

## WHITE “AUTOCHTHONY”

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### Abstract

Western conceptualisations of autochthony — that is, of being born of the earth itself — are a useful frame for understanding aspects of the settler Australian idea of “being a local”. The western tradition of autochthony underpins relationships between particular peoples and particular lands, and importantly, the implicit moral virtue of one people’s claim to specific territory over that of others. The virtue of being a local, of a local place or of the nation, rests on a false claim of white “autochthony” that to perform its social function must conceal Aboriginal autochthony.

Bringing Australian settler claims of autochthony into the light enables its critical examination, and complements the critical examination of that other fictional people-land relation, *terra nullius*. The usefulness of white “autochthony” as an idea is not simply the deconstruction of its fiction. A critique of white “autochthony” opens local and national spaces to a constellation of ethical considerations. In particular, it institutes an ethics of location.

### Introduction

In this paper I propose that Western conceptualisations of autochthony — that is, of being born of the earth itself — are a useful frame for understanding aspects of the settler Australian idea of “being a local”. The western tradition of autochthony underpins relationships between particular peoples and particular

lands, and importantly, the implicit moral virtue of one people’s claim to specific territory over that of others. The virtue of being a local, of a local place or of the nation, rests on a false claim of white “autochthony” that to perform its social function must conceal Aboriginal autochthony.

Bringing Australian settler claims of autochthony into the light enables its critical examination, and complements the critical examination of that other fictional people-land relation, *terra nullius*. The usefulness of white “autochthony” as an idea is not simply the deconstruction of its fiction. A critique of white “autochthony” opens local and national spaces to a constellation of ethical considerations. In particular, it institutes an ethics of location that decouples the necessary connection that claims of white “autochthony” produce between settlers, local places and the nation.

### The Standing Ground

This paper is written in Bundjalung kuntri, however, I situate myself within a different imaginary geography: a settler imaginary of the land.<sup>1</sup> I say this not to deny Bundjalung claims to kuntri but to acknowledge the imaginary that informs my first language for this land: the imaginary to which I am habitually bound to return and draw upon — through language to repeat, and in practice to re-enact. These are habits of generations. My project is one that seeks to disrupt the way that return is repeated and re-enacted as everyday Australian settler colonialism. It is a project that is

constrained by the settler clearing in which particular things and ideas are able to appear.

In the first language of my imaginary... I was born in Lismore on the far north coast of New South Wales. My mother and father were also born in Lismore. Mum grew up in South Lismore, dad in Green Forest. My mother's family, a railway family that followed the construction of railways north, came from somewhere down near Bathurst and from the New South Wales South Coast. At some point, more distant maternal relatives arrived in Australia from Scotland and Leicestershire. These are impressions rather than facts. On my father's side, his parents emigrated from near Helmsley in Yorkshire in the late 1800s. They bought a farm at Green Forest and another at Tuncester 5 miles from Lismore and it was at Tuncester that I spent the first three years of my life, before mum and dad left dairying and floods and headed into town and the hills of East Lismore. Those east Lismore hills and paddocks in which I played explorer and naturalist as a child is now Southern Cross University where I play a cultural studies Ph.D. candidate.

I grew up with a sense that this family story is a monocultural Anglo-Celtic story of rootedness in Lismore. By turning the family tree upside down, however, there is a reverse sense—a sense of branching and dispersal, an international diasporic movement. It is, however, without any sense of diaspora that I grew up as one of the Lismore locals: 'Born and bred,' as they say. Rooted in place, despite the movement that lies not so long ago in the past.

My sense of being a local was disrupted through signing a Sorry Book that eventually led to the question of my current research. This question was not directed towards my personal history of forgetting

the movement that brought me into Lismore but instead towards my sense of origins within the local: What ideologies and concepts inform the processes Australian settlers undertake to install themselves as "local" or "original"?<sup>2</sup>

My inquiry into how I came to think of myself as a local of Lismore began with becoming conscious of the physical, social, cultural and imaginary displacements of Aborigines that had occurred in order that being a white local could happen in the first place (see Garbutt 2004). This paper attempts to go some way to answering these issues in terms of an idea I call *white "autochthony"*.

