Throsby drove his cattle into the Illawarra using an Aboriginal trail down the steep escarpment, where he was one of the first 'settlers'. Land began to be granted to absentee landlords dispossessing Dharawal; punitive military campaigns were used to reinforce the encroaching frontier (NSWNPWS, 2005, p. 17). In 1816, the much-memorialised Governor Macquarie unofficially declared war, implementing a secret campaign to rid the Cumberland Plain, in the Sydney region, of its Aboriginal population. He instructed his soldiers to seek out the Aborigines and 'strike them with terror... drive them to a distance from the settlements of the White Men... inflict terrible and exemplary punishments'. In the early hours of April 17, 1816, the 46th Regiment attacked an Aboriginal camp at Appin. At least fourteen Aboriginal people were massacred, including the elderly, women and children. Macquarie labelled the incident 'unfortunate.' (Organ & Speechley, 1997, p. 10). In 2016, an Appin Massacre memorial ceremony was held to remember the Dharawal people who died.

All of this, and much more, happened and is happening in this place I now call home. All spaces are heterogeneous, abundant with conflicting interests and histories and unexpected alignments. It is only to state the obvious to say, what one sees, knows and experiences in any particular location is cultural, just as the particular time and place educates, shapes and frames one's perspective. In our contemporary moment, the politics of neoliberalism fosters fear, suspicion, defensiveness and indifference. More and more people are becoming economically and socially

marginalised. ‘The rich get richer, and the poor get the picture’, as Midnight Oil sang, in what now feels like halcyon days (Midnight Oil, 1982). Australia is in an era of the bureaucratisation of social services and punitive remedialism: the most disadvantaged are made responsible for their problems, treated as deficient and the fix is to submit to demoralising disciplinary regimes, or be abandoned. It is worth remembering that certain forms of life are cultivated at the expense of others. What is one’s responsibility to invest in the multiplicity of life? It seems of vital importance to know that Australia has an Aboriginal history, present and future, that the local has sites of cultural significance, colonial and contemporary violence, and that all places hold divergent memories, histories and ways of life. What motivates this project is a desire to expand our capacity to understand settler–Indigenous relations, invest in the plurality and diversity of places and grow our imaginative life to create more just futures. To do so, also requires appreciating how feelings and emotions inform one’s sense of self, place and experiences.

## ii

If I were to zoom in on my idea of home, like a GPS for deep and persistent feelings, you would see a farm tucked into and surrounded by a national forest, complete with freshwater creeks, cavernous Moreton bay figs, hills for rolling down: an early childhood home, to borrow from Williams, a place where I first lived, where I came alive and learned to see (1973, p. 84). How did the country of my childhood shape and inform my capacity to see and feel now? A key concern of this book is with how the taken-for-grantedness of settler authority plays out in the everyday. I explore the feelings and sensations of everyday certainty, belonging and personhood that settler colonial legal and political structures give rise to, as Mark Rifkin proposes, and the questions that are suspended and made moot by an all-encompassing settler sovereignty (2013, p. 322). The givenness, or what Rifkin conceptualises as settler common sense, framed my experiences of and attachment to my childhood home and continues to orientate my subjectivity and embodied relationships to people, place and history. Such experiences of the self in relation to place normalises ongoing dispossession of Indigenous people (Rifkin, 2014).

I was brought up on the far north coast of NSW, on a farm fed by the rich volcanic soil of the Border Ranges. Bunjalung country. As a child I knew nothing about Aboriginal sovereignty or colonisation. I did, however, sense denial, a defiant refusal to acknowledge that this had been home to *others* long before ‘us’. It was something to do with Aboriginal people. I wondered but dared not ask. To me, this place was proudly Bellbird Appaloosa Stud. My father was a cattle grazier and a horseman and my mother could cook, care and help on the farm, and to my child’s

eyes was stylish and elegant (a cut above the rest, and this gave me hope). We were country kids, bush kids, a little too far beyond the pale for some. I knew the words to Kenny Rogers' 'The Gambler' and Tammy Wynette's 'D-I-V-O-R-C-E' like little girls today know the words (and moves) to Jennifer Lopez' 'Ain't your Mama'. Farming communities extend kindness, and help people out when they can, out of necessity and a moral order. Did this include Aboriginal people or those said to have a 'touch of the tar brush'? The language of eugenics and assimilation taught us racial prejudices and warned of social exclusion. At a young age I learned to work hard against its pull; the ever-present threat of being battered by the loneliness and poverty of the margins. Individual Aboriginal people might be helped out, and there were the star boxers or football players who were championed in the ring or on the field, but I felt a collective hostility that I did not understand and made little sense. These are all dimly light memories, there was undoubtedly much more, but I am tracking the tributaries and undercurrents of feelings.

Many years later, in an interview I undertook with the Nynooogar writer Kim Scott, he asked me where my interest stemmed from in the relationship between black and white Australia. Maybe I told him a few stories of growing up in Kyogle; of the haunting sense that what seemed unquestionably ours, wasn't. He responded, you're asking the questions you couldn't ask as a child. He was right. Things have changed dramatically since my childhood in the 1970s and 1980s rural Australia. Still it's the uncanny, in and out of place, the unspoken social hierarchies, the training of the heart, the uncertainty buried deep in that taken-for-grantedness that plagues me.

In the country of my childhood, it was easy to believe in God. This wasn't because we lived on the edge of what is now the heritage-listed Murray Scrub – a lowland subtropical rainforest on the far north coast of New South Wales. We lived on fertile farming land alongside a rich and complex ecological system. I remember my father calling it 'apple tree country'. Riding along the clear, stony, icy-cold creek – the boundary between the farm and Toonumbar State Forest – he pointed out native apple trees. 'They don't bear fruit,' he said, 'the timber is no good for milling or for making furniture, but they are the sign of good country.'

It wasn't the perennial fear of drought or flood destroying the family livelihood that demonstrated the presence of a distant, fierce God. Each year there seemed to be a drought, the earth cracking open, turning the flat between the house and the yards into a mosaic. Followed by a flood, the sky settling low and heavy, dark as a battle ship, obscuring the ranges. It wasn't the devotions to 'beauty rich and rare' that we chimed each morning when we raised the school flag that persuaded me that this was God's country. Or the nationalist poetry we read at school that sang of the county's splendor and abundance. Women were beautiful, sometimes a cowboy, but not the country. It was too clever to get caught in a

net of words, especially one as dangerous as beauty – dragging with it suspicion and reproach. Language fell across the country like a veil; the world turned, words slipped off, dropped behind.

The God I learned about in Sunday school meted out his whims from some far away non-place. In the country of my childhood, the men, despite their fierce belief that they were kings of the country, their practical intelligence and toughness, sometimes appeared unanchored and fragile. It was as if authority came from elsewhere, even further away than town. The men embodied the taken-for-grantedness of settler colonialism, but there was also vulnerability. It is this dynamic of entitlement and helplessness that I want to examine, to analyse how it masks settler common sense, and transfers complicity and personal responsibility to a higher authority that can ruin or reward. In the case of Australian settlers, the government.

And the women you ask. Where were they? It was a man's world. But no one doubted that the place would fall to pieces without a 'good woman'. Judged harshly, often found wanting, expected to be 'handy on the farm', grow the kids up (more-or-less on her own) and 'scrub up well' when the occasion required. Not too pretty of course, and flirting was out. But you couldn't help but admire them; they could do just about anything. I knew women to be kind, a great reservoir of gentleness and understanding. There were plenty of women who were mean, harsh, if not scary but maybe I didn't really think of them as women. Us kids talked amongst ourselves, wondered what went wrong: what made her so tough or 'unpredictable'? Rumours circled such women; some man was to blame. The men of my childhood could be wild and reckless, forthright and reliable but better not trust your heart to them. Lots of things went unspoken, most especially the often-drunken violence and anger rained down upon women. As they say, in tough times everyone sticks together. After all, the country was hard won, and some-how we all knew to keep quiet, not to question what worried at our hearts.

### iii

I tell the above stories to locate myself and what inspires the spirit of this book. Like many country kids, I left and moved away to go to university, fulfill career and personal ambitions and became urban, even cosmopolitan and certainly middle class. From a young age, I became acutely aware that 'country' girls like me leave the bush. In my teens I started to find the life provincial and restrictive. Nonetheless, I loved the country but it felt like there was no place for me. Other women who have grown up in and left the bush have shared similar feelings of loss. I wonder if it creates a yearning for an idealised, seemingly unmediated relationship to place, that one felt as a child. In the 1990s and early 2000s, many progressive settlers responded to the 'revelations' of colonial violence

that circulated through government reports, the media, scholarship and personal accounts, with shock, anxiety and guilt. It left them feeling out of place. Throughout those years, I remember thinking ‘we’ did know, the evidence was everywhere. It was an open secret. The country was violently won, but such knowledge was buried, and hardened against. In rural Australia, there seemed to be so much pain and grievance – accidental deaths and injuries, loss of crops and stock through drought and flood, and the anger worn by women, children and outsiders – which pile up and become a burden to carry. In settler Australia we celebrate and bury the trauma. What does this strange mix of grief, exclusion, privilege and knowing silences produce? What relationships to place, people and the self? What is allowed to find expression and what is censored?

The women of this study are searching for a sense of belonging, which they pursue through an engagement with Aboriginal Australia. Not all of my subjects were raised in rural Australia, but their longing for a connection to country and to Aboriginal people and culture shares a gender and racial politics that continues to mark and circumscribe settler–Indigenous relations. Their pursuits also furnish productive questions that reveal more than they conceal. Hidden within the anxiety to belong, reconcile with Indigenous people and reckon with colonial history, and coupled with the threat that Indigenous political will pose to good white people, lie insights into an architecture of Australian subjectivity that we don’t talk about. A particular concern is that in our historical moment, there is a retreat, a wariness for settlers to disclose what it feels like to be the beneficiaries of living in a colonised country. It is shaming to discuss these awkward, if not ugly emotions, and much easier to dismiss them as personal failings or hide behind the valorisation of Aboriginal ‘culture’ or a deep empathy for the marginalised, the dispossessed, the injured (Pedwell, 2014). Consequently, progressive settlers could fail to confront colonial history, examine one’s complicity in maintaining power and privilege, and work in solidarity with Indigenous people.

