

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission

From: Simon Katterl

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Submission:

I write not as a non-Indigenous cis-man, not with any strong belief that my views or experiences add to what has come before me, but as an expression of my commitment and solidarity with the work of Yoorrook Justice Commission.

I grew up in FNQ on the lands of the Yirrganydji people, but I didn't know who they were. That it was no longer theirs and that I didn't know that was an injustice. I went to school, with so many Murri and Torres Strait Islander mates.

I remember a primary school friend, James, telling me about his culture and how proud he was. I thought it was 'cool', but didn't understand the significance of it, and probably didn't validate both his pride and show the humility a settler on that land needed to. That was an injustice.

Growing up as a teenager, in a progressive family, I had coded racist beliefs about 'moving on' and other responsabilising narratives (not from my parents but broader influences - ahem, Cairns Post). That was an injustice.

My actions were both a product and producer of colonisation. After living in Meanjin for 6 years and in East Timor, another nation impacted by colonisation, I came to Naarm in 2015. I now work in mental health due to my own lived experience, and I'm still learning how to locate myself in this work, on this land. I remember coming to the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, 'wanting' to 'collaborate' on work together on a project that I ran, but I didn't have a pre-existing relationship.

I only later reflected, through the generous advice of other Blak voices, that this wasn't the way to go. Relationship first. Last year myself and others, including First Nations people who have used the mental health system, worked on a project to advise the Victorian Government on how to formally acknowledge harm in the mental health system.

In it we drew on research to identify six possible elements to a meaningful apology:

- Expression of shame
- Acknowledgement of inappropriate conduct and violation of rules
- Sympathy towards the victim
- An explicit disavowal (disapproval) of the previous conduct
- A commitment to pursuing correct behaviour, and
- Penance and an offer of restitution

I use that as a personal lens through which I try to respond to my own failures, including those above. I have shame for my failures to respect this land and the people on it, and what that says about the person I thought I was and want to be.

I acknowledge that this breaches both my own image of who I think I should be, but also the cultural laws and lores of First Nations people. My actions are just a small, but cumulative set of harms and injustices that have impacted First Nations people on this land for over 200 years.

How I deal with that shame is to disavow it and put it behind me to make me better for others going forward. I have and will work harder to love the land I'm on and put relationships first. My restitution comes in the form of rent and hopefully the solidarity I provide in supporting First Nations justice in the work and advocacy I do, and organisations I am part of. Wherever I can,

I will support the work of Yoorrook, First People's Assembly and the broader truth and justice processes in Victoria and abroad. I have provided separate evidence on the failures of the Victorian Mental Health System on human rights, and the potentials this might have for injustice to First Nations people on this land.

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