## AUTOCHTHONY AND THE LOCALS

### *Autochthony*

The word *autochthon* is directly borrowed from the Ancient (Classical) Greek word *αυτοχθον* [*autochthon*] meaning 'sprung from the land itself' (Delbridge 1991:113) or 'children of the land itself' (Isocrates 1990:33,§24). For the ancient Athenians being an *autochthon* had the sense of being indigenous to their territory (Walsh 1978:301). This *autochthonous* relationship between Athenians and their land—Attica—produced 'the "empty space",' Nicole Loraux says, 'where the civic imagination of Athens began to crystallise' (1993:51). Within this space emerged ideas of citizenship, the *polis*, democratic government, public ritual and religion, and the roles of women, slaves and foreigners within the *polis*.<sup>3</sup>

Athens provides an example of the particular effects of the Western *autochthonic* imaginary. Firstly, the inequalities and violence that accompany the foundation of the state are forgotten through a single unifying myth. There is

'a founding forgetting ... of the division unity implies'—a '*forgetting of the political as such*' (Loroux (2002:43 and 42 [emphasis in the original]). Secondly, autochthony eliminates the question: 'To whom does, or did, the land belong?' (Saxonhouse 1986:255) Thus autochthony serves to provide a myth of doubly peaceful origins. Thirdly, autochthony legitimises a claim to territory through boundaries dictated by nature and not through a social contract or the arbitrariness of a treaty (Saxonhouse 1986:255). Finally, the status of autochthon automatically marks the citizen from non-citizen and foreigner.

Marcel Detienne, in a comparison of autochthony in ancient Athens, ancient Thebes and present-day France, asserts one should always read autochthony and foundation in partnership. He argues that questions of 'founding, beginning, creating' are inextricably tied to 'ways of being born of the earth' (Detienne 2001:53). 'There are', he concludes, 'ten or twenty ways of founding one's autochthony' (55). Ancient Athens is a site to which a study of western autochthony must return, but it is not the only autochthony: there are numerous autochthonies, each founding its own birth from its soil.

Loroux, Saxonhouse and Detienne alert us to two sets of issues. Detienne alerts us to the fact that western autochthony is found, begun or created—that it comes into being through a process of commencement followed by a legitimising claim. Secondly, Loroux and Saxonhouse alert us to the type of social effects that we might anticipate when claims of belonging are founded on a Western tradition of autochthony.

This paper proposes that claims of being a local are claims of belonging that draw on the legitimacy conferred by autochthony. These autochthonist

claims are founded upon the practices of nineteenth century settler colonialism and articulate with contemporary post-colonial settler nationalism to produce ongoing colonising effects.

### **The locals**

The claim of being one of the locals is continually being asserted throughout Australia in everyday conversations and the local media. The Cronulla riot in December 2005 brought the locals to national attention with some in the crowd holding banners proclaiming 'Respect locals or piss off!' (TCN 9 2005). The connection of being local with Anglo-Celtic Australian nationalism was unmistakable in this context. However, despite the pervasive language of being local there is no sustained scholarship on the subject in Australia. There are a number of insightful analyses of being local in works that deal with other Australian issues, however, these analyses do not reference each other as the idea of being a local is not the object of study (see Woolley 2003, Schlunke 2005:43–56 and Kijas 2002:78–93).

My work on the idea of being local is situated in contemporary Lismore and is an attempt to understand the meanings and effects of locals' claims of belonging in contemporary Australia. This work draws from a survey of the use of the word "local" in national and daily newspapers in the two years since December 2003 (Garbutt 2005). My particular focus has been Lismore's only daily newspaper *The Northern Star*. This newspaper is a major New South Wales north coast regional daily with a claimed readership of 70,000 people. I also draw to a lesser extent from *The Sydney Morning Herald* to provide state and national contexts.

In that analysis I have identified a number of characteristics of what it might mean to be a local in Lismore (cf. Hall et

al 1984:204–207). Four of these are particularly relevant in this paper. Firstly, being a local includes a person in a field of relations marked by propinquity and that gives rise to a sense of community, care and belonging. The community of locals has a sense of homogeneity that is distinct from a heterogeneous outside. This homogeneity is understood to have a geographical basis. For locals community arises organically within, and is coextensive with, the local place.