A note on my use of the term country. In Aboriginal English, country refers to a holistic connection to land. It is a word for home and takes in everything within the landscape: the land, sea, sky, rivers, special sites, seasons, plants, animals and stories. Country is a place of Aboriginal heritage, belonging and spirituality (Eades, 2013). My application and understanding of how the term is often used in rural, white Australia is that the word shares a sense of a deep connection to and recognition of the fecundity of land, but there is no equivalence. Country cannot be entirely captured within an economic logic, but it readily captures the heart. Nonetheless, it remains caught in the settler colonial imaginary. Rural white Australians still assert the largest claim on authentic belonging.

## Chapter Summary

*Anxieties of Belonging in Settler Colonialism* traverses multiple cultural sites – memoirs, film, cultural tourism and policy – and a picture begins to emerge. Each chapter is a piece of the puzzle, and the logic of the book's organisation is to trace a cultural dynamic across a particular time, and to explore how it manifests in different terrain. By analysing varied cultural sites, I investigate a broad cultural subjectivity – good white people – to argue that settler anxiety is an effect of and a refusal to encounter Indigenous political claims and difference. My subjects of study are those who have been profoundly affected by the post-1970s Indigenous rights movements or whose subjectivities have been deeply informed by the politics of reconciliation and Indigenous testimony. At the height of the reconciliation era, the 1990s to early 2000s, there was a proliferation of work that examined settlers' responses to and turmoil over the revelations of Australia's colonial violence. Many people were accused of reacting with self-pity and being overly concerned with their sense of belonging rather than expressing horror towards ongoing colonial violence and stirring to support Indigenous self-determination. Now the routine is to worry about Indigenous people. One might not be any better or worse than the other; both are expressions of settler authority straining to regain control. There was however a revealing honesty in the self-conscious settler anxiety of the 1990s to 2000s, which I want to mobilise to scrutinise our contemporary moment. Thus, I examine texts from the reconciliation era to the present, post-reconciliation Australia. Initially, I examine crafted expositions of settler anxiety of belonging – Chapter 2, Kim Mahood's *Craft for a Dry Lake* (2000); Chapter 3, Margaret Somerville's ethno-autobiography, *Body/Landscape Journals* (1999), and Chapter 4, Jeni Thornley's poetic filmic essay, *Island Home Country* (2008). In Chapter 5, I move to an ethnographic account of settler–Indigenous co-presence, in which I witness the 'trauma' of the political encounter unfold, and then how settlers are reorientated towards Aboriginal self-determination. In the final chapter, I turn my attention to government policies to examine how the 'governing of care' works to conceal colonial power relations.

Australia is a cosmopolitan society, a complicated place and one of the most multicultural countries in the world. My subjects of study are Australians with an Anglo heritage, of British and Christian descent, urban, east coast and educated middle class. Those who are 'unquestionably' accepted as Australian, yet do not identify nor are readily celebrated as quintessentially Australian. Notably however, Australia has a diverse migration history. Some of the largest migrant populations are from China, India, Vietnam, the Philippines and Italy, to name but a few. In the post-second world war period, there were waves of migration from Europe, and over the last 50 years, Australia has become

home to people from across the globe. In Chapter 1, I discuss in detail why these particular Anglo protagonists. Notably being white does not equate with a sense of belonging. There are many people of European descent who for reasons of class, education, sexuality, cultural differences, etc., despite their fair skin, are excluded, or have never felt at home in Australia. This is simply to say that there is diversity of cultures, and within this book I am not attempting to address the variegated textures of contemporary Australia. My own background, experiences and pre-occupations have provided me with a level of proficiency and a position from which to speak about a particular subject position, which I refer to as 'good white people'. I will leave it to readers to draw connections and distinctions with their own lives.

Chapter 1 introduces the broad themes and concerns of the book, and revisits and revises the concept of settler anxiety. To extend the analysis of settler anxiety, first, I examine and detail the cultural dynamic that produces 'good white people'. Second, to develop a more nuanced understanding of the anxious subject, I draw upon the work of critical studies of affect and emotion and critical theory. Third, I analyse the threat that Indigenous political will pose to settlers' sense of home and ethical belonging. The following chapters investigate 'sites of discomfort': each is a detailed case study of a particular sociopolitical contestation. Chapters 2–4 explore settler, feminist memoirs, in which the women, in various ways, confront the limits of their 'goodness' and capacity to bear difference. The focus of these chapters is 'personal journeys' in which the women come undone when they are confronted by issues of race, gender, belonging and colonial history and complicity. In each there is a loss of innocence. Chapters 5 and 6 move the study from the personal to the collective good intentions of settler Australians. Chapter 5 explores a Yolngu<sup>5</sup> cultural tourism program, in remote Northern Australia, which harnesses non-Indigenous tourists' fascination with Aboriginal culture to assert political and economic autonomy and sovereignty (Wright et al., 2012). The result is both settler turbulence and ease, antagonism and alliance. I conclude that the political encounter unsettled and disorientated the tourists, which reoriented them towards a Yolngu ethos. Chapter 6 analyses the role that settler anxiety plays in shaping public policies that are designed to ameliorate Indigenous disadvantage. In particular, the current federal initiative, Closing the Gap (CtG). Seemingly, CtG makes minimal demands upon the broader population, other than on occasion to enact concern and worry. I examine what claims on life and the future are being made and how governmental care limits good white people's political engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I ask what are 'we' caring for?

Throughout this book, I pause over moments when, however accidentally, good white women are confronted with Indigenous political will, and it brings them undone. They are made anxious, uncertain and do not



know how to proceed. These contests are material and embodied: not mediated through the media, film and books. She is out of place and out of her depth. I ask, what can settler anxiety reveal about the complex cultural dynamics of settler–Indigenous Australia? More so, can anxiety teach progressive settlers how to make a home in an Australia comprised of multiple stories, knowledge, histories and political agency? I conclude that staying with anxiety – being disturbed, halted and unsettled – provides ways to renew our imaginative life and contribute to creating ethical settler–Indigenous relations that do not rely on reconciliation, recognition and resolution. Another key motivation for this book is the belief that if we closely examine the complexity of material encounters between settler and Indigenous Australians, we can see moments when settler anxiety gives way to a potentially radical political empathy. We need to turn ameliorative settler projects into political encounters, and in so doing create ways to see, be and think differently.

### Preface Acknowledgements

Parts of this preface were originally published as ‘A meditation on discomfort’, *Australian Feminist Studies* 32(93), 2017, 335–343, and ‘No Place like Home: Staying Well in a Too Sovereign Country’, *M/C Journal* 10(4), 2007, np.

### Notes

- 1 Australia Day has only been held on the 26th January since 1994.
- 2 Throughout this book, I largely use the term ‘Indigenous’ and am referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. When I can I will refer to the particular language group/traditional owners. When I use the term Aboriginal, I am not also discussing Torres Strait Islanders.
- 3 Also referred to as ‘Tharawal’, they are the traditional owners of large tracks of land in ‘the southern and south western Sydney area from the south side of Botany Bay, around Port Hacking, Illawarra Escarpment, as far south as the Shoalhaven River (Nowra) and extending inland west to Campbelltown and Camden.’ (see <https://www.tharawal.com.au/who-we-are>.)
- 4 The English word, Dreaming, does not capture the extent of the complexity of the Aboriginal spiritual concept. In Aboriginal languages, there are many different words used for the term. However, the Dreaming is ongoing and refers to the creation process and spiritual ancestors.
- 5 The traditional owners of north-east Arnhem Land, North Territory.

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# Acknowledgements

Most books take a long time to research and write, or more so rewrite and wrangle into shape. This one is no exception. It is impossible to thank everyone who has influenced the book and supported me along the way. It has become very clear how vital small, everyday gestures of collegiality, friendship and kindness are to the process.

I am especially appreciative of friends and colleagues who carefully read and gave detailed, perceptive feedback on draft chapters, discussed ideas and encouraged me over the years. In particular, I wish to thank: Katrina Schlunke, Karen Crowe, Amanda Harris, Pia Smith, Ian Buchanan, Elspeth Probyn, Joshua Lobb, Sukhmani Khorana, Tanja Dreher, Mike Griffiths, Emily Potter, Eve Vincent, Gordon Waitt, Pauline McGuirk, Colleen McGloin, Brian Martin, Catherine Phillips, Leah Gibbs, Michael Cohen, Niki Owen, Michaela Spencer, Bronwyn Carlson, Wes Morris, Leah Lui-Chivizhe, the Centre for Colonial and Setter Studies (CASS) work-in-progress reading group, and Feminist Research Network (FRN) work-in-progress workshops.

In particular, I am most grateful to my friend and colleague, Andrew Whelan, for his generous engagement with my work, intellectual companionship, insight and humour.

During my time as a research fellow at the University of South Australia, I was funded to undertake fieldwork and given the space to write. This is where I began to see a book emerging. I wish to acknowledge the financial support and sabbatical leave I received from the School of Humanities and Social Inquiry (HSI) and the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts (LHA), University of Wollongong. To a humanities scholar, time (and collegiality) is the greatest resource. Pockets of money that funded research trips, teaching relief, research assistants, conference attendance and workshops, all added up to greatly support the project. LHA's funding of writing retreats, research networks and centres assists my scholarship but more so a collective, supportive culture. In particular, I wish to thank LHA for providing funds for an editor. A very special thanks to Haydie Gooder for not only being a thorough, encouraging editor but also deeply engaging with and caring about the issues and ideas I am reflecting upon.

