Whiteness and Social Change
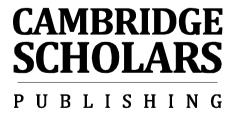
Whiteness and Social Change:
Remnant Colonialisms and White Civility
in Australia and Canada

By

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SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

…we are under no illusion that we have all the answers. Instead we are encouraged by the fact that we are not alone asking the questions.
Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri (2011).

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PREFACE

The research for this book was first inspired through becoming aware of the violent and ongoing colonial history in Australia, and my own strategic ignorance which had fostered-facilitated this unknowing. The spaces created by activism and the praxis of listening fostered an uncomfortableness with that which I had been taught in the school system, and more broadly. The reality of Australia's (ongoing) colonial history, expressed through living witnesses, sits in stark contrast to imperial notions which tell a story of benevolent settlement and civilisation of Australia's Aboriginal peoples told through education curricula. Cognitive dissonance drove me to reflect on how my own complicity in perpetuating colonial assumptions was undermining attempts at working towards respect and recognition. This defining movement was one of many. My appreciation goes out to those who (continue to) expose my well-meaning intentions, as well as those who have helped me on my (ongoing) journey of transcending whiteness for my own sake.

I am indebted to those I have met during the long and ongoing struggle to protect the Sandon Point area (and many more in other struggles). Their tireless efforts continue to inspire. I first met Dootch in the mid 1990s, finding his exposures of my own privilege quite confronting. He was one of a small number of visible (to a naive and in many was wilfully ignorant white person) Aboriginal people struggling for respect and recognition. My increasing exposure to implicit, explicit and subtle challenges to the denial of sovereignty and its broader implications was situated alongside a broadening awareness of human chauvinism (Routley 1979) and (structural, cultural) exploitation enmeshed in the political economy of global capital. An increasing focus of my everyday became a direct involvement in collaborative struggle (theory and praxis) and the seeking of a more fair and just relationship.

I must thank Jillian Smith for first introducing me to the dispute over the Red Hill Valley. My experiences of listening to accounts of those struggling to protect the valley, promoting respect and recognition of the Haudenosaunee, have exposed me to different contexts and approaches.

Meeting participants in the land reclamation at Caledonia afforded an awareness of approaches to struggle I previously had very little exposure to—and significant differences in the responses of white people to assertions of sovereignty. With regards to Wave Hill, Minoru Hokari's engaged and transformative research provided me with a depth of empirical detail to pursue my initial reflections that (dominant) white accounts of the walkout were far from an accurate interpretation. Minoru's struggle with cancer ended (in 2004) before I had the opportunity to gain more directly from his knowledge and experiences.

The unwavering support of Brian Martin and Susan Dodds, at the University of Wollongong, Walter Peace, at McMaster University, and a host of others continue to prove invaluable. Walt's willingness to assist me whilst in Canada, openly sharing his extensive knowledge of the Red Hill Valley, made my comparative research more than possible. The librarians and staff in the libraries at the McMaster and Wollongong universities, the Hamilton and Wollongong public libraries, and the Hamilton Spectator librarian Tammie Danciu also greatly assisted in my search for historical and other hard to find publications.

I have drawn inspiration from the challenging—and at times necessarily confronting—work of many including Sara Ahmed, Linda Alcoff, Ien Ang, Daniel Coleman, Andrew Feenberg, Thomas Gieryn, Jane Haggis, Stuart Hall, Frank Hardy, Minoru Hokari, bell hooks, Herbert Marcuse, Patricia Monture-Agnes, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Fiona Nicoll, Val Plumwood (Routley), Damien W. Riggs, Sue Stanton, James Tully and Langdon Winner. I am also indebted to the residents of "bunnytown", the many participants in the Red Hill Valley dispute I met, the staff at OPIRG McMaster and the Centre for Peace Studies at McMaster University. There are many others who have provided me with companionship and immeasurable encouragement during this journey: my family, friends, colleagues and all those who I have met in struggles along the way. These include all those willing to listen when I have wanted to share thoughts and ideas, and those with whom I have conspired.

