RUNNING HEAD: ETHICS OF GOVERNMENT-COMMISSIONED RESEARCH
IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Research informed by theory reformed by practice: Negotiating ethical government-commissioned research at the interface of Western bureaucratic systems and indigenous communities

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*I would emphasize the importance of retaining the connections between the
academy of researchers, the diverse indigenous communities, and the larger
political struggle of decolonization because the disconnection of that
relationship reinforces the colonial approach to education as divisive and
destructive.*

Smith, 2005, p. 88

Introduction

What happens when, in the process of conducting government-commissioned research
into education in indigenous communities, one of the foundational principles of doing
ethical research (namely, including a local indigenous collaborator(s) on the research
team) is rejected outright by the indigenous community members themselves? And
what if the timeframes and resources allocated for the research don't allow for most
indigenous community members' views and understandings about education to be
properly translated across multiple lines of difference, including culture, language,
gender, generation and race? Indeed, what if the research is requested and funded by a
government agency (ostensibly acting as proxy for the local indigenous education
committee), rather than directly initiated by the community itself? How is it possible
for research into indigenous education to proceed ethically from such a basis? And
how would any researcher who considered herself ethical get involved in something
that seemed so questionable from the outset?

At the beginning of 2008, four white female academics embarked on a project to
conduct a government-commissioned review into education across a group of closely
related Indigenous communities on Australian Aboriginal Lands[1]. Others (both white
and Indigenous) joined us along the way. But this is not the story of how we began
with an ideological and ideal-inspired research program, and were forced to
compromise or abandon, one by one, our high-minded ethical principles. We were
well aware from the moment we received our first request to tender for the contract
that, in terms of adhering to the ideals of 'ethical indigenous research,' this project
was fraught, constrained by the institutional requirements of government and the
(narrowly conceived) vision of bureaucrats. But we also knew that, in practice,
'research' is never ideal, and must always instead be both enabled and constrained by
the time, budgets, willingness, languages, pre-existing knowledge and assumptions,
and so forth, of those involved.

Broadly we did hold ideals for conducting research in and with indigenous
communities. We believed this research should be decolonizing; conducted with the
historical understanding that, "research from many indigenous perspectives is so
deeply embedded in colonization that it has been regarded as a tool only of
colonization and not as a potential tool for self-determination and development"
(Smith, 2005, p. 87). And so we sought to conduct our research on/with indigenous
peoples in a way that challenged its colonial elements and maintained at the forefront

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[1] Since the review report has yet to be released to the public, we are under contractual constraints to
maintain the confidentiality of the government agency, Aboriginal Lands and communities with and for
whom we conducted the research. Their names and other identifying information are therefore
excluded from this manuscript.

an ethic of community accountability, involvement, engagement and relationships. We worried conducting a government-commissioned review within a six-month time frame would overly compromise our ideals for conducting research in indigenous contexts, indeed even if we could call such a review 'research.'

Yet if we followed Smith in considering that indigenous research is only 'ethical' when it has an underlying or explicit aim to contribute to "a transformative agenda that moves indigenous communities to someplace better than where they are now," then we could not overlook the importance and relevance of (and therefore the opportunity to do) government-commissioned reviews and other consultancy work (Smith, 2005, p. 88). As with the *Little Children are Sacred* (Wild & Anderson, 2007) report, the impetus for the controversial NT Intervention, we knew government-commissioned reviews are potentially powerful mechanisms for change in indigenous communities (whether for good or ill or both). We believed our collective experience in indigenous education and research would result in a critical appraisal of the education system and would make hard-hitting, but vital, recommendations for improving the education and lives of the indigenous peoples we were commissioned to review/research.

With this in mind we proceeded to tender for, and eventually decided to accept, the review contract.

What is presented here, then, is our analysis of what happened before, during and after the review. It is our story of how we grappled with and troubled over the extent to which our government-commissioned research in indigenous communities was (sometimes) justifiable as ethical. Our aim is to highlight the complexity of negotiating the ethics of government-commissioned reviews and, under the assumption governments will continue to commission reviews and researchers will do them, draw on our experience and analysis to suggest additional ethical practices that may need to be taken-up for government-commissioned researchers to conduct ethical-as-possible research under such highly constrained conditions.