Some of the material in this book and earlier versions of several chapters were previously published in articles and book chapters. I am thankful to the editors and anonymous reviewers for their feedback. The work is reprinted with permission: 'A meditation on discomfort', *Australian Feminist Studies* 32(93), 2017, 335–343; 'Questioning Care', in A. Hickey (Ed.), *The Pedagogies of Cultural Studies*, (pp. 116–131), New York: Routledge, 2016; 'Waiting at the Border: White Filmmaking on the Ground of Aboriginal Sovereignty', in B. Neumeier and K. Schaffer (Eds.), *Decolonizing the Landscape: Indigenous Cultures in Australia*, (pp. 129–147), Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2014; 'They were so Unbearably Fragile and Foolish: Apple Trees, Intimacy and the Strangeness of Possession', in B. Holloway and J. Rutherford (Eds.) *Halfway House: The Poetics of Australian Spaces* (pp. 268–284), Crawley, WA: UWA Publishing, 2010; 'Anxious Settler Belonging: Actualising the Potential for Making Resilient Postcolonial Subjects', *M/C Journal* 16(5), 2013, np; 'No Place like Home: Staying Well in a Too Sovereign Country', *M/C Journal* 10(4), 2007, np; 'Intimate Australia: Body/Landscape Journals and the Paradox of Belonging', *Cultural Studies Review* 13(1), 2007, 74–89.

I live and work in the beautiful Illawarra region, on Dharawal country, and I grew up on Bundjalung country. Throughout my life, I have lived in and travelled to many different places in Australia. Even if as non-Indigenous Australians we don't know it or acknowledge it, country helps sustain us. Finally, special thanks to my family. Especially Tray and Jess – I fail to know how to reciprocate your generosity of heart.

# 1 Introducing Anxieties of Settler Belonging

Have you felt it in yourself or sensed it circulate in a space? Good white people writhing with discomfort, and no shortage of disdain and affront in the face of Indigenous political will. I'll use an academic conference as an example. So as not to identify any particular scholar, below I sketch a scene drawn from several presentations, where the largely white, academic audience are called to account. A prominent Indigenous academic is delivering a keynote to an informed, receptive audience. We want to hear her well-researched arguments, and perhaps more so, learn from her, gather an intellectual and political arsenal, to be moved and galvanised to action. She states calmly and confidently:

Indigenous people have never ceded sovereignty. Yet in any real sense how many people in *this* room, however good your intentions, genuinely accept Indigenous sovereignty? What does it mean to *you*? Indigenous people have repeatedly said that we are not being listened to, and despite the Prime Minister's pledges, governments continue to do things to Aboriginal people, not work with us.<sup>1</sup> We continue to be examined, probed, pitied, blamed for our poor health and socio-economic marginalisation, infantilised, and treated as incapable of finding solutions to the problems that beset our lives. Yet every day Indigenous people are working at local, national or international levels to improve our peoples' lives and counter ongoing colonialism.

She refuses an easy alignment and rejects settler benevolence and goodwill. When the speaker puts forth a political agenda that questions settlers' intentions, their willingness to relinquish power, to treat Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as equals – equals who might have a very different understanding of the problems and the solutions – what happens? It's early summer, not yet mid-morning and already threatening to be a hot day outside. Inside the air conditioning is too high, and many delegates shuffle in their seats, reaching into their bags for another layer of clothing to ward off the chill. Yet the room feels quiet and still. Bodies are so attuned to tension. In the audience,

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I feel anxiety flare, then swell to indignity and hurt. The room is heavy with worry and fretting. The keynote address ends, the Q&A is brief, as if the questions are stuck in the audience's throats, and the applause restrained. At morning tea, no one directly addresses or speaks to the feeling, but we hold it close, unwilling to let it go. Maybe someone says she found the speaker a bit rude, aggressive – angry. But most stay quiet; fear being accused of insensitivity, or worse, ignorance and racism. Feelings of hostility and uncertainty linger.

It is a familiar scene, which marks a particular cultural dynamic between progressive settlers and Indigenous people, and one that good white people don't like to talk about. Throughout this book, I want to better understand why settlers experience Indigenous political will as disturbing and painful, disrupting their sense of self, belonging, ethics and politics. Pity, according to Tony Birch, is the 'emotion that drives the relationship between conservative and liberal-minded Australians alike in their dealings with Aboriginal people' (Birch, 2014, p. 41). It is this inequitable and patronising relationship, to borrow from Birch, which is my focus. There is no shortage of pity. However, when Indigenous people refuse settler benevolence, and the accompanying identity of historical victims, and assert political agency, good white people's response is not pity but a self-defensive anxiety. When they encounter the materiality of Indigenous life, in all of its complexity, strength and vulnerabilities, they are confronted by the limits of settler innocence and goodness and feel uneasy and under siege. Indigenous autonomy and political will threaten a taken-for-granted sense of settler belonging, and a common response is anxiety.

Indigeneity, as scholars have long observed, makes settlers anxious; the claim to land is a sharp reminder that the colonial project is incomplete and settlers are the beneficiaries of its ongoing violence (Byrd, 2011; Fanon, 1963; Tuck & Yang, 2012). The pity identified by Birch – the configuration of sympathy and worrying about Indigenous people – I conceptualise as a form of anxiety that works to displace Indigeneity. Central to this book is a particular demographic for whom, as former Prime Minister Tony Abbott put it, 'few things matter more than the lot of Indigenous people' (2015). My interest is, as I indicated in the Preface, 'good white women': progressive settler Australians who want to learn about and engage with Indigenous peoples, cultures and social issues. To be more accurate, my protagonists are anxious, good white women. Those who are deeply troubled by the so-called 'Indigenous problem': socio-economic inequality; poor health, education, housing; racism; growing incarceration and suicide rates; the closing of remote communities; the 'loss' of culture; and the list could go on and on. There is a lot to worry about. All Australians should be alarmed by ongoing discrimination, injustice and disadvantage. However, what does the culture of concern and 'care' reveal about settler colonialism?

To be clear, not everyone cares. It is only too obvious that Indigenous issues do not matter to a lot of Australians. Even more so, as Clark and colleagues found in their recent study of non-Indigenous attitudes towards Aboriginal reconciliation, a ‘large body of the population remains disinterested and unengaged’ (2016, p. 2). Indigenous lives remain invisible, their voices go unheard, are met with a powerful form of apathy and inaction or worse with outright hostility and racism (Buchanan, 2012; Davis, 2016; Dodson, 2014). As much as indifference, resentment or aggression are an ever-present backdrop, and bring good white people into sharp relief, it is not the target of my analysis. My intellectual curiosity is animated by what appears to be a contradiction at the ‘heart’ of progressive settler cultural politics: the desire for vital Indigeneity – strong people and culture – an end to (neo)colonialism, and a deep concern about Indigenous well-being, but coupled with an inability to negotiate Indigenous political agency. However, as I will go on to argue, it is not a conflict but rather exposes the architecture of settler colonialism. Notably, I am identifying two modes of anxiety. Firstly, worrying about Indigenous people, which is an evasion of the political: a virtuous anxiety. Secondly, an encounter with the political that interrupts settler certainty and suspends agency. The latter is politically potent, I argue, if it is harnessed to reflect upon what is going on here: not for (poor) me but in settler colonialism’s troubling relationship with Indigenous Australia.

Anxiety is often perceived as an undesirable emotion, a sign of a lack of cultivation and self-control. It is revealing, not so much of the individual but of a cultural dynamic (Pedwell, 2014, p. 56). One’s own anxiety can bring one undone; another’s can make onlookers squirm with embarrassment and discomfort. There is nothing majestic about anxiety. I share Sianne Ngai’s interest in what she refers to as minor affects: envy, anxiety, irritation, boredom and bewilderment (2005, p. 7). These weaker, petty categories of feelings, which she calls ‘ugly feelings’, call attention to ‘real social experience and a certain kind of historical truth’ (2005, p. 5). Minor affects, or ugly feelings, are important, Ngai contends, because they are ambivalent and confusing, thus such feelings are ‘explicitly *amoral* and *noncathartic*, offering no satisfactions of virtue, however oblique, nor any therapeutic or purifying release’ (2005, p. 6). Ambivalence obstructs or suspends agency. It is the sudden, however momentary, realisation of helplessness and hopelessness. Such negative emotions evoke pain or displeasure. They can make you feel passive in the face of something significant or what Ngai refers to as ‘powerful powerlessness’ (2005, p. 1). Virtuous anxiety, however, affords catharsis and satisfaction: it displaces the political. Nonetheless, it is activated by brushing up against Indigeneity and colonial complicity. Thus, as I will go on to illustrate, anxiety signals both an evasion and confrontation with Indigenous sovereignty and political will.

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In a sense, Indigeneity is everywhere and nowhere. There is the relentless bad news reported by the media, policy announcements, interspersed with occasional good news; Aboriginal television drama's such as *Redfern Now*; the burgeoning film industry; celebrated artists, musicians, sports people; and no shortage of corporate and government walls adorned with Indigenous art; and the now commonplace Welcome to Country.<sup>2</sup> As Ken Gelder discusses:

in the contemporary postcolonial moment, Aboriginal people have more presence in the nation even as so many settler Australians (unlike their colonial counterparts) have less contact with them. Postcolonialism in Australia means precisely this, amongst other things: more presence, but – for non-Aboriginal Australians – less Aboriginal contact.

(2005, p. 172)

His concern, as is mine, is that genuine political encounters have been replaced by mediated images, the personal and social. Settler Australians are often occupied with the powerful realm of the symbolic but rarely engage with Indigenous people. Despite settlers' lack of contact with Indigenous people, there is no shortage of opinions and judgements. Mainstream perceptions of 'Aborigines' and Aboriginality, as Chris Healy outlines, have little to nothing to do with experiences of historical or contemporary Indigenous peoples, but rather are the product of stories inherited from colonists and colonialism (2008, pp. 4–5). What happens when mediated images and colonial stories are swapped for contact with contemporary Indigenous people?