Secondly, being local is connected with a suspicion of mobility. This typically takes the form of creating somewhat arbitrary rules regarding how long it takes to be a local. In Lismore this may take between twenty years and never. This temporal criterion extends across generations creating a local aristocracy of the established and the outsiders (Elias 1994: xv–xvii). A third order of local time is established that marks local history as beginning at a point in time with the coming of “the discoverers” and taking a specific historical form beginning with “the pioneers” or “first settlers”. Prior to this time is an undifferentiated expanse of prehistory. The most local of the locals have been in Lismore since time “began” and can trace their lineage to an old pioneering “name” (Garbutt 2004:112–114). History and time are closely articulated with the British ‘born and bred’ kinship system transported to Australian soil (Edwards 2000:28).

Thirdly, as the local is always experienced as enclosed but with external relations with more powerful larger-than-local geographic scales, the locals also have a tendency to feel under siege from extra-local incursions. There are many variations of how such contests are expressed but they tend to take the form of “locals first”. There is also an implicit message from locals of a sense of moral priority over variously constituted outsiders (such as tourists, blow-ins, new-

comers, hippies and greenies) when it comes to access to local resources. Local belonging articulates with a British system of absolute and exclusive enjoyment of property as a right of legal or assumed ownership (Rapport 1997).

A fourth characteristic of being local is the focus of this paper and is examined in more detail below (also see Garbutt 2005). This is a racial aspect to being local in Lismore in which the locals represented in the local print media are always white, and Aborigines are never locals. The exception to this rule is in circumstances in which place denotes race (Razak 2002). In Redfern, for example, identified by many if not most settler Australians as an Aboriginal place, Aborigines may be termed locals (Goodsir 2004). The use of local as an identity is expressive of a segregated settler spatio-cultural imaginary.

Overall, the process of becoming a local naturalises the local in the local place. Yet as Pred shows in his model of becoming-places, processes of social reproduction and practices of individual agency simultaneously produce place, individuals and societies (Pred 1984:282). In other words, the local place is always becoming through larger-than-local (for example, social) processes as well as through local processes. The locals are never absolutely or essentially local. Once the natural category of the locals and local culture is exposed as problematic—that is, that the local is produced through processes that cross spatial boundaries—‘the only choice,’ Amy Shuman says, ‘... is to study the processes of marking [and] claiming authenticity’ (1993:94–5).

### **Claims Of Being Local As Claims Of Autochthony**

Autochthony is a particular claim of authenticity emerging from a ‘magical’

relation between people and soil (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001:239). Walsh (1978:301) asserts that for ancient Athenians autochthony referred to their indigeneity. This meant more than being descendants of the earth-born autochthon, King Erichthonius. It was an Athenian claim that they had never moved from that earth of their founding ancestor's birth.<sup>4</sup> The basis of their claim to territory was that it had always been theirs as first possessors (Harris 1993:1726–1727, n. 68).<sup>5</sup>

It is a leap of logic to argue that Australian locals regard themselves as autochthons in the above sense. Detienne reminds us, however, that there are many ways of founding one's autochthony. While classical Athens is the Western exemplar it represents only one form of autochthony amongst many. In this section I will argue that being a local is a claim of autochthony along two lines. Firstly, I will set my argument in the context of current claims of autochthony in Africa and Europe. This is an argument for the possibility of autochthony — that autochthony is not dead and buried in the ruins of ancient Athens. Secondly, I will draw on empirical language use data to argue that the claim of being local is a form of Australian settler indigenisation. This argument demonstrates that being a local has the discursive and cultural form of an autochthonist claim. My argument does not result in proof but an informed suggestion.

### **Contemporary Autochthony**

Claims of autochthony are double claims with people and place forming a single and particular interpretation of society: a territory belonging to a people and a people belonging to a territory. "We" and "here" is spoken in one breath: there are few things more local.

Autochthony has a continuing and growing significance in the twenty-first century. Some authors speak of 'an upsurge' of autochthony (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000:425, Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005). This upsurge is occurring, I would contend, because of autochthony's usefulness in claims to territory and the concomitant certainties it brings—authenticity, legitimacy and belonging. These benefits—placed beyond question in claims of a unique people and place connection—accrue at the very time they are under threat from hybridising transnational and translocal flows. As Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2000:425) have argued:

In such a perspective, cosmo-politanism and autochthony are like conjoined twins: a fascination with globalization's open horizons is accompanied by determined efforts towards boundary-making and closure, expressed in terms of belonging and exclusion.