The (final) enunciations throughout this book owe significantly to the efforts of Robert Carr, Jason Hart and Angela Williams. They sifted through drafts, pointed out obscurities and ambiguities, challenged ideas and provided invaluable assistance enabling me to increase to the overall effectiveness (specifically and more generally) of my engagement with theory and praxis.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACLALS	Association for Commonwealth Languages and Literature Studies
ACRAWSA	Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association
ACTA	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AIA	Australian Investment Agency
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ARV	Anglican Retirement Villages
ATSIHP Act	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act (Australia)
AWU	Australian Workers Union
BC	British Columbia, Canada
BLF	Builders Labourers' Federation
CHOP	Clear Hamilton of Pollution
COI	Commission of Inquiry (NSW)
DCP	Development Control Plan
DEH	Department of Environment and Heritage (Australia)
DIPNR	Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (NSW)
The Embassy	Aboriginal Tent Embassy (Canberra, ACT)

EP&A Act	Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (NSW)
ESD	Ecologically Sustainable Development
FCAATSI	Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Australia)
Friends	Friends of Red Hill Valley
HETF	Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force
HRCA	Hamilton Region Conservation Authority
ILALC	Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council
KEJ	Korewal Eloura Jerrugaraugh Corporation
LEP	Local Environment Plan
Navin Officer	Navin Officer Heritage Consultants
NAWU	North Australian Workers Union
NDP	New Democratic Party (Canada)
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
NIRAG	Northern Illawarra Residents Action Group
NPW Act	National Parks and Wildlife Act (NSW)
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSW)
NSW	New South Wales, Australia
NT	Northern Territory, Australia
Pastoral Award	Cattle Station Industry (Northern Territory) Award
Picket	Sandon Point Community Picket
QEW	Queen Elizabeth Way, Ontario
REP	Regional Environment Plan

SCESFC	Sydney Coastal Estuarine Swamp Forest Complex
SCLC	South Coast Labour Council
SEPP	State Environmental Planning Policies (NSW)
SPATE	Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy
Stockland	Stockland Trust Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WA	Western Australia
WCC	Wollongong City Council
WWCAC	Wadi Wadi Coomaditchie Aboriginal Corporation

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

An email from Miangaal Elder Les Ridgeway (Snr) to Reconciliation Australia, reproduced in *Reconciliation News* in December 2010, asked "that the Reconciliation folk think carefully and please refrain from referring to us as 'Indigenous' we have never ever referred to our many Clan folk as such". Aborigine is identified as the appropriate term, with First Peoples also being a mouthful. In this book, Aborigine is used to refer to Aboriginal Australians. First Peoples is used when referring to both Aboriginal Peoples in Australia and First Nations in Canada. At times Iroquois, Iroquois People, Iroquois Confederacy, Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Haudenosaunee and Six Nations are used interchangeably, reflecting how the Haudenosaunee and the broader community use them. The term "native" is reproduced in direct quotes only, given racist connotations and associated legacies in Australian discourse.

The terms "white" and "White", and in parallel "whiteness" and "Whiteness", are afforded equivalence here with each referring to a politicoeconomic system as opposed to a (socially constructed) racial classification (Mills 1999: 106). Chapter two provides an overview of the distinction.

Drawing from feminist theory, the terms and/both are used together to emphasise the coexistence of contradiction and ambiguity, and to move away from the (routinely false) dualistic implications in constructions of either/or frameworks.

"Technology", as used here, draws on Science and Technology Studies (STS). The term refers to artefacts and associated social relations, where artefacts are constructed objects (what are considered technology in the normative sense). Collections, and intersections, of artefacts comprise a technological ensemble. The term technoscience as used here refers to the reciprocal production of science, technology and society on each other as practice and discourse. Specifically, such a definition evokes what Anderson describes as a critical engagement with the performativity of western (specifically postcolonial) technoscience, "revealing and complicating the durable dichotomies, produced under colonial regimes, which underpin many of its practices and hegemonic claims (2002: 644).

