Chapter 2
Who Are the Experts? Where the 'Self' and the 'Other' Meet When Building Relationships with Aboriginal Elders

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Abstract Working and researching in Australian Aboriginal contexts is a privilege. At the same time, it can be complex and demanding to learn to relate with the oldest continuing culture in human history in a way that is respectful of historical context and wisdom, and compassionate towards issues that have evolved since European colonisation. This chapter attempts to weave anecdotal stories from Aboriginal Elders, with colonising academic research requirements, to demonstrate how they can co-exist, and what is required in order for this to be a respectful and effective process for both parties.

There is an old fella sitting on my verandah alone, soaking up the north facing sun…he seems to be talking to himself… I tip-toe past as quietly as possible so as not to disturb, and I hear him say: 'You know I love you very, very much'. At this point he has his arms outstretched to the sky and I realise he is communing with his Creator. Uncle[1] is an Original[2] Senior Lore Man and Nankere (Medicine Man) who loves the life force that animates all things; he meditates and communes with that life force regularly. When I hear him communing like this, privately, in his Original Language and in English, I am struck anew, each time, at the enduringly rich, devotional, and tender inner lives of my Original Elders. This inner life is something they carry carefully and quietly, and the best way I know how to experience it, is to literally shut up, be still (sometimes for long times) wait, and listen. The late Uncle Bejam (Denis Walker) said: '… learn how we do it—and you learn by listening. That's all you have to do. Listen and you'll be told' (Personal communication, 2015).

[1]Original Elders are respectfully called 'Aunty' or 'Uncle' by Original (and non-Original) people. This is an inclusive practice across family and language groups.

[2]Throughout this chapter the respectful title 'Original' will be used for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people/mobs. This is in honour of the late Uncle Denis Walker (Bejam) who described himself as "a sovereign, tribal Original person" (Personal communication, 2017).

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If any of the Elders who have given me permission to write this chapter should honour me by reading the start of it, I want to begin by saying a few very important things that they will expect to see that I have understood. Then I will digress into addressing colonising academic expectations. Firstly, how could I write about working with Elders if I do not ask permission from them to do so, at the outset? Accordingly, I went to my local, Senior Lore Man and requested his permission to write this chapter. Asking permission in these terms is indivisible from receiving the cultural blessing for good and successful work. When I explained what the work was about, Uncle said: 'The best thing is to be quiet and wait until the Elders have finished speaking, and then speak if you have something of value to offer. If you want to know something, patiently go one by one to your Elders and ask them'. I couldn't agree more. In the white fella[3] way of promoting autonomous *self*-sovereignty, there is always an opinion to be had, whereas in the black fella way of animist *group* sovereignty, often, less is more—less talking, less self-promotion, less movement here and there. Why is this so? My Senior Lore Woman describes it perfectly when she reminds me: 'Kami (granddaughter) you cannot hear the spirit of anything—the land, the creatures, the people — if you fill up all the spaces by talking and moving about all the time'.

So… as an Anangu (central desert) woman living on Bundjalung (north coastal NSW) country, the first thing for me to do when seeking rapport with Elders is to ask for permission for any cultural work I am planning on undertaking. I ask local, and central desert Elders. If I do not get permission, I do not pursue the project. When I am given a "no" to any request, I have learned not to take it personally. All it may mean is that there are things that are not in their rightful place for me to undertake the work or project at that moment, and/or there are things I do not know, and cannot know at that time. As an Uncle said to me: 'Bub, sit still and wait on the will of heaven'. With at least sixty thousand years of continuing culture, at the mob's[4] back, sometimes working within Aboriginal contexts is like asking an ancient, vast, deep, slow-moving river to change course—it takes time—and that 'time-taking' process is not personal; it is collective,[5] and must take into account the wider cultural picture before any such change is initiated. At the same time, I have learned that a 'yes' from one Elder does not necessarily constitute a 'yes' from all Elders. It is at times like this that the way forward may not be immediately clear. My best advice for these moments is to self–reflect, be patient, and do not fall foul of the pressure to fulfil white fella deadlines.

Many Original Elders, with whom I have had the honour of conversing and working, operate within a different relationship to 'time' than many non-Original

[3]This can specifically mean 'white man/men' or can mean white people, or non-Original people in general. 'Black fella/s' refers to an Original man, or Original people in general. Both are considered to be non-offensive, collective terms, used by Original people (Creative Spirits, n.d.).