Literature Review: Codes of Conduct and Ethics of Decolonizing Research
There are currently two (overlapping) systems of ethics to which we considered ourselves accountable. They are referred to as 'top-down' and 'community-up,' or 'decolonizing,' ways of ensuring and 'doing' ethics in research (Cram, 2001; Martin, 2008; Smith, 2005). During our review we negotiated both ethical systems.

Top-down Ethics
Institutional ethics boards are top-down ethics systems that govern research based on (slowly) evolving codes of conduct. They establish minimum standards for conducting ethical research. In 2006, the National Ethics Application Form (NEAF) was released to the Australian public and has now become the form most often used by Australian university ethics committees (NHMRC, 2008). The NEAF includes a section dedicated to indigenous research, which contains questions about a) whether and how indigenous people will be consulted before and during the research about priorities, ethics and output and whether this continuous consultation engages the values and existing processes within the participating communities, b) whether and what roles indigenous people will have in the implementation of the research, including whether any of the researchers/investigators are indigenous and c) the

extent to which the research is reciprocal, reflects the needs of the community and is likely to produce an outcome of benefit to the community (NEAF, 2008).

The NEAF's indigenous related questions were developed around the NHMRC's (2003) guidelines for conducting indigenous research. The guidelines are based on six values agreed upon by indigenous participants at a workshop held in Ballarat in 2002:

1) Spirit and Integrity
2) Reciprocity
3) Respect
4) Equality
5) Survival and Protection
6) Responsibility (NHMRC, 2003)

Another group influential in establishing codes for the conduct of indigenous research is the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Studies who have developed *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* (2000):

1) Consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding
2) Respect, recognition and involvement
3) Benefits, outcomes, and agreement.

Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) are responsible for assessing research proposals for the extent to which they meet minimum established guidelines and codes of conduct. Ethics committees have been critiqued for being only as good or effective as their institutional members (Cheek, 2005), for failing to appreciate emerging methodologies often required in indigenous settings (Smith, 2005), for narrowly focusing on institutional liability (Cumiskey, 1998) and for failing to reflect on their own colonizing processes (Denzin, 2005).

An easy criticism of top-down ethical guidelines and processes is that they assume a universal understanding; that everyone in every place agrees on their meanings (Smith, 2005). While the NEAF asks researchers to detail how they will consult indigenous communities on the proposed research and its ethics, HRECs often have no way of determining whether the consultations themselves are conducted ethically, i.e., based on ethical ways of being in indigenous communities that may or may not be understood in the same way as in Western ones. More covertly, institutional codes reflect and reify their own power. These codes proscribe the rights of the researched, at least structurally denying them agency to determine their own rights; it is only to the institution that the researcher and the researched may appeal (Martin, 2008). It is following these criticisms that indigenous researchers such as Bishop (2005), Martin (2008) and Smith (1999, 2005) have advocated a 'community-up' approach to establishing ethics in indigenous research.

Community-up, Decolonizing Ethics
Community-up ethics are (appropriately) more difficult to define than top-down ethics, because they are not a set of codes or guidelines that establish minimum standards for research, although they may eventuate in such a document within a research project (see Martin, 2008; Smith, 2005 for examples). Rather, community-up or decolonizing ethics are ideal *practices* in which every step of the research should aim to trouble, dismantle and/or reverse power differentials evident in the research relationship(s) that traditionally reverberate colonial power. Therefore doing community-up research is necessarily participatory, relationship-building and

critically reflective, including processes such as critical reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Bishop, 2005; Smith, 2008), co-evaluation of power relations prior to and during research activity (Bishop, 2005) and negotiation of local ethics to which the researcher should be accountable (Martin, 2008).