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

...reconciliation "to" implies a relationship of unequal power whereby a dominant agent can render another submissive, whilst reconciliation "with" does not necessarily imply such a relationship.
Fiona Nicoll (2002).

In the early hours of the Sunday 19 September 2004, two men were seen running away from McCauley's Beach towards the coastal village of Thirroul, located south of Sydney in the northern suburbs of the Illawarra region of New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Moments later the nearby Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy (SPATE) burst into flames. The complete destruction of the embassy's structure and the life-threatening situation for the five people who were asleep inside marked a significant point in the long-running dispute over the future of the Sandon Point area. The assailants' actions provide a stark contrast to those of the broader community. Since its establishment in December 2000, the local community has supported SPATE and called for recognition of the area's cultural significance. This support had assisted in increasing the profile of SPATE, and broader awareness of a wealth of issues of concern to the local community regarding the future of the Sandon Point area.

The situation at Sandon Point is not uncommon. High profile public campaigns promoting respect and recognition of First Peoples cultures are visible in many western countries. For example, substantial criticism was levelled at the hosting of the 2010 winter Olympics on unceded lands in and around Vancouver, Canada. Across the country treaty rights continue to be an undercurrent of numerous conflicts between First Nations, the Federal and Provincial governments: a number of examples are referred to in this book, including the campaign against the Red Hill Creek Valley Parkway and the land reclamation at Caledonia, both located south-west of Toronto, Ontario. In Australia, alongside the ongoing dispute at Sandon Point, concerns have been raised about the impacts of proposed mining in the Pilbara region of Western Australia (WA). The extraction of gold at

Lake Cowal in Central NSW, against the wishes of the Wiradjuri people, locates another example of broad community support for an Aboriginal Tent Embassy.[1] The lack of respect and recognition shown in moving ahead with these contentious projects, and numerous other contemporary issues, are indicative of key issues that many western societies have yet to appropriately address. At the root of these controversies are what will be referred to throughout this book as remnant colonialisms. What is important to note here, is that remnant colonialisms permeate into the actions of those supporting First Peoples' calls for respect and recognition.

What are remnant colonialisms? To put it simply, these are assumptions and interpretations, rooted in colonial legacies that continue to shape the ways in which western societies view (and construct) *other* cultures. Susan Dodds (1998) has provided another way to think of this: how white people's perspectives are framed by persistent colonial assumptions. In order to clearly identify what is being brought into question here, we need to consider what is meant by the interlinked terms white and whiteness. At its simplest, whiteness refers to situated understandings from which those who are positioned as white view the world. Being situated as white shapes and determines what is marked as well as what is obscured, or unmarked individually and collectively.[2] There are double binds within and across whiteness, alongside being produced by whiteness on those positioned as *other* (see Ellsworth 1997).

Common in scholarship on whiteness, the terms "white" and "White", alongside "whiteness" and "Whiteness", are used interchangeably. In both instances, the former are more predominant, albeit without a marked distinction between the different typology. Charles Mills outlined a succinct and intentional distinction between the two ways of representing the terms: "the theory of the Racial Contract, by separating whiteness as a phenotype/racial classification from Whiteness as a politicoeconomic system committed to white supremacy, opens a theoretical space for white repudiation of the Contract. (One could then distinguish 'being white' from 'being White.')" (Mills 1999: 106). In drawing from, and making a distinction with, the Social Contract, Mills makes it clear that white people have a (difficult) choice.[3] Those positioned as White (to use Mills' nomenclature) can withdraw their consent from the Racial Contract, and in doing so they reject, challenge and expose their own concomitant complicity in the lived privileges of Whiteness gained at the expense of the racialised *other*. To not do so is to remain culpable. Such culpability and concomitant complicity emerge through distinction between the Social Contract and the Racial Contract. Mills introduces the Racial Contract as