[4]'Mob' or 'the mob' is a respectful, collective term for Original people across language groups.

[5]As opposed to individualistic cultures, collectivist ones (such as aboriginal cultures from around the world) operate from the perspective of shared resources and benefits, and a concern for the social group as a whole (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Original culture in Australia reflects this in the way that Elders are collectively referred to as Aunty or Uncle.

Australians. I cannot adequately stress how important it has been for me to respect and accept this different relationship with time. The lack of reliance on technology (computers and phones) of some Elders has challenged me to be creative, and, most of all, patient. To cultivate good relationships, it is pivotal to meet Elders on their own sovereign terms. I have learned, and will continue to learn, when to step in, be persistent, and press for action and/or information, and when to step back—leaving the space open to see what comes along to fill it. For the most part, I have found that speaking with Elders in person is more productive than communicating via the written word or telephone calls. This has meant lots of driving and travelling to facilitate sitting down face to face with Elders for yarning[6] about significant matters. I have also learned to seize the moment when an Elder is available, as oftentimes when I have rescheduled, or was not able to spontaneously respond to an Elder's request to meet with them, the opportunity would slip away and be very difficult to retrieve in a different time and place. At other times I have spent three or four days waiting in town for an Elder to show up. They do show up…in their own time…which is the right time within the bigger, collective picture….

I have learned about, and engaged the use of, the inimitable Original people's grapevine—the way in which information often gets passed around the mob to find its way to the one who will act upon it. Following is an example. While working as a provisional psychologist for an organisation, I was allocated clients of Original heritage. It was quite common for a client in this cohort not to have a personal mobile phone. However, their cousin, brother, or another relative would have one. Even if these relatives did not live in the same house as my client, if I wanted to contact my client, I would call the relative—who had a phone—and ask that they let the client know I was wanting a yarn about something. I recall a colleague saying: 'If the cousin has a phone, why not the client?' A logical question—however—'logic' for Original people may be quite a different process than the 'logic' white fellas are used to. The animist, family-oriented way in which the mob tends to function, can be either ignorantly criticised as inefficient, or deeply understood as part of a profound indigenous way of knowing and being (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Such understanding may highlight, for white fellas, the difference between 'being white' and 'being whitely' (Sullivan, 2006, p. 160). The first is the physical self, and the latter is the way in which a person thinks and acts which stem from racial hierarchy and white privilege (Ranzijn, McConnochie, & Nolan, 2009).

A story about meeting Elders on their own terms… recently I was asked by one of my Senior Lore Elders to drive him to visit his daughter—about one and a half hour's drive. I was at work at the time. I decided to seize the opportunity and told my work boss I was leaving early to attend to some cultural business. She (a white fella Scotswoman) was, as ever, embracing of this concept. As we drove, Uncle was sharing many things about the country we were driving through—things I could not have learned from anyone else. He asked if he could smoke in the car. I do not smoke and do not like being around the smell of cigarettes very much. However, I

[6] 'Yarning' loosely translates to sitting down and talking. It often involves sitting around a campfire, sharing cups of tea, silence, stories, and giving a conversation time to unfold.

heard myself responding by saying: 'Yes Uncle, however, I will need the windows down'. He smiled, saying: 'You don't smoke do you'. 'No, I don't. But I also know that in this situation, your breath carries your Dreaming[7] and so if I refuse to inhale that, even with the strong smell of tobacco on it, I am not only denying your way of Dreaming at this moment, but I am also denying myself the opportunity to ride on that smoke and share in your Dreaming, AND, I will need the windows down'. Uncle turned in his seat, looked at me, nodded approvingly, and said: 'Ahhh yes… good… you understand.

You know, when I am out with the old fellas and they are sniffing their spirits, I don't join them, but I am willing to sit there and breathe in the smell of their breath and ride with them that way into their Dreaming. We are always in the Dreaming. We had our natural ways of Dreaming denied to us—dancing, singing, storytelling, language, ceremony—and so we had to find any way we could to stay connected to the Dreaming because if we are not connected to it, things aren't good for us—not good for us at all. When the white fellas look at us and think we are just drunkards, what they don't see is that this is all some black fellas may have, to stay in the Dreaming, because everything else has been taken away'.

