

## I'm Not Racist, But . . .

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# I'm Not Racist, But . . .

A COLLECTION OF SOCIAL OBSERVATIONS

ANITA HEISS



CAMBRIDGE

PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING  
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge PDO CB1 5JX United Kingdom

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First published 2007

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Lightning Source

Typeset in Swift 9.5 / 13

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ISBN 978 1 84471 316 5 paperback

Salt Publishing Ltd gratefully acknowledges  
the financial assistance of Arts Council England



1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

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## Acknowledgements



# Apologies

What do want me to do with your apology?

With your lifetime of entrenched racism  
wrapped up nicely into one word  
“Sorry”

What do you want me,  
to do  
with your  
off-loaded baggage  
once your  
stories  
have rolled  
off your tongue  
and fallen  
on my  
overworked  
tired ears?

How do *I* respond  
as *you*  
walk away  
shoulders free  
from the weight  
of guilt,  
mind clear.

How do I process  
What is your  
solo apology  
but the 15th  
I've heard  
today.

*You're sorry! You're sorry!! You're sorry!!!*

Well not half as fucken sorry  
as I am  
at having to listen to you  
in my office  
at writers festivals  
at dinner parties  
after lectures  
at the bus stop  
in the library  
anywhere *you*  
feel like talking  
to me.

I am not a priest,  
I do not  
want to hear  
the confessions  
of your  
of hideous  
family deeds.

I am not a social worker,  
I cannot  
offer you  
the therapy  
you so obviously  
need.

I am not your mother,  
so I

will not  
nurture you  
unconditionally  
while you  
find  
your new leaf  
to turn  
over.

Please don't see  
my brown skin  
and smile  
as an invitation  
for you  
to explain away  
your life  
of privilege  
your complacency  
in allowing  
ongoing oppression  
of Indigenous people  
in this country.

I do not want to hear  
about your  
*spiritual experiences*  
at Uluru  
or how  
you've never  
had the opportunity  
to hug  
a blackfella.

I am not on call 24/7  
to be available  
when *you*  
have that  
sudden realisation  
that recognition  
that yes *you*,  
just may  
have inadvertently,  
endorsed racist policies  
and beliefs  
all your  
life.

It's not my problem,  
or my  
inspiration,  
or of  
interest to me.

How ignorant,  
self-centred  
are you?  
To think  
I would  
want to  
hear it?

It's *your* healing  
—not mine

And no,  
we are

not on  
the same  
journey—  
Yours  
is of self-realisation.  
Mine  
is of self-preservation  
as you  
continue to  
wear  
me  
down.

No, it is *I* who is sorry!

CANBERRA 2004

## Aboriginal Studies

You 'study' us  
Observe us  
Analyse us  
Write about us  
You philosophise  
    and scrutinize us  
Your lecture about  
    and separate out  
You debate and speculate,  
    evaluate and investigate.

But who is it for,  
    If not for us?  
When most of us  
    can't even read what you write  
And don't even  
    know your words are in print?  
And your royalty and lecture fees  
    benefit only you?

Do you really do it  
    to educate others?  
Really?  
Now come on,  
Seriously—  
Be honest,  
You enjoy being  
    the Patriarch or Matriarch  
    of your chosen field—  
The study of Aborigines.

SYDNEY 2004

## Anthropology is . . .

Supposed to be the study  
Of behaviour  
Of social relationships  
Of the physical  
Of the social  
Of the cultural . . .  
Development of human beings  
*Human beings*  
Not just Aborigines  
And other 'primitive' societies  
But of *all* human beings.

But why don't I ever meet anthropologists  
who study **white** people?

SYDNEY, 2004

## Who's Truth

You say you want the truth  
about Indigenous lives,  
Of our reality.  
But your own reality means  
You can't handle it  
Aren't ready for it  
Can't digest it  
Prefer to dissect it  
Or rather reject it.  
Because it's not *your* truth.  
So, in order to really know *my* truth  
You may just have to adjust your own concepts  
And definitions of what you know to be 'true'.

SYDNEY, 2004

## Different Lives, Different Values

Them

Us

Colonised

Coloniser

Give it

Take it

Observed

Observer

Politicised

Apathetic

Aggressive

Complacent

Live it

Study it

Collective

Hierarchy

Community

Individual

Cooperation

Competition

Culture

Capitalism

SYDNEY, 2004

# Indigenous Intellectuals

In ebony towers

*On red earth*

In UN forums

*At community meetings*

In Gucci suits

*Ochred up*

Talking strategy

*Performing ceremony*

Published academic

*Memory man*

Regardless of

where you are

how you pass on knowledge

You are *both* Indigenous intellectuals

CANBERRA 2004

I don't hate you, but . . .

I don't hate you

For your ignorance

I don't hate you

For your entrenched racism

I don't even hate you

For supporting government policies of cultural genocide

I don't hate you, but . . .

I do want you to at least

Embrace your own dysfunction

Acknowledge it

And then analyse it—

Just as you analyse me

Then I want you to

Research it

Observe it,

Write about it,

And then maybe even preach about it,

Just as you do about me.

No, I don't hate you, but . . .

I do wonder about you sometimes.

CANBERRA, 2004

## My Other

You are 'my other'  
But you do not steal my gaze  
Or consume my thoughts  
I am not preoccupied  
    with trying to understand  
    what its like—  
    to be you  
    to be white  
    to be the majority  
    to be the so-called definition of civility  
    how it must feel to assume the superior role.

And I do not ask you—  
    what it's like to be non-Indigenous  
    to have the freedom to choose  
    to be politically active  
    or to choose to participate  
    in the reconciliation process.

I do not ask you to tell me—  
    the entire history of your society  
    or the customs of your ancestors  
    or why *your* people can't seem to agree on anything.

I do not ask these questions not only because—  
    they may make you feel uncomfortable  
    but because it is important for me  
    to determine *my own role*  
    *my own place*  
    in this world that we share.

So I wish you would start—  
asking yourself the same questions  
you ask of me  
and focus  
more on the 'self'  
rather than 'the other'.

SYDNEY, 2004

## My 10 Point Plan for a better Australia

1. Become a Republic
2. Bob Brown for President
3. A national representative Indigenous political voice
4. Develop and implement self-government models for Indigenous communities
5. Grant awaiting Native title claims
6. Put John Howard, Amanda Vanstone and Phillip Ruddock on a leaky boat
7. Release asylum seekers in detention
8. Indigenous Studies compulsory for K-12
9. Replace anthropology department in universities with Indigenous Studies departments
10. Enforce protocols for behaviour for question time in Parliament

## Ode to my mother

She inspires and never tires  
But always conspires—  
    to motivate  
    to procreate  
    to maintain  
    and sustain  
    to nurture  
    and protect  
    always direct  
    what is left of Koori-dom.

An audience  
    with the Pope,  
    gives her hope  
    that the future  
    will be better  
    than the past.

Her smile  
    lights the universe  
    wrinkled hands  
    invade her purse  
    and she gives,  
    and gives  
    and gives  
    and gives

Black curls  
    frame a face  
    full of grace  
    and dignity.