not a contract between everyone in a society, rather being "between just the people who count, the people who really are people ('we the white people')" (*Ibid.*: 3). The Racial Contract is identified and labeled normatively (to generate judgments about social relations and injustice) and descriptively as a means to expose cultural and structural exploitation. By structural exploitation, I am referring to the foundational work in the field of Peace Studies expressed as structural violence by Johan Galtung (1969). Following Brian Martin, I use *exploitation* in place of *violence*: "The main problem with the expression 'structural violence' is that it adds an enormous burden onto the term violence. Most people think of violence as direct physical violence. For much communication, terms such as exploitation and oppression may be clearer than 'structural violence'" (Martin 1993: 43). Structural, or indirect exploitation is exploitation without a subject (person) acting out what Galtung identifies as violence. It is exploitation embedded in the very fabric of a society: where systems, institutions, policies or cultural beliefs can and do meet the needs and rights of some at the expense of others (see Schirch 2004). Similarly, cultural exploitation (nee violence) encompasses "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science (logic, mathematics)—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung 1990: 291).

Such notions are quite confronting to those positioned as white and/both otherwise situated to benefit from indirect exploitation (i.e. class, gender) at the expense of others. These can be confronting in part through reflecting on the shaping of perceptions, how one knows and sees the world, via the experiences of situatedness and situated knowledges. Drawing attention to concepts such as whiteness and the Racial Contract enables exposure of what are abstract notions to those positioned as white: which are quite often clearly visible and experienced in the everyday by those who are located as the racialised *other*.

In this book, whiteness (lowercase "w") is used to depict a less dualistic definition of what Mills labels as Whiteness. In doing so, there is a contrast with any notion of phenotype/racial classification—reflecting the socially constituted nature, and historical variability, of who has been and is considered white or *other*. What I am referring to here is the interpretive (historical) flexibility of what skin tones are considered as "white". It is here that we can locate key features of whiteness. As a starting point, those who are considered white are positioned as normative (i.e. "normal"), rather than raced. To be white is to be effectively non-

named and non-defined. That is, white people generally do not think of themselves as white, they think of themselves as a person.

What distinguishes whiteness from, say, blackness, is that whiteness is largely defined in relation to others—furthering the non-naming and normalised positioning (by white people) of being white. Whiteness is not defined by what a white person possesses or does, rather by what s/he is *not* or *does not do*. White people do not do things that are explicitly white, rather they do things different to black people. In essence we can see whiteness as "a constellation of processes and practices rather than a bounded entity... firmly rooted *in* that process" (Frankenberg 2001: 73). Being white emerges through acting a certain way. It emerges through one's actions. That is, whiteness is a social construction.

What we can see here is that whiteness is relational and context specific. Yet there are also tensions between universality and particularity when seeking to engage with and define who is white and what whiteness is. For example, who has been considered white has shifted over time— there is a history of "sloppiness" (see Coleman 2008: 223-6). A clear example of this is that of Irish immigrants in the USA, who went from being positioned as 'colored' in the 19th Century, to white by the 1970s (Haraway 1989: 401-2, note 15).[4] Similarly, whiteness in countries such as Australia and Canada differs from that in the United States of America (USA). In the former, for example, whiteness is far more intertwined with the process of colonisation. In each country, whiteness is a system—a relation—of power.

In light of this, we can more critically locate assumptions emanating from whiteness as based on "or perhaps tainted by… colonial misconceptions" which position western culture, knowledge (epistemology, as a monolith) and ontology as superior to *other* cultures (Metallic 2002 at 6). We need not look too far to note examples and manifestations around us. Despite the demise of the concept of social Darwinism, there are still a number of white people who consider themselves superior to people of African decent. Such racism, to varying degrees, permeates through many western (never quite post) colonial societies (see Haggis 2004a). The perceived superiority of western culture can be seen in the granting of mining leases in the Pilbara region of Australia. The environmental and cultural assessment process (adjudicated by white people) have noted the irrecoverable impacts of mining and associated activities on areas of Aboriginal cultural significance, including damage to rock carvings and paintings that predate European settlement

by thousands of years. Mining, or perhaps the profits to be gained from mining, are seen as more important, with the destruction of what are described as (nonwhite) cultural artefacts thus positioned as justified. Similarly, approvals granted for the widening of the Sea-to-Sky Highway from Vancouver to Whistler for the 2010 winter Olympics locate the perceived superiority of western ideals over First Nations' rights and responsibilities founded in their ontologies. Largely regardless of repeated statements about the cultural significance of many areas in which de/construction works were proposed—including protests and physical blockades at these locations—the approvals were pushed through and the works went ahead.