This was an epiphany[8] for me. I realised how easy it is to be fooled by the way things, people, may look, at surface value. However, at least sixty thousand years of continuing culture (some anthropologists are now saying more like a hundred thousand years; Gammage, 2011), *the oldest continuing culture in human history*, has sustained through the most catastrophic invasion, colonisation and genocide (Harff & Gurr, 1988) by staying connected with the Dreaming in any ways available. The humility and sacrifice of that state of being was at once deeply devastating and remarkably inspiring to me. It was profoundly reassuring to understand that the Elders are still Dreaming… no matter what it may look like to the contrary. I feel humbled by that resilience, and I remind myself to carry that humility and respect into my interactions with my Elders.

My Senior Lore Woman has told me that, in Original Lore, when there are no more Elders Dreaming, this country and all on it, will cease to exist, as it is the ongoing Dreaming that keeps it all in corporeal manifestation. In whatever context that is true for the mob, either actually or metaphorically, I am forever comforted by the fact that the Elders are always Dreaming—Dreaming things into existence for us to cherish and experience. I am reminded of the utmost priority to take care of

[7]The Dreaming is the manifestation of Original creation. It gives meaning and interconnection to everything. The Dreaming also creates the lore for the interrelationships between people and the land, and all of creation. It gives identity to Original people; shared Dreaming usually denotes shared family and mob. It is a present, and evolving, state of being i.e., not a past 'time'. Therefore, the most accurate term is 'the Dreaming' rather than 'the dreamtime' (Creative Spirits, n.d.).

[8]Psychotherapist Dr. Ann Jauregui (2003) explained that at moments when transmission of an experience and/or feeling occurs, the commonplace drops its disguise, and life becomes saturated with deeper meaning, creating an epiphany (a sudden grasp of meaning and/or reality). It is my experience that listening to Elders, really listening, leads regularly to epiphanistic moments. Ralph Waldo Emerson, philosopher, (1803–1882) explained it thus: "There is a depth in those brief moments which constrain us to ascribe more reality to them than all other experiences" (1884, p. 219).

our Elders, and to ensure the passing on of the light of Original culture and Lore to subsequent generations.

Researching in Aboriginal Contexts

The Importance of Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process by which a researcher critically reflects upon their own biases and assumptions and how these may, or may not have influenced the research development and outcomes. Taking a specifically academic trajectory now, I would like to speak about the need for reflexivity when researching in Aboriginal contexts, and while relationship building with Elders, and mob members in general. When I was asked to write a chapter for this book, I was given a brief, which included the phrase: 'The book will reinsert the "I" into academic writing and include personal voices, individual experiences…'. I was greatly encouraged by this intention, as to remove the 'I' from Aboriginal contexts is to be defeated before beginning. In the Pitjantjatjara language of my own mob, the Anangu people of Uluru, the idea of 'I' and 'ownership' has been expressed very differently to white fella ways of understanding this concept. For example, an Anangu person would have said (in their Original Pitjantjatjara Language) 'I hand' (for 'my hand') or 'I country' (for 'my country') or 'I child' (for one's son or daughter). Accordingly, there was no differentiation between the sense of self, and the expressions of that 'self'—within the broader concepts of one's land and country—and also within closer 'ownership' concepts such as possessions, body parts, children, and so on. Consequently, to exclude the 'I' in Aboriginal research contexts, is to exclude the very fabric of the vast and animistic sense of 'I' for many Original people of this land. Lamentably, as the Anangu people have learned to speak English, there has been a degree of loss of this important and unique 'I' language phenomenon. However, some Elders remember it, and uphold the intricately nuanced meaning of the 'I'.

In the spirit of good reflexivity, I keep a verbal recorded diary of impactful meetings—things that were said, realisations that I have about myself, and/or the wider context. This has been an especially important process for me because, as an Original person I emerged from the Dreaming over sixty thousand years ago, and as a first fleeter (one of my white descendants arrived on the First Fleet) I came across the seas only yesterday in comparison. I am indigenous and non-indigenous to this land. The non-indigenous part of me upholds autonomy, self-actualisation, and seeks diversity. The indigenous part feels, irrefutably, the wisdom and spirit held in land and country, and seeks the strength that comes from the collective. Hence, there is a lot to reconcile!