In the following chapters, I analyse very material, visceral encounters between Aboriginal people – who are asserting their ongoing sovereignty, autonomy and self-determination – and good white women. They refuse settler benevolence, pity and authority. I zoom in on and slow down these moments to examine a particular formation of settler anxiety – the worrying, sympathy and self-pity – to argue that it is a displacement and avoidance of the political. However, in the encounters that I survey, the political encounter cannot be easily escaped, and virtuous anxiety is disturbed. Anxiety registers a confrontation with the unfamiliar and interrupts self-mastery (Heidegger, 1973). The world turns into something remote and strange. The subject is rattled, which potentially generates change. One can escape the distress by fleeing into the familiar, the known or seeking reassurance. We need to stay with the discomfort, as Irene Watson advises, and thoughtfully meditate upon how settler colonialism reproduces subjects who desire the luxury and security of exclusive possession, while also limiting good white people's capacities to reimagine belonging, shared existence, social justice and solidarity (2007). Anxiety exposes a choice: one can step into or evade discomfort.



My protagonists are all pursuing a sense of ethical belonging, and their quests lead them away from the comforts and certainty of 'home' into Aboriginal Australia, with whom they desire recognition and acceptance. Instead they find themselves on contested ground; Aboriginal sovereignty is no longer an intellectual or symbolic issue, and they are confronted with their own colonial complicity. They are progressive, educated, middle class, cosmopolitans, whose political and personal identities are tested, and found wanting, in the face of cultural differences and Aboriginal self-determination. Typically, it brings them undone. They are overwhelmed by emotions, are riven with uncertainty and anxiety, questioning and self-absorbed. They feel lost and out of place. Spaces of encounter, such as these, with all their raw, unbridled emotion, are scary and compelling. My ambivalence about anxious white women is not only because I share some of their anxiety (most obviously), but also because, rightly so, there has been a rejection of the emotional self-indulgence of the privileged white woman who is distressed, feels reproached or misunderstood, leaving Indigenous people burdened with comforting her. But there is a danger here. How can good white people understand their desires, if one can only speak of them once they have been made presentable; once passions and conflicts have been extracted? How can we understand the architecture of settler colonialism, renew our imaginative life and contribute to creating ethical settler-Indigenous relations and more just futures if we avoid ugly feelings? The following chapters detail corporeal settler-Indigenous engagements; however, for the remainder of this Introduction, I will outline the project and the broader settler subjectivity that is under examination.

### **Unsettling Times**

There is nothing new in worrying about Indigenous people. It is a mode in which the authority of the settler state is enacted (Fanon, 1963; Mackey, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Indigenous health is an ongoing national anxiety, and the idea that Aboriginal people, as Lea quips, need settlers help is a foundational assumption (2008). For decades, the poor health and socio-economic status of the Indigenous population have been a concern for many progressive white Australians. Indigenous and non-Indigenous professionals and activists have worked in solidarity to improve Indigenous health, socio-economic and political conditions (Kowal, 2015; Land, 2015). There are many notable and inspirational historical and contemporary examples of settler Australians harnessing their concern to support Indigenous resistance, struggles for justice and the establishment of organisations and services that have considerably improved Indigenous lives. There are too many to name, and the history and significance are little known, but just to name a few: The Australian Aborigines' League, The Federal Council of Aboriginal

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Affairs Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), Aboriginal legal and medical services, Freedom Rides, land rights campaigns, The Wave Hill Walk Off, 1967 citizenship campaign, and land and environmental protests such as Jabiluka (Attwood, 2003; Land, 2015; McGinness, 1991). There is also a history of white paternalism, including a complete lack of consultation and dialogue, and too many cautionary tales. For those settlers who aspire to collaborate, as Land states, it is ‘important to be familiar with the work of those who have made significant contributions, and as well as those whose practices have been either particularly problematic or particularly positive’ (Land, 2015, p. 53). It is also important to understand our own historical and political moment.

Mainstream Australia has a long history of remembering and forgetting Indigenous people (Healy, 2008). Indigenous activism, as noted, has repeatedly drawn government and non-Indigenous peoples’ attention to, and attempted to intervene in, the systemic erasure of ongoing colonial violence.<sup>3</sup> The following chapters span a timeframe from the late 1990s to the present, 2018. I reach back into the years following the implementation of the Native Title Act (1993)<sup>4</sup> and height of the reconciliation era,<sup>5</sup> when settler anxieties of belonging were unashamedly articulated. Arguably, this was a time of remembering. If worrying about Indigenous people is a national preoccupation, then what can a re-examination of such anxious times tell about our present? It could be said, from the 1980s, mainstream Australia was called to account: Indigenous activism, the arts, revisionist history, law reform and the reconciliation movement, just to name a few, intervened in the great Australian silence (Stanner, 1968). These narratives transformed the public sphere: a discursive space opened up that made room for empathy and compassion. As is well documented, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander testimony detailing colonial violence and ongoing injustice, most significantly in the Stolen Generations report *Bringing Them Home* (Wilson, 1997),<sup>6</sup> deeply disturbed settler Australians’ sense of belonging and legitimacy. It also galvanised progressive settlers to back movements for sociopolitical change. In the late 1990s, there was a boom in white community groups,<sup>7</sup> supporting reconciliation and native title, which led in to hundreds of thousands of Australians undertaking the historic ‘bridge walks’ of 2000, marching to support reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia (Foley cited in Land, 2015, p. 76). The years of the late 1990s to early 2000s could be said to be the most recent and the height of the demonstration of non-Indigenous people’s goodwill towards Indigenous people (Land, 2015). Notably, it was also an era of aggressive, paranoid nationalism with white settlers claiming that Indigenous people were undeservedly being granted special rights. It was a time of reckoning and resentment (Potter, forthcoming). In post-reconciliation Australia, despite notable exceptions, such as the National Apology and more recently the movement to ‘Change the Date’

(see Preface), large numbers of mainstream Australians have not been there in solidarity with Indigenous struggles.

Since the mid-2000s, successive governments have focused upon citizens' responsibilities – not rights (and arguably to the detriment of Indigenous rights). There has been a significant policy shift away from redress and reconciliation to neoliberal punitive interventions.<sup>8</sup> The prevalent government approaches to improving the lives of Indigenous Australians are aimed at socio-economic equality, while often ignoring colonial history and the diversity of Indigenous circumstances, socio-cultural distinctiveness and life worlds (Altman, 2009, p. 1). The state's focus on mainstreaming, individualism, welfare reform and the 'real' economy expresses a neoliberal-colonial order. It figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care' – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions. In making the individual fully responsible for her- or himself, neoliberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action; it erases the discrepancy between economic and moral behaviour by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational deliberation about costs, benefits and consequences. But in so doing, it carries responsibility for the self to new heights: the rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the constraints on this action – for example, lack of skills, education and childcare in a period of high unemployment and limited welfare benefits. Correspondingly, a 'mismanaged life', the neoliberal appellation for failure to navigate impediments to prosperity, becomes a new mode of depoliticising social and economic powers and at the same time reduces political citizenship to an unprecedented degree of passivity and political complacency (Brown, 2003). The model neoliberal citizen is one who strategises for her- or himself among various social, political and economic options, not one who strives with others to alter these options.

The most marginalised are represented as dysfunctional. The current 'crisis' in Indigenous Australia is largely responded to by government agencies through reinforcing mainstream values and experiences, which fosters particular life worlds at the expense of others. Thus, in contemporary Australia, the response to Indigenous disadvantage is to deploy an array of techniques and methods to normalise Indigenous people. Yet, seemingly mainstream Australia has not noticed the disregard for other world views or does not consider this a problem, despite Indigenous people's loud and consistent protests (Davis, 2016; National Constitutional Convention, 2017).

Nonetheless, I would argue that concern for Indigenous well-being remains a moral barometer of our time. Over the last twenty to thirty years, the political sentiment of broader, 'well-meaning' non-Indigenous Australians has shifted to a steadfast, dutiful recognition of past wrongs

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and belief that government's role is to alleviate Indigenous disadvantage. Being moved by Indigenous suffering is no longer the bastion of the bleeding hearts or activists. To be clear, I am not arguing that non-Indigenous people are mobilised to act, like they were in the height of the reconciliation movement, but rather that there is a broad sentiment of concern for Indigenous issues that is almost mainstream. Again, let me emphasise that this sits alongside a detachment, hostility and repugnant racism, and government policies that are punitive, interventionist remedialism. The more recent Change the Date movement indicates that non-Indigenous people can still be galvanised to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' causes. However, as discussed in the Preface, the 2017 Uluru Statement was largely met with silence, inaction and a lack of solidarity. What drives this book is not an argument that some people care and others do not, or that there are historical moments when the broader public are moved to support Indigenous struggles and at other times are apathetic and indifferent. As much as I think these are legitimate inquiries, my motivation is to analyse the anatomy of a particular form of settler subjectivity, which continues underneath the ebb and flow of settler 'goodwill', and I am naming settler anxiety.

From the late 1980s, Indigenous testimony of colonial violence and the Native Title Act deeply disturbed many settler Australians' sense of belonging. To borrow from Gelder and Jacobs, it turned 'what seems like "home" into something else, something less familiar and less settled'. They diagnosed these effects as postcolonial anxiety – uncanny Australia – and remind us that the uncanny is an experience of being simultaneously in and out of place (1998, p. xiv). Indigenous claims for recognition of injustice and rights threatened settlers' sense of security and legitimacy and put white Australia's authority under question. Fast-forward twenty to thirty years, now in the post-reconciliation era, good white people remember colonial violence, especially the cruelty of child removal policies, separation from community and country, and systematic discrimination. In our political moment, good white people do not forget Indigenous suffering; it has become too familiar, if not strangely comforting. White anxiety – configured here as guilt, worry and pity – about the legacies of colonialism works to neutralise the politics of sovereignty, and renew settler certainty and ethical belonging. Are settlers more at home worrying about and pitying Aboriginal people than genuinely listening, learning and engaging with other visions of the future? Indeed, do good white people need Indigenous vulnerability to maintain a sense of authority? Or to put it another way, why are 'well-intentioned' white Australians so troubled and unsettled by Indigenous political agency? The aim of this book is two-fold. First, I wish to illuminate settler anxiety, if you like, as a practice of emotional fortification to maintain one's sense of an ethical self. Second, and more so, I want to contribute to the work that destabilises the power relations that reproduce settler anxiety.