Twentieth and twenty-first century claims of autochthony are and have been a response to territorial and cultural uncertainties. During the late 1920s and early 1930s Heidegger's mission was to found a German national socialist philosophy in the autochthonous soil of middle-Europe (Bambach 2003:1–5). In the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries African and European peoples in Cameroon, Ivory Coast, the Great Lake Region of Rwanda-Burundi, Flemish Belgium, the Netherlands, and northern Italy have claimed territory and full citizenship rights for autochthons (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005). In Romania autochthonists and westernisers continue to debate cultural forms (Szilagyi-Gal 2001, Iordachi and Trencsényi 2003).

Most relevant to this discussion, however, is the work of Carlos Alonso. He notes the 'power and its irresistible appeal [of autochthony] as a trope of cultural affirmation' for the settlers of postcolonial states

(1990:10). In particular, he proposes that Spanish American settler culture is structured by a social order he names "cultural autochthony":

[A] *cultural* state that is interpreted as having generated itself in a *natural* fashion, that is, arising automatically from the midst of the collectivity and in perfect consonance with the surrounding environment (1990:10 [emphasis in original]).

Cultural autochthony underpins a claim of the unique cultural difference of a (post)colonial culture from that of the metropolitan power. The cultural uniqueness springs from the new land itself, a necessary marker for articulating the new nation with statehood. The power and irresistible appeal of 'the autochthonous cultural order' is the 'seeming transcending of the nature/culture dichotomy' that assuages the anxiety of the colonist in exile from the metropolis (Alonso 1990:10).

It is against this background that I propose the claim of being an Australian settler local is a claim of cultural autochthony. I also propose that such claims are produced (and productive of) a cultural state located in specific ways. This location is marked by the dispossession of indigenous peoples by settlers seeking legitimation through a 'founding forgetting' of that dispossession. In claiming autochthony the settlers naturalise themselves to place. They become unmarked: the natives born to the nation, the locals. This particular settler form of cultural autochthony, I name white "autochthony" because its unmarked nature has the unmarked form of whiteness. It is, I propose, a cultural form found in many settler states, including Australia. I also use the term white "autochthony" to separate the settler claim from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigeneity. Clearly the settler claim is at variance with the ontological status of Indigenous peoples. That they occupy

similar ground is what makes the settler claim worthy of critical examination in conversations regarding Australian belongings.

### **Settler Indigenisation and Cultural Autochthony**

The analysis of the processes by which Australian settler belonging achieves legitimation and authenticity is rarely made through the idea of autochthony. Deborah Bird Rose's analysis is one exception. Rose (2004) proposes that at the national level settlers have authenticated their belonging to the country by imagining that the mantle of autochthony has been passed from Aborigines to themselves. As 'the ancient autochthon passes away,' she says, '... the settler takes his place as the new (and superior) indigene' (117).

Other scholars have tended, rather, to analyse such processes in terms of settler indigenisation. Literary critic Terry Goldie (1989) provides one of the earliest analyses of indigenisation in settler nation-states in his analysis of representations of indigenes in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand literature. Goldie (1993:unpaginated) defines indigenisation as the process 'through which the "settler" population attempts to become as though indigenous, as though "born" of the land'. Concomitant with this social production of indigenisation is a political production: the land 'as a natural nation' (1993:unpaginated). Processes of indigenisation are attempts to satisfy the 'impossible necessity' 'to become "native," to belong here' (1989:13).

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffen (2002:135) have also identified indigenisation as one part of the tension in postcolonial settler identity: a tension that arises between 'the backward-looking impotence of exile and the forward-looking

impetus to indigeneity' (135). These tensions, they assert, are part of the process through which settlers come to terms with establishing their lives in new landscapes using imported cultural practices and languages and applying them in often contrary conditions to those in which the practices and languages arose.