I can recommend an academic reflexivity process for qualitative research in Aboriginal contexts based upon the work of Parker (2004). Parker analysed reflexivity in terms of the first person (self-confessions); second person (how the position

of the researcher influences the research); and third person (the researcher's role). I have found this direction to be compatible with ethnographic Aboriginal research. I have discovered, at times, that there needs to be some conflation in these three approaches, due to the phenomenological nature of qualitative research in Aboriginal contexts i.e., the distinctions between self-researcher-participant are often less delineated than represented in quantitative, or even qualitative constructivist work (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). I do not believe there is any need to feel conflicted about this, as it is my belief that in the push to be recognised as a science, by focusing only on what is measurable, and/or constructed, psychology is in danger of losing the art of perceiving and understanding the ineffable, unmeasurable interactions between people, both in clinical and naturalistic settings (Josselson, 1996).

While researching in Aboriginal contexts I have found that many of the mob Elders generally relate in very different terms to white fellas. Often when I ask a question, I receive a story in reply, rather than what I may perceive to be a 'direct' answer. In embracing this, in accepting that yarning in the present moment is a vital medium of kinship in Aboriginal contexts, I have touched in on ineffable and inexplicable aspects of myself that I have struggled to understand in white contexts. These have included narratives centred on my own belonging and identity as one of the mob, my relationship with the land, my way of communicating via stories and anecdotes, and my collectivist, animist affiliation with life that I have often attempted to wrestle into compatibility with the 'scientific' approach to western psychology.

As such, reflexive processes have assisted me to assess my intellectual and academic investments in any Aboriginal research; such processes insist that I unearth, define and abandon hitherto unconscious (Layton, 2004) intentions which motivate a specific 'researcher' position. These have included being outcome-focused, which inhibits my capacity to stay present in qualitative interviewing. I also have come to realise that it is best to relinquish positioning myself as a detached observer, a position ordinarily adopted in psychology research to preserve the integrity of the investigation (Davey, 2011). This type of detachment—whether from white fella or black fella researchers—often does not sit well with Elders, and makes it problematic for me to fathom and document the authentic lived experiences of Aboriginal consultants and participants via the qualitative interview research process.

Phenomenology

Given the phenomenological nature of qualitative, ethnographic research, it is not always possible, or necessary, to remain rigourously detached from the research (Davey, 2011). On the contrary, I have discovered that immersing myself in the narrative (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013), into the yarning, elicits a greater intimacy of understanding of the lived experience of Original people. According to many Elders with whom I have spoken, this is the only acceptable way to understand them, their expertise, their definitions, and their frames of reference (Arbon, 2008). If, as a researcher, I hope to understand Original people ever more deeply, I must be willing

to view them as experts and meet them on their own terms—to overlay colonising research parameters would not only be insulting, but produce irrelevant research outcomes and findings—findings that echo with the hollow absence of Elder input and Original authenticity.

Narrative: Yarning with a Purpose

Narrative is found in many oral and written traditions such as legends, fables, myths, music, songs, dance, books, dramas and history (White, 2007). Narrative is also present in every age, place and culture, in its diversity of forms. There have never been people without narrative, and, in particular, indigenous cultures have depended on narrative for the transmission of knowledge to subsequent generations (White, 2007). Aboriginal narratives are to be found in every stone, tree, mountain, creek, flower and animal of country.[9] The narrative approach upholds the fact that everyone has a story that feeds the family, the environment, the spirit, the animals and the culture (Arkinson & Delamont, 2006; Wingard & Lester, 2001). Yuval-Davis (2006) stated that when people are invited to engage in storytelling, the individual and group identities become narratives: 'stories people tell themselves and others about who they are and who they are not' (p. 202). Yuval-Davis also described that within the narrative approach, the identity is fluid: 'always producing itself through the combined processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong' (p. 15).

The narrative method of data collection is notably compatible with the yarning way of communicating amongst Original people, and can be used to write, and rewrite the storylines of Original identity and belonging (Denborough, 2014; Garvey, 2007). Consequently, from a narrative discourse perspective, the narrative style has been acknowledged as the therapeutic, and conversational research approach of choice in a number of Original people's communities (Wingard & Lester, 2001). It is the narrative discourse method of communication and meaning-making that is particularly useful for Aboriginal research. It is an effective method for keeping the Original voices intact—keeping them as expert (Wingard, Johnson, & Drahm-Butler, 2015; Chilisa, 2012)—and not buried/lost in Western research frameworks.

[9]Original people's relationships to 'country' are intricate and inter-relational. Original people will often use the singular word 'country' to make the connection to family, tribe, mob, and other important associations with specific parts of this land that has become known as Australia (Creative Spirits, n.d.).