## Affective Genealogies

Good white people care about Indigenous people and culture; I am not doubting or questioning people's intentions. They are anxious to 'get it right'; their sense of self and belonging depends upon it. More so, anxiety is an historical subjectivity: a social practice, an activity through which the subject is constituted. Foucault claimed that the study of the genealogy of the modern Western subject needed to take into account two separate but related aspects. It is not enough to consider technologies of domination<sup>9</sup>; we also need to analyse the active practices of self-constitution. Foucault explains:

techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on.

(2005, p. 214)

In a simple sense, it is the work that we do to know ourselves, to constitute ourselves as subjects in relation to what one understands as the truth (Foucault, 1997, p. 271). A truth such as *colonial violence is in the past and good white people work with Indigenous people to secure a just, shared future*. I am arguing that a contemporary practice of self-seeking – technologies of the self – is the activity of knowing 'who I am' in relation to Indigenous issues and intercultural relations, which offers self-certainty. Of course, these activities do not produce an authentic self, but a kind of subjectivity that does particular work in the world: reproducing colonial relations of authority and vulnerability. These are, as Foucault argues:

not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group.

(1997, p. 291)

Foucault's concern, as is mine, is that the attitude to the cultivation of the self is governed by claiming a self-knowledge or 'truth', which tells settlers how to behave in given situations but does not intervene in and transform politics. Indigenous people are vulnerable and redemption is performed through acts of benevolence that welcomes Indigenous people into an already determined future. Good white people take responsibility for past injustices, face up to colonial history and the ongoing destruction and marginalisation, often by feeling guilty and pitying Indigenous people, or empathising. We work to make amends. I am arguing that these

are practices of the anxious subject, which reproduce the ‘truths’ of settler colonial authority. Good white people’s role is to guide Indigenous people out of the past and into the present and predetermined future. Anxiety blocks settlers from engaging with Indigenous political will and the imperatives of Aboriginal testimony (Povinelli, 2002, p. 42).

I am not suggesting that only white women are anxious, or that it is a particularly gendered subject position.<sup>10</sup> But rather my choice to focus upon good white women is for several reasons, one of which is that as a white, settler Australian I too am implicated and complicit. Historically, white women have had significant involvement in Aboriginal social issues, which has been contentious – often criticised by black activists, feminists and scholars as serving a white feminist sociopolitical agenda and failing to understand the history of racism (Ahmed, 2005; hooks, 1989; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). As much as there is a contested history of white feminist solidarity (Land, 2015, p. 72), settler women have worked alongside Indigenous women to secure basic human rights and social justice – housing, maternal and child health, parental rights and education, to name a few – and there remains much to celebrate and take lessons from (see Lake, 2001; Paisley, 1997; Wilson, 2015). The inequalities and asymmetries remain, as does the drive for many white women to redress historical wrongs and ongoing injustice.

In particular, Aileen Moreton-Robinson has demonstrated the role white women have played in the oppression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the disregard they have shown for Indigenous political differences and sociocultural values (2000). Black feminists have argued that liberal feminism elides race: the good white woman understands herself as marginalised and therefore similar to and sympathetic with Aboriginal women’s dispossession. However, her misidentification of herself with marginalised women effaces the authority that she gains by being white and educated (Ahmed, 2005; hooks, 1989; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Thus, she maintains the familiar, powerful colonial role as the dispenser of truth about Aboriginal people (Whitlock, 2000, p. 156). White does not simply refer to people with white skin, nor am I suggesting that if one is faired skinned one is white, but rather whiteness is ‘a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced’ (Frankenburg, 1993, p. 6). It does imply that good white women, however intentionally or unwittingly, participate in the racialised social structures that accord them privileges associated with mainstream Australian culture (Kowal, 2015, p. 11). Moreton-Robinson writes:

Whiteness is both the measure and the marker of normality in Australian society, yet it remains invisible for most white women and men, and they do not associate it with conferring dominance and privilege.

(2003, p. 66)

Privilege manifests in many different ways; however, as Moreton-Robinson illustrates, whiteness is constituted in forms of epistemic privilege, in the form of visibility and representational power. The anxious white woman too easily assumes the role of rescuing and recuperating Aboriginal women (and children) into mainstream life, which is a loss of voice for Aboriginal people (Watson, 2005). I am responding to feminist and critical race and whiteness studies scholars call for relinquishment of white authority, and thus a reconfiguration of settler belonging.

Feminist scholarship and activism guides this book. Feminists have worked to politicise what had previously been dismissed as unworthy of political and intellectual attention: the home, the body, childcare, motherhood and so on. They have long argued that cultural politics and power relations are embedded in everyday life and social relations, and produce our subjectivity, indeed our world. Most recently, studies of affect and emotion have become central to feminism, emphasising that ‘experience, perception and intellection are all highly mediated by affective states, rather than the product of “detached reason” or “objective observation”’ (Stephens, 2015, p. 274). Following this intellectual trajectory, I examine what is often overlooked as political: white women’s emotional response to Indigeneity. Attention to studies of affect and emotion provides further insights into the concerns of critical race and whiteness, Indigenous and settler colonial studies and feminism.

It is the depersonalisation of anxiety that interests me: the way feeling states are part of shared and communal experiences, rather than personal or private sensations (Stephens, 2015, p. 274). What Lauren Berlant refers to as ‘public feelings’ (2004). We know and inhabit the world through emotional attachments: emotions are not something one has, but rather it is through emotional responses that surfaces, boundaries, distinctions and impressions are created in shared social spaces (Ahmed, 2004). They are forces on a sensory level that enable us to understand and make distinctions between self and other (Stephens, 2015, p. 278). Emotions, or as Ben Highmore prefers ‘passions’, are cultural. He writes:

It is not simply me responding to the world with pleasure or pain, but of me being placed within a culture where passions circulate, and where I am impassioned in a whole host of ways.

(2009, p. 12)

Good white women are impassioned by the colonial injustice, ongoing inequality and marginalisation that affect too many Indigenous lives, and they want to be a part of the solution. Emotions are not neutral, depoliticised actions: they ascribe value and thus rearrange our connections and interactions with the human and more than human (Waitt, 2014, p. 669). They shape perception and order values, identity and senses of belonging (Ahmed, 2014; Highmore, 2009; Probyn, 2005).

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Emotions are a performance of the cultural politics of inhabitation or 'world making' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 12). In this sense, emotions construct the object, or are a way of apprehending the world, and are crucial to the construction of an understanding of the self and social life. Emotions draw one towards or away, or as Sara Ahmed identifies, involve reactions of 'towardness' or 'awayness' in relation to particular objects (2004, p. 8). Reflecting on my earlier example of the Indigenous academic, the expectation of inclusiveness and affirmation of an ethical belonging draws white women towards her. However, with her refusal to comply with settler desires, they move away or reject her.

Notably, I have been moving between the terms emotion and affect. Let me draw some distinctions and outline my motivations. Arguably, the difference between affect and emotion turns on representability. Affect is the term that is given to visceral forces that are considered interpersonal and beneath or alongside conscious knowing (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 1). This approach to affect draws upon both Deleuze and Spinoza's conceptualisation of the body, which is defined by its radical openness to other bodies; affect is not personal or interpersonal but transpersonal, drawing in many bodies. Affect, then, is both within and between bodies: it is prior to the representational translation of an affect into a knowable emotion. Affect does not reside in or is possessed by a subject (Anderson, 2006, p. 735). Thus, individual bodies are not of ethical or political interest, but interactions between bodies are (Pile, 2011, p. 11). Emotions tend to be understood as generated from the social and cultural. I more often refer to emotions and feelings rather than affect. Notably, however, for Lacan anxiety is not just an emotion, it is an affect (Harari, 2001). However, my approach follows scholars such as Elspeth Probyn, who writes:

In terms of the conundrum of affect and emotion, I will hazard that affect tends to refer to a privileging of the bodily .... On the other hand, especially in the descriptions of emotion in sociology and cultural studies, what happens at a social and cultural level tends to be privileged .... For me it matters less that one can be pure in the use of emotion or affect than that one remain alive to the very different ideas that circulate about what is, in the end, intimately connected.  
(2004, p. 28)

What is important to my understanding and deployment of the terms affect and emotion is that the body is conceptualised as productive, fluid and dynamic, yet there are enduring relations between components that define stable characteristics (Bignall, 2010). Although affect is less formed and structured than emotions, as Ngai observes, it is nonetheless not code-free or meaningless (2005, p. 28). My work is indebted to scholars who are questioning and intervening in depoliticised accounts



of affect as an unmediated relatedness (Stephens, 2015). As Berlant so eloquently writes, the ‘visceral response is a trained thing, not just autonomic activity’ (2011, p. 52). Settler anxiety is a cultural practice: an activity of self and social constitution. Anxiety also brings subjects undone.

Anxiety interrupts a sense of self-mastery and disturbs the taken-for-grantedness of the world. For Heidegger, anxiety is significant because it brings us closer to an understanding of human existence. In our everyday lives, we are immersed and caught up in the world, absorbed by things and people. He refers to this as fleeing or falling into the world because we are confronted by nothingness. Thus, he makes a distinction between fear and anxiety: fear is present and knowable; anxiety is driven by meaninglessness. Fear is induced by an identifiable threat. While with anxiety, the trigger is unrecognisable. Heidegger’s point is that what is threatening is the feeling of indefiniteness:

All things, and we with them, sink into indifference. But not in the sense that everything simply disappears. Rather, in the very drawing away from us as such, things turn toward us. This drawing away of everything in its totality, which in angst is happening all around us, haunts us. There is nothing to hold on to. The only thing that remains and comes over us – in this drawing away of everything – is this ‘nothingness.’