It is through reflecting on such examples that we can begin to explore the implications of persistent colonial assumptions in society today. The task of this book is to do just that. The intent is to also dig much deeper, reflecting on the unseen implications of remnant colonialisms, and how they permeate *into the everyday*. To even begin the process of working towards a fair and just society, one in which respect and recognition are cornerstones, western societies—that is, white people—need to critically reflect on these, *their*, assumptions (see Tully 1995). Through such engagement, we can meet the need to acknowledge that such assumptions—whether they be conscious or unconscious—have "colonial manifestations" (Metallic & Monture Agnes 2002 at 41). It is in noting that there are and can be unconscious manifestations, that we can become aware that our actions can have undesired implications, and that these implications can emerge irrespective of intent.

Alongside seeking to expose unconscious manifestations of whiteness—to illustrate its implications, this book seeks to show the ways and means through which such assumptions can both be undermined and reinforced. For example, the dynamics of experience can act to normalise whiteness. Conversely, assumptions and implications previously unmarked can be exposed through one's actions and questionings.

Three different long-running campaigns seeking to promote respect and recognition of First Peoples and their cultures are explored in detail. The contemporary dispute over the future at Sandon Point, hinted at in this chapter's opening paragraph, is one of these. To assist in exploring the differences in manifestations of whiteness in specific contexts, the long-running community campaign seeking to protect the Red Hill Valley, in the east end of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada is also considered. To provide some historical context of the dynamism and shifting nature and

manifestations of whiteness, the support afforded the 1966 walkout of Aboriginal stockworkers and their families from the Wave Hill Station in Australia's north is outlined and engaged with.[5]

Each of these examples provide differing contexts and their own illustrations of how whiteness can permeate into the supportive actions of local (white) communities and others more broadly. As events to reflect on, they each have their own value in and of themselves. The benefit here is the whole being much greater than the sum of its parts. In reflecting on the commonalities and differences in the ways in which respect and recognition are mobilised at each locale, and the ways in which whiteness is both—paradoxically—contested and re-entrenched, we can learn a great deal about how communities and societies can work towards the goal of a (more) fair and just relationship. This is often a central and explicit component of the actions of white supporters. To provide an indication of this, each of the respective campaigns are introduced here. These outlines will be followed by a more direct engagement with key themes, drawing from and laying the foundations for engagement with existing scholarship on whiteness and its manifestations.

The Wave Hill walkout

In August 1966, Aboriginal Stockworkers and their families walked off Wave Hill Station—never to return. Wave Hill is situated in the north-west of Australia's Northern Territory, approximately 600 km south of Darwin in what is known as the Victoria River district—Gurindji country. Wave Hill Station was one of a number of pastoral leases operated by the British Vestey's group of companies since 1914. The Vestey cattle empire covered more than 15,000 square kilometres, extending from the eastern coast of Queensland to the Kimberley region in the north-west of Australia.

The participants in the walkout made their way to Wattie Creek/Seal Gorge, part of ancestral Gurindji lands known to them as Daguragu— where many remain to this day. The walkout is an event that some have incorrectly described the birthplace of the modern land rights movement in Australia. Such labels are indicative of whiteness, both at the time of the walkout, and its persistence in Australian society today. Land rights was not a term used by the Gurindji, rather this is one of many terms which white Australia used to label the actions taken in seeking to understand

them in *familiar* terms. The (mis)interpretations of the events as they unfolded, and in a number of contemporary accounts, locate the foundations for reflecting on the support afforded the Gurindji.