Most recently David Pearson (2002) has argued that in Canada, New Zealand and Australia citizenship is 'best conceptualized and described by examining the linked processes of ... the aboriginalization (of aboriginal minorities), the ethnification (of immigrant minorities) and the indigenization (of settler majorities)' (990). For Pearson, indigenisation represents a move from a settler to a post-settler position which signifies detachment from the British motherland and identification as a "native" of a new land, a move from 'home there' to 'home here' (1004). Pearson argues that the interlinked processes of Aboriginalisation, ethnification and indigenisation, 'reflecting a tripartite relationship of power between indigenes, settlers and 'others'', became prominent from the 1970s onwards (1004). During this time Britain moved towards the European Union, while Australia, New Zealand and Canada concentrated on involvement in their own regional re-alignments, including increased regional, specifically Asian, migration (1004–5).

The parallels and resonances between the process of settler indigenisation and what Alonso calls the cultural *state* of cultural autochthony are clear in these various accounts. It may well be that what Alonso describes as a state is the outcome of the process of settler indigenisation. Both involve transformations of the imaginary of the colonist/settler in terms of cultural and spatial identity. Both occur in the tension arising between exile and belonging, past and

future. Both represent the colonists break with the motherland through "birth" in a new land, despite the obvious continuities in the cultural, economic and political relationship.

My interest in autochthony is in its implication of a relationship with place, especially of human co-existence in place rather than the appropriation of an Indigenous identity. Autochthony implies a necessary connection with a place, and the analysis of settler belonging in terms of white "autochthony" has the potential to disrupt that necessary (and typically exclusive) connection. In doing so a more inclusive politics and ethics of being in place might be possible.

### **Settler Indigenisation, White "Autochthony" and Settler Discourses of Belonging**

Of the scholarship engaging with settler indigenisation in Australia, the most relevant to the arguments in this paper is the work of Pal Ahluwalia (2001), because of his analysis of language. Language is both a social product and productive of social orders and provides an insight into the operation of white "autochthony".

Ahluwalia notes that in Australia the category "aboriginal native" was used to disenfranchise Aborigines from citizenship rights but also prepared a conceptual space for the emergence of the settler as "native" (2001:64). Ahluwalia draws on Chesterman and Galligan's discussion of Australian late-nineteenth century definitions of aboriginal and native. Whereas "native" typically signified indigenous populations throughout the British Empire, in Australia "aboriginal" 'was used to refer to [indigenous populations], often in terms of 'blood'; [while "native" referred] to place of birth' (1997:87). "Aboriginal native" refers, therefore, to an Aborigine. On the other hand 'the word native,' Anthony Trol-

lope observes from his travels in Australia during 1871 and 1872, 'is almost universally applied to white colonists born in Australia' (1967:101). Native, the unmarked form, represents the settler. Aborigines required marking out from the naturalised white natives to the nascent nation as 'aboriginal natives'.

Trollope may well have noted the use of native in the title of the Australian Natives' Association (ANA) formed in 1872. The ANA was an Australian form of the "native societies" that, Terry Goldie observes, 'existed in [Canada, New Zealand and Australia] in the late nineteenth century, societies to which no non-white, no matter how native, need have applied' (1989:13). In Australia, the ANA was a patriotic and friendly society initially formed in 1871 for the protection of the interests of 'Melbourne Natives'. It later expanded to include 'Victorian Natives' and by 1872 had opened membership to Australian natives, calling itself the Australian Natives' Association (Menadue n.d.: 6, 8, 12). Membership was conditional on being male, white and born in Australia—three conditions the ANA imposed in order to be declared 'native-born' (Menadue n.d. 7; Blackton 1958:40).

Pal Ahluwalia concludes:

The idea that white colonists born in Australia were natives whilst the indigenous population were not was an important one. It was an idea that went to the heart of the manner in which the continent was settled. The myth of *terra nullius* was dependent upon the non-recognition of the local population and the 'indigen-isation' of their white conquerors (2001:64–5).

Proposing an Australian response to Mamdani's postcolonial African question, 'When does a settler become a native?' Ahluwalia asserts 'this occurred when white colonists were locally-born'

(Mamdani 1998:251; Ahluwalia 2001:66). The idea of the settler as native or native-born continues to recirculate in Australian discussions of relationships to the land. For example, Peter Read (2000:Ch. 5) explores songs expressive of the non-Indigenous attachment to the land in a chapter of *Belonging* entitled 'Singing the native-born'. Allaine Cerwonka (2004:3) critically examines 'the processes by which [non-Indigenous] people territorialise the nation' in her book entitled *Native to the Nation*.