(1973, p. 2)

Importantly, as Heidegger states, things do not simply disappear but rather have a strange, menacing, overbearing presence. He uses the example of the feeling of dread that overcomes one in the dark. We cannot see anything and therefore do not know what surrounds us and if we are in danger. He writes, ‘what threatens us is *nowhere*’ (1973, p. 231). The world turns into something remote and unfamiliar. A foreboding future consumes the present.

Anxiety is an experience of the world as slipping or drawing away: one feels separate from the world. Again, as Ngai states, one suffers a ‘powerful powerlessness’ (2005, p. 1). The world that is so familiar becomes uncanny and strange. We are threatened by the meaninglessness of our existence: the sense that one’s identity is under question (Harari, 2001). Heidegger argues we flee from the nothingness of the world by filling our lives with people and things (1973). My claim is that settlers’ normative emotional engagement with Indigeneity – the worry, pity, guilt – is a form of fleeing. After all we are enmeshed in the world through emotions and modes of care. Our everyday existence is interrupted, and there is no longer a common sense, self-evident world that we are caught up in. One is thrown back upon oneself, questioning the world and who am I (Heidegger, 1973). The moment before fleeing or falling back into

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the world is when everything has disappeared, and I am alone. I am no longer attached to a particular understanding of the world or myself:

[I]n anxiety there lies the possibility of a disclosure which is quite distinctive; for anxiety individualises. This individualisation brings **Dasein** back from its falling, and makes manifest to it that authenticity and inauthenticity are possibilities of its Being.

(Heidegger, 1973, p. 235)

Heidegger is not referring to an individual essence – essential self – but singularity. However, to be singular, according to Heidegger, is to not be at home in the world: to take up the choice to change my ordinary life. Following Heidegger, I propose that staying with anxiety is productive: the moment when the good white woman questions herself but does not flee into the familiar world of settler anxiety, but rather her role, her ability to perform normative ethical belonging is disturbed. I want to examine such ‘emptying’, ‘meaninglessness’ moments to understand how they might contribute to rearranging and disrupting colonial relations.

### **Witnessing, Guilt and the Shamed Nation**

It is easy to forget that over the last twenty to thirty years, Australia’s cultural memory has been fundamentally reconfigured. Indigenous memory and testimony, revisionist historiography, land rights and native title and the reconciliation movement, just to name a few, reformed the public sphere. The 1988 bicentennial was a celebration of the white nation and thus a highly political event, which Indigenous activists and supporters used as a platform to interrupt a triumphant national narrative and assert that Australia has a ‘black history’. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Indigenous public intellectuals, political activism, the arts and music produced both settler pride and turmoil. Multiple and contested alternative histories disrupted the dominant and benign narratives of Australian settlement and the white nation, which was the bedrock of national identity and foundation of white belonging (Butler, 2013, p. 4). It might seem strange now, but well into the 1990s, the statement that Australia was colonised was for many radical and divisive. With the handing down of the *Deaths in Custody* and *Bringing Them Home* Reports (Johnston, 1991; Wilson, 1997), and the proliferation of stories (novels, film, autobiography, public debate, academic work, media), a deeply unsettling image of white Australia came into frame. The *Bringing Them Home* Report, Whitlock proposes, became a transformative force. Bearing witness to the stories and trauma of the Stolen Generations overwhelmed and shamed settler Australians ‘more profoundly and publicly than any other single event of recent past’ (Whitlock, 2004, p. 243). The systematic violence of colonialism,

and most notably, the Protection and Assimilation eras, became public knowledge and it hurt.

Mainstream Australians became witness to a history of institutional abuse of Indigenous people. Former Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd's National Apology to the Stolen Generations (and to a lesser extent but perhaps more remarkable for its time, Paul Keating's Redfern Speech) was an act of collective witnessing of and response to, as Kelly Jean Butler discusses, Indigenous people's testimony of historic injustices and suffering.<sup>11</sup> The challenge of testimony to public figures, academics and ordinary citizens alike, as Butler explains is:

to reimagine a vision of good citizenship against the revelation that Australia is not only a nation founded on dispossession, but also one which actively perpetuates the disadvantage of a range of sociocultural groups.

(2013, p. 5)

In opposition to former Prime Minister John Howard's, and conservative commentators, refusal to apologise, Kevin Rudd understood reconciliation as a core Australian value – the fair go – and to borrow from Ahmed, the very ideal of civility (2005, p. 78). The act of bearing witness, affirming the voices of Indigenous people and empathising became the role and vision of good citizenship: the answer to the challenge posed by the revelation of the horrors of colonialism. Witnessing was yoked to notions of good citizenship (Butler, 2013, p. 2). The so-called core value of the 'fair go' is recuperated and repurposed 'to forge a national community founded on respect for and attentiveness to the testimony of the socially and politically marginalized' (Butler, 2013, p. 9). The 'fair go' as a style of care. Arguably, the vision (although not necessarily the practice) of the 'fair go' has always been associated with the downtrodden but what changed was the image of the dispossessed. In the public imagination, Indigenous people shifted from strangers in the modern nation to a vulnerable population – subjects of concern – who need to be enfolded within the now safe arms of settler Australia. Notably, it positions settlers as performing the welcoming embrace. The appeals to Australian values are a self-conscious formation of a newly imagined political community: witnessing became a civic virtue.

Initially the reconciliation movement did not becalm progressive settler Australia with the sense that we now live in a reconciled nation, as Gooder and Jacobs demonstrate, but rather that the nation was improperly formed: it was born from violence (2004). The fantasy of settler colonial innocence and rightful possession was interrupted. What can I do to restore the nation and thus myself? Surely a country that is coming to terms with its own violent past, judged and found wanting, and has the capacity to witness the pain and suffering of those who have

been historically marginalised and injured, must be a good nation? In this scenario, injustice belongs to the past, and thus recognising historical violence and witnessing Indigenous' suffering acts as a form of nation-building (Ahmed, 2005; Butler, 2013). The reconciliation movement sought a new moral order without rupturing the imagined politics of consensus. Settler guilt, shame and anxiety are bound together in this emotional economy: desires of redemption, accord and restoration of the good white nation (Edmonds, 2016). Witnessing has produced a subject of national shame, Ahmed argues, and declarations of shame work to 'bring the "nation" into existence as a felt community' (2005, p. 72). She explains:

Those who witness the past injustice through feeling 'national shame' are aligned with each other as 'well-meaning individuals'; if you feel shame, then you mean well... national recovery... our shame *means that we mean well*, and can work to reproduce the nation as an ideal. The transference of bad feeling to the subject of shame is only temporary, as the 'transference' itself becomes evidence of the restoration of an identity of which we can be proud.  
(2005, p. 77)

The nation's better self is revealed through good white people feeling bad. Thus, settler Australia becomes reconciled to its own history through witnessing Indigenous hurt (Ahmed, 2005, p. 77; Butler, 2013; Maddison, Clark, & de Costa, 2016). I would contend that it is a subject of anxiety, not shame, as in Ahmed's configuration, which enables identity to be restored. However, I agree that Indigenous testimony, which was once so disturbing, now has the effect of renewing the good white nation and rescuing settler innocence (Macoun, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012). There remains a refusal to engage with Indigenous agency and political difference.

Indigenous people are persistently characterised as vulnerable and in need of settler generosity and benevolence (Veracini, 2010, p. 108). However, there is very little engagement with, what Povinelli refers to as, the imperatives of Aboriginal testimony (2002, p. 42). Again, as Watson asks, '[i]s there no possibility of a political space to be heard on the concerns we hold as Aboriginal people?' (2007, p. 36). There is strong support amongst many non-Indigenous people and public institutions for the processes of reconciliation, and arguably the new Recognition campaign (Clark, de Costa, & Maddison, 2016, p. 6).<sup>12</sup> What appears to be a commitment to alleviating ongoing injustice and restoring Indigenous sovereignty is, as Povinelli illustrates, 'inflected by the conditional'. As long as economic resources are not at stake, progressive settler sympathy and desire for reconciliation continue (2002, p. 17). Furthermore, as Damien Short states, the reconciliation process

‘placed a “colonial ceiling” on Indigenous aspirations by emphasising nation-building and national unity over sovereignty or the negotiation of a treaty’ (cited in Clark et al., 2016, p. 4). This might be no more evident than in middle-class support for policies, which do not in any way impinge on their own lives. In no real sense do most progressives have to encounter Indigenous sovereignty. If Indigenous sovereignty is recognised at all, it is largely figured as impractical, impossible or dangerous (Nicoll, 2002, p. 9). The dominant voice, Watson asserts, ‘or the prevailing “reality” is that the sovereignty of Aboriginal laws is an impossibility’. If it exists at all, it belongs to the past; one sovereignty prevails and Aboriginal law is irrelevant. Yet, as she writes, Aboriginal law lives (2007, p. 24). There is little room for an engagement with incommensurability and Indigenous political will. Instead, the apology, and more generally the process of reconciliation and recognition, works to secure settlers’ sense of belonging, to borrow from Glen Coulthard, ‘by situating the harms of settler-colonialism in the past, and seeking to repair its injurious legacy by making Indigenous subjects the primary object of repair, not the colonial relationship’ (2014, p. 17). Since the 1990s to the present, there has been a shift in policy approaches, from redress to punitive remedialism, with the former focused upon the settler-Indigenous relationship. However, foundational to each approach is the desire to restore the settler nation, rather than decolonise.