Central to numerous white interpretations of the walkout, and dominant at the time actions were taken, was the understanding that the impetus was wages and conditions of employment. We can easily locate some basis for these assumptions. The pastoral industry drew heavily from Aboriginal labour for both station operations and to facilitate substantial profits. To assist in achieving such profits, it was commonplace in the pastoral industry in Australia for Aboriginal workers to be paid very little—if any—wages. Any wages paid, even if paid in full, were a fraction of those paid to white counterparts. The payment of lower wages was often justified via a perceived inferiority of Aboriginal workers.

An extension of this perceived inferiority is found in the quasi-legal status of Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal workers, at least in the foundational years of the pastoral industry, were "regarded as the 'exclusive property' of the signing station" (*Daniel v State of Western Australia* [2003] FCA 666 at 167). The term signing station refers to the station granted leasehold rights over the ancestral lands of the Aboriginal peoples now "owned". A provision included in the Cattle Station Industry (Northern Territory) Award enabled Aboriginal workers to be designated *slow* and paid an even lower rate (Broome 1994: 140). Such overt manifestations of colonial whiteness permeated through the pastoral and other industries, as well as Australian society more broadly.

Further indication of this dehumanisation, and indicative of the conditions Aboriginal workers were forced to endure, were the tin humpies they *lived* in on the cattle stations. Humpies are temporary shelters, often consisting of a piece of corrugated tin a couple feet off the ground. Whereas they can be seen to have their roots in the nomadic lifestyle of many Aboriginal groupings in Australia, the stark contrast with the living conditions of white workers is clear. These ramshackle structures were to became a symbol of the disgraceful treatment of Aboriginal peoples in Australia—which continues to this day in many parts of the country.

Indicative of the politics of experience, which continues to have profound effects on those who actively support the struggles of First Peoples, are the reflections of Frank Hardy, a best selling author and member of the Communist Party of Australia. He travelled to Wave Hill

before the walkout and penned his experiences in *The Unlucky Australians*, first published in 1968. Amongst the notes and commentary, including some valuable recordings of the oral-historical accounts of participants and supporters, Hardy became very aware of many misinterpretations of what was transpiring. For example:

> Well, one thing I'm sure of; wages are not main issue for the Aborigines in this strike... I'm convinced tribal identity and land are the real issues for them in this strike… (Hardy 1976: 108).

Hardy was plainly aware that the politics of experience, of his being directly exposed to actions and ideas of the participants, shifted his own perspective and interpretation of what was transpiring—and why. Paralleling broader sentiments, which had garnered support across Australia in the early stages of the walkout, he had considered wages and conditions as the key issue behind the actions taken. Any other reasons for the actions taken were beyond his reckoning.

Hardy's shift in awareness was shaped by accounts of Aboriginal participants, as events unfolded. These oral-historical accounts indicate, and often refer to, the walkout as being a pre-planned action. Control of ancestral lands was key. In contrast to these professed aims, many white accounts of the walkout continue to refer to the walkout as a strike: a strike that later shifted in focus, with the shift in focus considered to be mediated by white supporters. In this book, the question of why events were interpreted this way is reflected on.

As support for the walkout increased and spread throughout Australia, the conservative Federal government responded to the issue of control of ancestral lands. In blankly rejecting any handover of lands, Prime Minister William McMahon set off a chain of events that continue to trouble subsequent governments and the Australian populace more broadly. McMahon made his rejection in a statement on January 25, 1972. The following day, a beach umbrella was erected on the lawns in front of the national parliament: the Aboriginal Tent Embassy had come into existence. The embassy is today a symbol of Aboriginal political action and a reminder of the conditions imposed on many Aboriginal people in Australia: often ramshackle with intermittent structures, somewhat reflective of the humpies in which Aboriginal stockworkers and their families endured at Wave Hill and elsewhere.