Things to Keep in Mind When Relating with the Mob and/or Engaging in Research

The Dilution of Mob Identity and Its Impact on Psychosocial Health of Original People

Research documents a strong, mutually reinforcing link, between dilution of mob identity (predicated by invasion, colonisation, the stolen generations[10] and ensuing transgenerational trauma[11]), disruption to bonds of family and country, and the psychosocial health of Original people (Atkinson, Nelson, & Atkinson, 2010; Cunneen & Libesman, 2002). Further, the manifestation of transgenerational trauma within the mob appears—at face value—to be a tacit example of intergenerational transmission of psychosocial behaviour and symptomologies. Such intergenerational transmission has been found to occur across demographic trajectories such as age, income, education, and living location, due to societal processes that influence the life course, and operate within family and community structures (Liefbroer & Elzinga, 2012). These processes appear to be the most vulnerable to trauma. In relation to the mob, the trauma of invasion, colonisation and the stolen generations—past, and ongoing—would apply.

Assimilation Processes and Their Connection to Genocide

Moses (2000) and Tatz (1999) assert[12] that the assimilation processes of colonisation inflicted on Original people have amounted to genocide. Harff & Gurr (1988), in their

[10]The 'stolen generations' refers to Original people who were forcibly taken from their parents, families and country to be raised in Christian missions or white families as a way to 'assimilate' them into white culture (Australians Together, 2014). This government practice was largely carried out between 1886 and 1970; however, removal of Original children is enforced to this day at higher rates than ever (Cunneen, 1997; Cunneen & Libesman, 2002; Grandmothers against Removal, 2016).

[11]Transgenerational trauma refers to trauma that is so illimitable, that it transfers from the generation of origin to subsequent generations. It is passed on through the repeated experiences that are the consequences of government policies and practices, through the repeated experiences of racism and discrimination, through repeated socioeconomic disadvantage and psychological and spiritual suffering (Ranzijn et al., 2009).

[12]The philosophy of 'assimilation' was central to the stolen generations in that the Australian government assumed white superiority over black inferiority, promoting 'natural' (when it was actually enforced) elimination and/or assimilation of Original people into white cultural contexts (Ranzijn et al., 2009). The Darwinistic, unilinear, anthropological perspective favoured in the late 1800s meant that Original culture was viewed as 'backward'; Original people were seen as physically inferior, with psychological deficiencies. They were believed to be physically and culturally unchanging, and therefore a dying race (Oldmeadow, 1968). Tragically, by the beginning of the twentieth century, Original people had been stereotyped as "primitive Stone Age curiosities" (Ranzijn et al., 2009, p. 182).

discussion of hegemonic and xenophobic genocide, may offer an appropriate model for thinking about genocide as appertains to Original people. They described hegemonic genocide as the forced submission of racial, ethnic, religious and/or national groups to the authority of the state.

Given the Australian Government's policies (e.g. assimilation) during colonisation and the stolen generations, it can be said that Original people have been victims of hegemonic genocide.

Harff & Gurr (1988) go on to explain xenophobic genocide as the murder/massacre campaigns by the state for national protection and/or purification of victims who are deemed threatening or alien. As such, the extensive and intentional massacres of Original people during invasion and colonisation between 1788 and 1928 (Elder, 1998) are tacit examples of xenophobic genocide. These dark chapters in Australian history have inexorably contributed to the transgenerational trauma of Original people (McKendrick et al., 1992). This, in turn, has made belonging to the mob not just a vital mechanism of personal and cultural identity for Original people, but often a fraught kinship based on psychosocial survival through extreme adversity (Ganesharajah, 2009).

The Psychology of Childhood Trauma and Its Consequences for Belonging to the Mob

The many deeply moving stories from victims of the stolen generations notwithstanding, there is a paucity of information/research on contemporary attachment experience/theory as may apply to stolen generations victims. The consequences of early trauma are only just beginning to be fully understood. Furthermore, assumptions are made about how ruptures in belonging to the mob may affect Original identity (Carson et al., 2007). However, there is a lack of literature on trauma and its sequelae that particularly relates to the childhood removal from family, and the transposition into an alien, and not always attuned or caring, separate environment (Bowlby, 1979; Winnicott, 1957) and how that may affect the wellbeing of Original people. The importance of the early mother–child relationship for positive adult functioning was first recognised by object-relations[13] and attachment theorists. They were further elaborated in self-psychology and the emerging field of infant research. In the third millennium (of Western psychological theorising) understanding continues to increase through fields of neuroscience, developmental psychology, and trauma studies. The extent of trauma experienced by Original people post colonising European contact, and the effects of that trauma, are yet to be fully acknowledged, let alone researched. It has included murder, fatal illness—for which Original people