Good white people know that colonisation was violent, and that systemic injustice and cruelty reached well into the twentieth century and are saddened and shamed by the historical removal of children from their families and communities. Notably, the current removal and incarceration rates of Indigenous children and young people are extremely high (Productivity Commission, 2018), and yet governments continue to consider such interventions viable options, and seemingly this is of little concern to most Australians. Despite the plight of Indigenous people being a preoccupation in Australia, we remain immune to, and ignorant of, much of the ongoing colonial project. Reflecting upon the Stolen Generations, Henry Reynolds asked ‘why weren’t we told’ (2000). Meaghan Morris challenges and reframes his question by answering:

Only in recent years, however, has some notion of the scale of the trauma and disruption that this policy created begun to filter through to the *white* Australians in whose idealised name it was practised. Or, rather than speaking of an ‘idea’ filtering through, I should say that only recently have we begun to develop the collective capacity to comprehend, to empathise, to imagine the trauma and disruption. This is also a matter of the politics of remembering. It is important to clarify that many (I would guess most) white Australians ‘were not “aware” of what was happening’ *not* because we did not *know* it was happening (we did) but because we were unable or did

not care to *understand* what we knew; we could not imagine how Aboriginal people felt. So we whites have not, 'just found out' about the lost children; rather, we are beginning to remember differently, to understand and care about what we knew.

(2006, p. 107)

It is a politics of remembering: Australians did not care enough to understand, to feel, to be moved. In the 1990s, revisionist history and activism created a discursive space in the public domain, which helped produce the conditions for white Australians to feel compassion. One could argue that developing 'the collective capacity to comprehend, to empathise, to imagine the trauma and disruption' moved Indigenous people from the socially dead to perceptible in the settler field of vision. Following Judith Butler, Ian Buchanan argues that the 'frames' in which our lives are situated condition 'how we respond to the world, the kinds of moral and ethical choices we make'. Like Bourdieu's habitus, Butler's 'frame' is a social and cultural formation that subjects unconsciously internalise. The frame allocates recognisability of certain figures, in this case Indigenous people (Buchanan, 2012, p. 116). Now settlers can perceive Indigenous people, but what is being recognised? Brought into frame? Or as Buchanan asks, 'what makes Indigenous people alive to settlers in their world?' (2012, p. 116). My answer; for many settlers Indigenous people are victims of historical injustice or, what has also become prevalent, dysfunctional and failing to take responsibility for their lives. Aboriginal people are objects for mainstream Australia to worry about but not to take seriously. Good white people can see the gaps, the bad statistics, vulnerability and suffering; this is how Indigenous people come into frame for progressives. Indigenous life can be mourned, or rather a particular perception of Indigeneity is recognised and grieved: a life that evokes settler pity. However, it is not a 'remembering' that readily arouses remorse or mobilises political action. Rather it has become a style of benevolent remembering that works to secure good white people's sense of innocence, belonging and as rightful heirs of Australia's future.

Collective witnessing demands of me to empathise with the pain of child removal, so graphically portrayed in the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* (Noyce, 2002) and captured in Rudd's National Apology. Good white people listen to the pain and suffering of Indigenous people, against a crowded backdrop of ignorance and brutality. To be a good citizen one must contribute to the collective national project of confronting the past, which in turn should produce shame and guilt in the white subject (Butler, 2013, p. 43). Notably, everyday racism is often deflected onto socio-economically marginalised white people, who, however unspoken, are categorised as 'bad white people', who do not feel properly shamed by racism, colonial violence and ongoing injustice. The binary of good/

bad white people, however false, as if there are not complex, variations of position, circulates in Australian society, and limits public and personal conversations. It is imagined that the 'bad white people', with their racist views and thoughtlessness, continue to perpetuate racism and injustice in 'our' progressive society. Thus, guilt and shame authorise 'good white people' to distinguish themselves from 'bad white people' who lack the education and goodwill (Sullivan, 2014, p. 5; also see Hage & Zournazi, 2002). It is a model of the progressive liberal subject that is pitted against the uncultivated racist, who lacks the necessary self-awareness and worldliness to 'know' how to behave, or to care in the right way about Indigenous people, equality and social justice. Some white progressives, Macoun proposes, see the political challenge, and thus their duty, as being to educate non-Indigenous people about colonial violence and mobilise their good-will, turning them into allies in the struggle for equality and justice (2016, p. 86). The sign of a good white person is performances of understanding and compassion, which risks a self-satisfied moralising and reaffirming of one's virtue. Bearing witness and empathising renews and remakes the subject position of the progressive Australian. Thus, the anxious white subject becomes a normative character on the stage of white Australia, so essential to the reproduction of power relations (Svirsky, 2014). Does she desire social justice or moral redemption, or both? Or must she forgo the luxury of 'moral redemption', in order to effectively contribute to social transformation?<sup>13</sup>

Good white women feel bad. She feels guilty about racism and her white privilege. To fix the problem of racial injustice, the good white women must work on herself, sympathise with 'Indigenous issues' and learn about colonial history and Indigenous culture: reason, care and moral conviction are imagined as the tools that will empower her to give up her privilege and recuperate the good self (Kruks, 2005; also see Macoun, 2016; Nicoll, 2000; Probyn, 2004). But to do so assumes that privilege is a personal possession, rather than historical and structural, and imagines one's capacity to relinquish racial power is tied to one's capacity for self-awareness, rather than social transformation. Audre Lorde (1984) and bell hooks (1989) warn, white guilt can function as a form of self-centredness, turning the white subject 'back into' herself: it is her feelings that matter (Ahmed, 2005, p. 82). Their concern is that this further blocks the capacity to hear the claims of others. For all the good intentions, one can be driven by unacknowledged self-interest, and perpetuate racism by attending to the values and aspirations of settlers (Dreher, 2009; Riggs, 2004). There is not a commitment to change, but instead what matters is a positive white identity and overcoming bad feelings (Ahmed, 2005, p. 82).

Settler colonialism is driven by the logic of elimination, Wolfe argues, which seeks to permanently remove Indigenous people from their lands to enable settler possession (1999). Aboriginal people were of the past,

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or more so, *terra nullius* ‘went one step further and denied Indigenous presence, even as past’ (Potter, 2014, p. 81). Thus, settler colonialism renders Indigenous people out of place: temporally and spatially. Veracini draws a strong distinction between colonial and settler colonial countries: colonialism is based upon exploitation and subordination of the colonised, while settler colonialism is shaped by the persistent need to disavow the presence of the Indigenous other, which he refers to as the settler colonial non-encounter (2010). The practices of dispossession and disavowal vary significantly, which includes attempts to physically eliminate, as Veracini demonstrates, to the erasure of cultural practices, assimilation and absorption into the wider population and forms of selective amnesia that enable settlers to maintain a stable and innocent version of the past, and arguably the future (2010). Settler colonialism cannot countenance Indigenous political difference. Audra Simpson explains:

indigeneity (ex)poses a problem to the settler state in that the ‘Indian Problem’ is one of the existence of continued life (of any form) in the face of an acquisitional and territorial desire that then moves through time to become, in liberal parlance, the ‘problem’ of difference.  
(2014, p. 19)

Settler colonialism is premised upon the elimination and replacement of Indigeneity, the disavowal of the violence of colonialism to affirm settler innocence and sovereignty: the non-encounter. Colonisation persists; however, I conceptualise settler colonialism not as a consistent, coherent and uniform structure or logic, but rather gaining its force, as Rifkin proposes, through ‘reiterative yet shifting formations, practices, and inclinations’ (2013, p. 326). The ‘problem’ is that Indigenous political life threatens settler territorial authority and integrity, and demands the sharing of sociopolitical space, which occasions a crisis (Wolfe, 2016, p. 14). Settler anxiety is provoked by the proximity and the demand to share sociopolitical space with Indigenous people. Racially constructing Indigenous people as a population in need of management, inclusion and punishment, as Jodi Byrd theorises, displaces place-based politics and legitimate claims to sovereignty (2011, p. xix). Settlers contain the ‘crisis’ by problematising Indigenous peoples, which enables the accommodation and engagement with Indigenous presence (Rifkin, 2014).

Settler anxiety of dispossession is articulated most vehemently when the good white nation is perceived to be at risk (Ravenscroft, 2004). Again and again, settlers re-enact territorialisation by identifying as modern subjects – the present and future – thus justifying the right to claim possession, denying Indigenous sovereignty and governing for everyone. The country belongs to those who came after, the settler. Moreton-Robinson refers to this as white possessive logic (Moreton-Robinson, 2005, p. 22).



She develops her idea through Hage's concept of governmental belonging: the nationalists understand themselves to be central to the nation, and others are objects that need to be managed (Hage, 2000, p. 45). In turn, she highlights that this mode of inhabitation – possessive logic – is not only the bastion of nationalist conservatives but also that of progressives. Indigenous people are managed and continue to be enfolded into a narrative of European progress, by being imagined as remedial subjects who are not yet ready for a management role, so to speak. Thus, good white people's 'responsibility' is to acknowledge the damage colonialism wrought upon Indigenous people and support their 'repair'. Settler colonialism maintains authority by attempting to destroy multiplicity, contestation, the contemporaneous heterogeneities of people, places, histories and knowledges and futures (Massey, 2005, p. 5). Colonialism limits possible worlds (Viveiros de Castro, 2013, p. 491). It is the loss of the diversity of life that settlers fail to grieve. The movement from personal to political responsibility requires settlers to grieve and bear responsibility for the colonial desire to reduce forms of existence.

### **Unsettling Home**

For many, Australia is an object of attachment. As scholars have emphasised, senses of national belonging are closely associated with the family home: albeit one without conflict (Caluya, 2011; Hage, 2000; Morley, 2000). The longing for stable emotional attachments to home, which are safe and secure, plays out in local and national desires for uniformity and demands for stability created and maintained by a caring, parental government. Being at home in the nation is too often sentimentalised and fetishised as closed and secure: a place of comfort and seamless belonging (Fortier, 2003, p. 119). The home is a place of an organic social order, which cannot be disturbed (Frow, 2012, p. 9). Gorman-Murray and Dowling identify:

Home is powerful, emotive and multi-faceted. As a basic desire for many, home is saturated with the meanings, memories, emotions, experiences and relationships of everyday life. The idea and place of home is perhaps typically configured through a positive sense of attachment, as a place of belonging, intimacy, security, relationship and selfhood.