In my research, I have found a similar language structure to the "aboriginal native"/"native" formation in operation amongst the locally-born at the local level. This local cultural form is made accessible through an analysis of the language of "the local" in Lismore's regional daily newspaper *The Northern Star*.

In grammatical terms the word local is an adjective which is usually accompanied by a noun to form a noun group (Sinclair 1990:2–4). The adjective "local" classifies the noun, typically in terms of pertaining to a place. A local person is therefore a person somehow connected with a place. When we talk about a local or the locals, however, the noun drops from the noun group. This is the substantive form of the adjective where the adjective local, a classifier of nouns, takes on substance and performs the additional work of the noun. That is, the noun-local does the work of referring to a thing and its place in one breath. "Are you a local?"

This question brings people and place and identity together seamlessly. In the regional town of Lismore that has relied on extractive and rural industries for its wealth, predicated upon dispossession of Bundjalung peoples, it may be no surprise that issues of race become embedded within the definition of the lo-

als: of who specifically the locals can be.

In the naturalised form, the locals of Lismore are always white. People and place and identity are brought together: a white people in a white place that requires no further explanation. Identity as white need not be specified.

Within the white local place of Lismore it is Aborigines that require particularising and marking. Unlike the locals in general, the noun-locals, Aborigines must be marked and not be included amongst the unmarked. In an invariable practice in *The Northern Star* the substantive noun-local reverts to the adjective when speaking of Aborigines. In the adjectival form "local" is a modifier that relates an object to its physical place. Thus Bundjalung artist Digby Moran is reported as a 'local indigenous artist' who teaches 'local [Goori] kids' about 'their local culture' (Anonymous 2003).<sup>6</sup> This passage is careful not to confuse categories of locals: those marked and those unmarked. Aborigines are always adjective-locals while only settlers can be termed noun-locals.

In a mirror of the national language of the "aboriginal native"/"native", in Lismore the paradox is that the locals are non-Indigenous and the Aborigines are not locals. In effect, settlers have installed themselves as the locals, as white "autochthons". The process of "indigenisation" that Ahluwalia and others have identified is productive at the local and national scales: productive of an autochthonous settler imaginary (Castoriadis 1997:7–8, O'Loughlin 2003:131–132).

### **Founding White "Autochthony"**

White "autochthony" is a type of cultural autochthony that collapses Australian settler culture and nature, people and

place into a complex of material and imaginary relations between people, peoples and land. In Australia it takes its particular form by articulating cultural autochthony with practices and social orders transported from England and located within the Australian context.

As Pal Ahluwalia (2001:65) notes, indigenisation is part of the colonial foundation of Australia upon empty land or *terra nullius*. *Terra nullius* grants settlers first possessor status and provides the initial conditions for the emergence of white "autochthony". It is against the autochthonous status of Aborigines that the settler nation legitimates itself by claiming its own "autochthonous" status. Cultural autochthony articulates, then, with a regime of property ownership to legitimate exclusive rights to ownership. The mixing of soil with settler blood through colonial "pioneering" work also legitimated these property rights. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes, in Australia the non-Indigenous sense of belonging is 'derived from ownership as understood within the logic of capital; and it mobilizes the legend of the pioneer, 'the battler', in its self-legitimization' (2003:23). Through this work an autochthonous settler identity comes into being along with *terra localis*—the local-land of the settler locals and the nation-country of the settler natives.

Recently Genevieve Lloyd has argued that the philosophy of Kant and Locke 'come together to rationalize European presence as embodying the most fully human way of relating to the land' (2000:34). It was Locke in particular that brought landed property and autonomous identity together through labour. He writes: '...Labour, in the Beginning, gave a *Right of Property* wherever any one was pleased to employ it, upon what was common', thus

'[a]s much Land as a Man Tills, Plants, Improves, Cultivates, and can use the Product of, so much is his *Property*. He by his labour does, as it were, inclose it from the Common' (Locke 1988:11§32 and 11§45 [emphases in original]).