[13]Object Relations Theory (Fairbairn, 1952; Winnicott, 1957) proposed that the human psyche evolves in direct relationship to significant others. As such, it supports the importance of the child/primary-caregiver bond. Disruption to this primary relationship significantly impairs the development of the personality and sense of self in the world (Bollas, 1987).

had no immunity—kidnapping and abuse of children, the dissolution of community and culture, loss of relationship to country and language, and interruption of good parenting.

The sequelae of such trauma tends to be currently discussed predominantly in terms of enduring Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It has also been linked to the development of personality disorders (Raphael & Swan, 1997). However, the research that focuses on archaic trauma as a result of catastrophic disruption—in an object relations sense—has not been researched specifically from the perspective of Original people. The traumatic rupture of early childhood bonds that were inflicted en masse by invasion, colonisation and assimilation is rarely considered in the context of the unique psychological disposition of Original people. It is suggested here that this may partly be due to lack of research into the differences in psychology of Original people and Caucasian Australians. The latter represents the population norm. Consequently, I would strongly discourage anyone working in Aboriginal contexts from making assumptions about Original people based upon white, privileged, colonising, psychological concepts.

Unfortunately, Original people are often blamed for the difficult behaviours resulting from the impact of transgenerational trauma (Behrendt, Cunneen, & Libesman, 2009).

Concurrently, the mob is frequently burdened with unrealistic demands enforced with little understanding of the origin of the behaviours, or the damage from which they have evolved i.e. pivotal archaic trauma as a result of catastrophic disruption, and the breaking down of Indigenous cultural norms (Purdie, Dudgeon, & Walker, 2010). According to Ranzijn et al. (2009) this equates to unearned disadvantage.[14] Blaming the victims (Roberts, 2016) is a primary mechanism for invalidating Original people's lived experience, thereby adding to the cycle of oppression (Ranzijn et al., 2009), persistent psychosocial deficits and ruptures to psycho-emotional and spiritual wellbeing (Purdie et al., 2010).

As such, it is pivotal—in participating in principled research and/or interactions with Original people—to look through and beyond any personal or cultural symptoms of trauma—to see the breathtaking expertise and resilience that has allowed for at least sixty thousand years of actively continuing lineage. Looking through that lens, the next step is to engage in respectful interactions that can be recognised by mob members as supportive—on their terms. In research contexts, this will include looking over every single written word multiple times, and asking Original people to assist in this process, to assure positive, resilience-recognising language. At the same time, it is important to take every opportunity to engage in the kind of compassionate truth-telling that educates non-Original people about historical and contemporary contexts that uniquely and directly impact Original people. If contemporary Australian society in any way takes pride in the unique, iconic aspects of this land's Original people that are often used to symbolise Australian culture as a whole, and wishes to continue to

[14]The term refers to the idea that Aboriginal people are disadvantaged just because they are Aboriginal, as opposed to unearned privilege that says that white people are advantaged just because of their 'whiteness' (Ranzijn et al., 2009).

promote them at home—and on the world stage—then it must cherish our Original Elders, help take care of, and protect the mob, and only support government and social policies that allow the mob to flourish and be well.

I will conclude this chapter by returning to Uncle sitting on the couch, on my verandah, in the Winter sun. 'This spot right here is good' he says, 'I can feel the sun and I can feel the breeze on my face, and listen to the trees telling me their stories'. I sit on the ground beside his couch—get set to stay longer than may feel comfortable—and prepare myself to be silent for more time than I have to spare today. For experience tells me that this is the only way that my 'self' can meet his expert 'self'. It is in the silence, and the powerful and affecting whispering of the trees, that the Dreaming stories, on *this* day, will be transmitted to me. *This* is the time, the place, and the way the 'self' and the 'other'—whomever and whatever they may happen to be today—Uncle, me, the trees, the breeze, the sun, the unknown—will find each other in the Dreaming…the Dreaming that is always here, has always been here…and is always being Dreamed by the Elders…

In Gratitude for My Elders Past, Present and Emerging…

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