(2007, p. np)

Home or belonging is an emotional space, composed from a yearning for the subject to have a deep sense of security, affirmed and familiar to themselves and their community. Belonging, in this sense, is an emotional binding between subject and space, facilitating comfort, identity and becoming (Gorman-Murray, 2011, p. 211).

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Belonging is an emotional territory of the self in the community. If there ever was such a thing as security of belonging, the globalised world of late capitalism makes such pleasures much less achievable (Hage, 2002, p. 150). Comfort and security are the motifs for a better life but in a world that has become insecure, Hage proposes, many seek a form of cultural belonging in the form of a political ethical existence:

After all, communities are not just imagined; they are also so many bodies relating to each other. They are a practical ensemble of relations between people that one uses as a support in the pursuit of being. So being part of a community provides a very important objective and subjective gratification for people. That's what *feeling* part of a community, as opposed to just imagining, can convey. It is objective in the sense that you want to be part of a community only if you feel you are capable of achieving more by being part of it than you can on your own – and subjective in that you kind of 'take on' the greatness of so many more people when you are living in a community.

(2002, p. 162)

One feels connected to and recognised by their 'like-minded' community: homeliness is a relationship between the self and collective (Hage, 2002, p. 162). Good white people desire to belong in a reconciled nation, a place where we have confronted the past and are self-consciously forging a just, equitable Australia. Freed from the burden of wrongdoing, our compassion towards another's suffering provides a sense of proximity to what we desire: Indigenous people, and an ethical self and belonging.

There is a lot of hope tied up in being a good white woman. She identifies with a particular ethical future: a hope that is shared by one's community. But what is this future so desired, yet so dimly lit it induces such anxiety, even dread? Emma Kowal might respond, it is the fantasy space of postcolonial justice: 'a future vision where Indigenous people are lifted out of disadvantage to participate fully in Australian society, statistically equal to but culturally distinct from other Australians' (2011, p. 315). It is safe, secure home for all, a comforting image of a much more just Australia, in which so many progressives are deeply invested. Good Australia requires 'ethical White subjectivities fit for the post-colony' (Kowal, 2011, pp. 315–316). Yet Indigenous political will troubles the fantasy space of postcolonial justice. To be exposed as not good enough for the post-colony is dangerous. For good white people it's a high-stakes game: Indigenous self-determination is a threat to one's sense of self, belonging and a hoped for ethical future. One can critique or mock good white people, but my argument is this is a cultural dynamic that limits and prescribes progressives' capacity to work in solidarity with Indigenous people in their struggle to create a more just world.

For all the good intentions, 'we' cannot hear the hopes and demands of Indigenous people should it risk disturbing an emotional territory, where settlers are safe, at home. So, settlers continue to worry and fret, and focus their moral efforts on repairing the 'broken Aborigine', not transforming the foundations of settler colonialism.

In the encounter with Indigenous political will, there is no good white woman. It is an impossible position to hold. The future disposition of the self or configuration of the world is the desired object and it is under threat (Ernest Bloch, cited in Ngai, 2005, p. 201). Many settlers find Indigenous political autonomy so disturbing and estranging that they avoid it by fleeing into anxiety, the concern, guilt and pity, which reaffirms one's sense of ethical belonging and white authority. A state I call virtuous anxiety. White anxiety works to re-territorialise Indigenous political will into the familiar, leaving colonial authority in place: a strange self-certainty. Settler anxiety is a practice, or perhaps more accurately an emotional genealogy, that neutralises the effects of Indigenous experiences, politics and sovereignty, and the legacies of colonialism to make settlers at home in post-reconciliation Australia. But the reprieve is short lived. Home is a site of an ongoing political struggle. Anxiety is future-orientated. It is a mode of waiting or 'distressed anticipation': the fear that something one dreads might come to pass, which threatens to fragment and decompose the self (Harari, 2001, p. xxxii; Ngai, 2005). Throughout this book, I want to illuminate the object of dread, which I understand to be settler displacement, and ultimately the prospect of acknowledging and living with Indigenous sovereignty. On an emotional level, this demands a reversal of the power relations that structure good white people's sense of self, and thus is a constant existential threat.

When settlers' common-sense world is disrupted, the good white woman is lost. Thus, my second focus is encounters in which Indigenous people refuse settler benevolence and the identity of historical victims, and instead settlers are confronted by the continued presence and vitality of Indigenous life and claims to sovereignty. Good white people's everyday existence is interrupted, and they are thrown back upon themselves, questioning who they are, their style of inhabitation, the processes of reconciliation and recognition, and their understanding of ethical, anti-colonial future, and what it demands of them. The violent past is kept firmly alive in the present (Schlunke, 2009, p. 22). In the following chapters, I pause over and examine moments where settler anxiety threatens my subject's sense of self and ethical belonging, but she stays with anxiety. At the very least, to take responsibility for one's complicity in the colonial project, and to work towards decolonisation, requires settlers to bear uncertainty and anxiety: the strangeness, meaningless, loss of self and place (Mackey, 2014).

*Anxieties of Belonging in Settler Colonialism* is both a critique of settler colonialism and an experiment in telling stories differently.

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I share Rifkin's project in making visible and understanding how settler colonialism is composed and actualised in the everyday, through expectations, perceptions, experiences of belonging and emotions (Rifkin, 2014). Settler colonialism orientates, shapes and limits life, but it is not totalising and coherent. It is uneven, messy and shifting, thus allowing for disjuncture and power relations to be destabilised. I fix upon when settlers are disorientated by Indigenous life, which is where new and unexpected relations and politics are made possible. I do so because I believe it is necessary to intervene in the public discourse in which worrying about Indigenous people is seemingly a national obsession, yet is this care? To take political responsibility and transform the colonial relationship require settlers giving up on managing Indigenous lives – governmental belonging – a sense of one's benevolence and recognising how settler colonialism shapes good white people and actualises and limits their political action. The force of this book is driven by a desire to contribute to the collaborative struggle to transform political and social life.

### Acknowledgements

Parts of this chapter were originally published as 'Questioning Care', in A. Hickey (Ed.), *The Pedagogies of Cultural Studies*, (pp. 116–131), New York, NY: Routledge, 2016, and 'Anxious Settler Belonging: Actualising the Potential for Making Resilient Postcolonial Subjects', *M/C Journal* 16(5), 2013, np.

### Notes

- 1 Prime Minister Turnbull has on several occasions quoted Aboriginal educationist and co-chairman of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, Professor Chris Sarra, who urged the PM to ensure 'Governments do things with Aboriginal people, not do things to them'.
- 2 A Welcome to Country is when an Aboriginal custodian or elder from the local region welcomes people to their land. It is a demonstration of recognition and respect for the traditional owners of the land. It might be performed as a speech, song or dance or ceremony, and is performed at the beginning of many government, corporate, university and community events.
- 3 I wish to acknowledge Eve Vincent for drawing my attention to this point.
- 4 The Native Title Act (1993), passed by the Australian federal government, is a property right and national system of recognition of Indigenous people's ongoing connection to land and its cultural significance. It provides protection of native title and can co-exist with other land interests (such as pastoral leases). It overturned the founding myth of *terra nullius*.
- 5 The reconciliation era ran from approximately 1991 to the early 2000s. The formal process began as a result of the Report of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, 1991. The federal government formed the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, setting a ten-year timeframe to advance a national process of reconciliation between Indigenous and broader Australia. Significantly, in establishing the Council, the government

was acknowledging past and contemporary policy failures and the need for non-Indigenous Australians to become involved and develop a new understanding of Indigenous peoples, cultures and more broadly Australian history. The process was very successful at galvanising many Australians to organise community reconciliation groups.

- 6 The Stolen Generations were the children of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who were, largely, forcibly removed – approximately 1905–1970 – from their families by state and federal government agencies and church missions, under Protection and Assimilation Acts. In 1997, the *Bringing Them Home: The ‘Stolen Children’* Report was handed down to federal parliament. See <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/bringing-them-home-stolen>.
- 7 Notably, initially many of these groups formed as a result of the state-sanctioned reconciliation material that gave people a pathway to become involved.
- 8 I thank Eve Vincent for asking for me to clarify this policy shift.
- 9 Foucault writes, ‘techniques which permit one to determine the conduct of individuals, to impose certain wills on them, and to submit them to certain ends or objectives’ (2005, p. 213).
- 10 In writing this book (and in discussion with friends and colleagues), I have reflected upon if there is a particular white women’s pain at refusal or hurt. Note Peter Read in *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (2000) writes of the angst that settlers encounter with Indigenous Australia has produced. He is in crisis and cannot reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous senses of belonging. However, as he notes, white anxiety/guilt is not shared by all. He questions if it is socio-economic: ‘Everyone I have quoted so far, so far as I know, is like me: university-educated, urban, middle-class and Anglo-Celtic. Perhaps it is only this group that feels itself to be trapped’ (p. 5). See also, Henry Reynolds (2000).
- 11 However as Buchanan points out, as welcome as the Apology was, Rudd’s eloquent and harrowing account of the removal of children from their families and communities, did not ‘confront the foundational crime: dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands (2012, p. 113). Mackey argues that the Canadian apology does not require Canadians to account for how the processes of land theft and cultural genocide are foundational to the modern nation state. Making the broader colonial process into something ‘containable’ and ‘apologizable’ (2013, p. 50).
- 12 The Recognise campaign was launched in 2012 by then Prime Minister Julia Gillard. It was a government-sponsored marketing campaign to build public support for constitutional reform to recognise Indigenous people. It was abandoned in mid-2017, and seen by many to focus on symbolic constitutional recognition, rather than substantive reform.
- 13 I thank Colleen McGloin for posing this question.

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