Echoing Locke in a chapter called 'Singing the Native-Born' of his book *Belonging*, Peter Read makes the link between the production of settler identity and working the land. He says:

My feeling is growing that the once implied and now explicit Aboriginal moral claim to the land perhaps is answered, not by contentious or aggressive assertion, but by a statement of countering values. ...The moral justification is evolving through a three-way relationship between a man, his work and the land' (2000:117).

White "autochthony" provides a reading of this three-way relationship. From the mixing of sweat and soil emerges the autochthonous birth of the pioneer. Through ideological descent subsequent settlers are "born" from the pioneers.<sup>7</sup> This is the ideology of the 'Australian type'—a culturally autochthonous form of whiteness that emerges with the production of the Australian national soil (Ahluwalia 2001:65).

This autochthonous form of belonging both locally and nationally is further strengthened through the articulation of cultural autochthony with 'born and bred' kinship. This English kinship system 'is made up of a code of conduct (what people do and say they do) and ideas of shared substance (symbolized in idioms of blood and increasingly genes)' (Edwards 2000:28): thus "born"—the 'immutable place of birth'—and "bred"—'the effects of a variable upbringing' (Edwards 2000:84). In the site of Edwards' research, the town of Bacup near Manchester being born and bred embraces two significant aspects of English kinship.... [I]t is not enough to be born

in Bacup, one also needs to be reared in Bacup. The experience of being brought up in the town is said to be influential: it moulds a particular kind of character (2000:84).

White "autochthony" finds its particular form in the articulation of cultural autochthony with exclusive private ownership of property and born and bred kinship. Through these articulations not only is the connection of land and settler considered natural—a necessary connection—but it is made into an exclusive form of autochthony. There is no room for a multi-local sense of place-based belonging—of having one's ties in more than one place, nor is it possible to envisage multiple autochthonies arising in one place—of peoples' coexisting with varying senses of place-based belonging. The ideas of being a local, and of being a native born to the nation, are often expressions of exclusive, white "autochthony". As the locals of Cronulla demanded, 'Respect locals or piss off!' (TCN 9 2005). Or as the famous rock at Byron Bay, 40 kilometers from Lismore, reads: 'LOCALS ONLY'. Locals only: only those who are born (here) and bred (conform to the "Australian type") belong here.

### **Towards An Ethics Of Location**

To conclude I would like to make a few brief comments on how autochthony might open onto an ethics of location for the settler locals.

A number of threads crowd in at this point in somewhat of an interconnected jumble. To begin the unravelling, then, with a list:

- Firstly, to strife and reconciliation. This paper is set against a background of investigating local Australian whiteness, an investigation that began at the end of ten official years of Reconciliation in 2000. It addresses 'a

White problem' not "the Aboriginal problem" (Pearl Gibbs in Fox 1983:41). It is a response to a problem of settler relations with Aborigines. This is the background of my discussion for an ethics of location that unconceals claims of white "autochthony".

- Rather than proposing that settler Australians have a lack of connection to the land as some commentators do, I propose that the opposite is the case. I would argue that all places are constituted through relations and that settler-land relations are in manifest, if problematic abundance. Being a local is part of that abundance, so too, being native-born.
- 'You think that it is the bird who is free. You are deceived; it is the flower.' (Jabès 1972:115) Might being a local be always inherently violent? Through claims of white "autochthony", I think so. But being a local of itself? I am not so sure. I write this at a time of theory (in cultural studies amongst other locales) that I perceive to value mobility and instantaneity over emplacement and slowness. I find myself reacting against this. A white local's reaction maybe. A reaction directed towards not disregarding the care of the locals for place and each other, but of becoming aware of the limits to that care.
- White "autochthony" serves to commence an analysis and critique of settler belonging; an idea from which to reimagine the 'imagined and [ ] real geography' of the born and bred locals and the born and bred natives to the nation (Entrikin 2002:24). Keeping white "autochthony" in-mind is important as a reminder of what should be rejected in

reformulations of democracy, nation and citizen. White "autochthony" is something to think about and to think against.

And to begin again; this time to begin a narrative. I take note of Entrikin's assertion that democracy has both an 'imagined and a real geography' (Entrikin 2002:24). Imagined geographies are no less real in their effects. White "autochthony", I propose, is part of the imagined geography of Australian settler democracy that requires critical scrutiny when moving towards any ethics of location.