The actions at Wave Hill, and the increased public awareness fostered by the controversial Tent Embassy, forced a shift in the recognition of Aboriginal peoples in Australia. Gough Whitlam became Prime Minister later in 1972, with his government promising radical policy shifts including the 1975 passing of the *Racial Discrimination Act* and the recognition of ancestral lands. The latter is immortalised in Mervyn Bishop's widely reproduced photograph of Whitlam pouring soil into the hands of Aboriginal elder Vincent Lingiari (see Figure 3.1). Whitlam travelled to Daguragu, with his action symbolising a promise to transfer legal title of ancestral lands to the Gurindji.

The establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, alongside the broad nationwide support for the walkout, lead to Whitlam's visit and his symbolic act, with a form of "land rights" later enshrined in law. The symbolism of the Embassy, of the ongoing struggle for respect and recognition, is embedded in what is termed as the sacred fire. Sacred fires have become synonymous with this ongoing struggle in Australia. A number of tent embassies have since been established, each of which has a sacred fire.

Sandon Point

Coals from the sacred fire at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra were transported to Sandon Point in December 2000. As the two sites, and the struggles they epitomised, were linked with the ceremonial lighting of the sacred fire, Sandon Point was renamed Kuradji by Yuin elder Uncle Guboo. SPATE was established in the direct context of a proposed large-scale housing estate for the area. Rumours about the proposal surfaced in the late 1990s, which were soon followed by an event that was to change public awareness of the area's cultural significance.

In March 1998, heavy seas exposed an intact burial site in the fore-dunes of McCauley's beach at Sandon Point. The process of exhumation and reburial of the remains determined it to be of a Kuradji—which loosely translates as *clever fella*—up to 6,000 years of age. In the context of the impending housing proposal, and the direct threat this would have, SPATE was established and local Aboriginal people shared some expressions of the area's cultural significance with members of the broader community. These and other expressions of significance came to have a profound impact on the actions of the local community in seeking

to save and protect the Sandon Point area. Respect and recognition increasingly became the focal point of broader opposition to the housing proposal. The politics of experience fostered an awareness of the ongoing implications of colonialism, and cultural and structural exploitation embedded in Australian regulatory and legal processes. These key features locate the importance of examining and reflecting on what has and continues to transpire at Sandon Point. The question of how whiteness has manifested and continues to re-manifest itself in not only regulatory and legal processes, but also in the actions of the local white community seeking to promote respect and recognition, is an important one.

As with the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra, the physical structures at SPATE provide an intentionally prominent depiction of the conditions many Aboriginal peoples in Australia live with everyday, albeit not in a remote Aboriginal community or *reserve* hidden from view. The existence of SPATE, its physical presence, continues to have a profound influence on broader awareness of the area's cultural significance. SPATE's presence has provided a means for passers-by to meet with members of the local Aboriginal community that they would otherwise not have, and repeatedly forced the media, regulatory bodies and politicians to address the key and complex issues of respect and recognition alongside the cultural and structural exploitation of regulatory processes.

On 23 February 2001, two months after the establishment of SPATE, a letter was presented to local resident Max Ackerman, as a representative of the Northern Illawarra Resident's Action Group (NIRAG). The letter was written by Roy Dootch Kennedy, acting as a spokesperson for SPATE, and outlined the granting of permission for members of the local community to "come onto country" and establish a 24 hour-a-day presence as a symbolic and physical act of opposition to the proposed housing estate. The Community Picket, as it was to become known, was considered to be an "annex" to SPATE. Coals from the sacred fire at SPATE were used to establish a fire at the picket, further symbolising the linkages.

Dootch's letter also referred to the South Coast Labour Council (SCLC), an umbrella group representative of local workers and trade unions. The SCLC, drawing on a strong tradition of the social responsibility of labour, imposed a "green ban" at Sandon Point. Green bans are a form of strike action where union members refuse to work on a site based on the social and environmental impacts. The concept was pioneered by the NSW branch of the Builders Labourers' Federation