Autochthony, as *bodenständigkeit*, with its association with the German national socialist philosophy of "blood and soil", indicates the perils of an autochthonist cultural discourse (Heidegger 1966:48–49; Bambach 2003). Autochthony can be the basis of cultural forms that exclude in the most brutal and unjust ways. In ancient Athens itself, autochthony as a basis for citizenship, came under question. It was a concept at odds with Athens vision of itself as an open city, as a city of welcome (Saxonhouse 1986:256 and 273). This was particularly the case as it expanded into an Empire that looked towards the sea rather than to the land. Thus in Euripides' *Ion* the relationship between autochthonous citizenship and the non-citizen status of slaves, women and resident strangers in the city is explored.

The most vocal contemporary critics of autochthony, Doreen Massey (2005:189) and Emmanuel Levinas (1998:117–118) for example, call for its abandonment in all cultural forms because of its exclusionary nature. Levinas insists that autochthony is a triumph of ontology over ethical relations with others. For him, home, as a figure for place, must be opened to welcome the stranger (Levinas 1969:168–174).

Derrida takes a similar line, but notes the necessity of a site for roots. For him it is the nature of the site that is the issue. He notes that there is freedom in the site '[p]rovided this Site is not a site, an enclosure, a place of exclusion, a province or a ghetto' (Derrida 1993:66). More than a geographic site, this is a social site as Derrida's language indicates. Freedom in the site of roots is dependent on openness, an openness that includes openness to roots, multiple roots.

An ethics of location, must somehow promote the interruption of notions of white "autochthony", to open the site of the settler clearing and resist the idea of one single taproot into the earth. It would name the way cultural autochthony conceals movements and exclusions of people that occur in the name of being local, of always having been here, of having installed our-settler-selves as 'local' or 'original'. It insists on an opening of the local as a site of welcome.

Interrupting white "autochthony" does not devalue settlers' relations to place, or call for rootlessness. Instead it is directed towards recognising as a settler, autochthonist tendencies in local and national Australian culture that foreclose and exclude how we imagine our co-existence in place with others. I would advocate that being a local is an important aspect of our relations with the world, but I would also call on the settler locals to commence a new work that recognises and dismantles our claims to autochthonist foundations.

### Author Note

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### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> I use the word *kuntri* here to denote the relationships Indigenous Australians have with the land, compared with the 'Western' relationships with the land evoked by the common spelling *country*. My thanks to Glenn Woods at Gnibi, Southern Cross University's College of Indigenous Australian Peoples for this insight.

<sup>2</sup> See Garbutt (2003) for an initial exploration of this questioning.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of these issues see: Loraux (1993), Loraux (2000), Saxonhouse (1986), and Walsh (1978).

<sup>4</sup> The ancient Athenian myth of autochthony begins with the first king of Athens, Cecrops. Cecrops emerged from the earth itself and bore the form of his unusual birth: 'above the waist he was a man, below a curling snake' (Parker 1986:193). Cecrops' line proved discontinuous and was eventually overthrown by Erichthonius. Autochthonous Erichthonius was born under different circumstances and unlike the semi-serpentine Cecrops, was wholly human and produced a continuing line of kings. Erichthonius, also called Erechtheus, is therefore portrayed as the autochthon of the Athenian *polis*. Erichthonius was a male child born without a mother when Hephaestus, the Olympian blacksmith, lustfully and unsuccessfully pursued grey-eyed

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Athena. Just evading rape, she wiped Hephaestus' sperm from her leg on to the ground. Ge, or Gaia, the earth, gave birth to a child she handed to Athena, who acted as mother to Erichthonius. The version of the myth related here comes from Parker 1986. See also: Loraux (1993:39) and Peradotto (1977).

<sup>5</sup> Clearly ancient Athenians were not claiming first possession in the Lockean terms Harris discusses, however, their claim of moral priority as the first possessors is echoed by Locke.

<sup>6</sup> The word *goori* is used throughout the Bundjalung nation for Aboriginal people.

<sup>7</sup> On ideological and genealogical myths of national descent see Smith (2000:1394-1395).