The importance of local negotiation, especially government-commissioned research whose aims and outcomes are often dictated at a far distance from local indigenous communities, cannot be understated in decolonizing research. And the need for (and difficulty of) this negotiation increases with the amount of social and cultural distance between those carrying out the research and those participating in the research. Certainly the distance between the white, Western university professor and residents of an Australian Aboriginal Land community would be expected to be quite large. This is why most indigenous researchers argue that, "for indigenous and other marginalized communities, research ethics is at a very basic level about establishing, maintaining, and nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships" (Smith, 2005, p. 97). The point is not that indigenous people are somehow inherently more interested in relationships and community, even as this may be the case when compared to Western emphasis on progress and the individual, rather it is to emphasize the hard and necessary work to bridge cultural and social distance that is the responsibility of the researcher.

We do not want to make too much of the top-down/community-up distinction; in many ways the new NEAF seeks to institutionalize the community-up negotiation and relationship ethics that have emerged in recent indigenous critiques of research (Bishop, 2005; Smith, 1999, 2005; Martin, 2008). We also worry with others (e.g., Smith, 2005) that to identify community-up ethics as inherently indigenous and decolonizing and top-down institutional ethics as inherently Western and colonizing neatly divides an ethical space that is far more muddied and complicated in practice.

Yet, in practice throughout our government-commissioned review, we were confronted with both systems of research ethics, continually finding ourselves challenged by and challenging and often (re)negotiating their minimum standards and ideals.

The Government-Commissioned Review of Education, Work and Training
We were commissioned by an Australian state government to conduct a review of education, work and training in a 5 (out of a total 9) inter-connected communities on Aboriginal Lands. As stated in our final report, the review was guided by the following research questions:
1) What are the outcomes, strengths, and challenges of primary and secondary education in the Aboriginal Lands?
2) What are the outcomes, strengths, and challenges of VET/training in the Aboriginal Lands?
3) What are the outcomes, strengths, and challenges of work and pathways to work in the Aboriginal Lands?
4) How do the Aboriginal Land schools compare to like schools in other states and territories on measures of student participation and achievement?
While the review was commissioned by a state government, an indigenous governing body for education on the Aboriginal Lands did (eventually) authorise the review. Indeed, as we discovered during the course of our fieldwork, the review was initially

called for by a powerful and well-educated indigenous community member who was dissatisfied with the education system both on and off the Aboriginal Lands.

The duration of the review, from start to finish, was 6 months. In practice this meant we spent 2 months planning the review, 2 months conducting fieldwork and 2 months writing the review. The review timeline is presented in Table 1.

Review Activity	Dates
Plan review – Establish methods, plan field site visits, generate and translate interview questions, write consent forms/letters/informational materials, revise research plans based on committee feedback.	Weeks 1-8
Obtain review approval – HREC ethics committee and Aboriginal Lands educational committee.	Weeks 4-8
Conduct review – Conduct over 250 semi-structured interviews with those involved in delivering and receiving education, work and training for indigenous people on the Aboriginal Lands (this included those services provided in major cities off the Aboriginal Lands).	Weeks 8-16
Write-up review – Analyse and write-up the review findings, submit review to state government for approval	Weeks 16-32
Present findings – Aboriginal Lands educational committee	Week 32

The fieldwork was conducted by 4 white female university researchers, one indigenous researcher and one indigenous translator with relational ties to the Aboriginal Lands we were commissioned to review.

In terms of institutional and decolonizing ethics, we wrote on the NEAF application that the research was requested and approved by indigenous people living on the Aboriginal Lands; interview questions and presentations would be translated into the dominant language spoken on the Aboriginal Lands; that we would employ a local indigenous person as a co-researcher and interpreter; that we would seek the opinions and 'voices' of indigenous participants at every level of the review; that we would seek to build and maintain reciprocal and respectful relationships; that an indigenous researcher would be involved in data collection, analysis and writing of the report; and that the interim and final results would be presented to the indigenous community members for approval.

Yet in practice, throughout the review, adhering to these plans was complicated. Added to that was the constant nagging question of whether or not our research was conducted with a decolonizing ethic: Were our research processes sufficiently participatory and relationship-building? Did our on-the-ground interactions

challenge, reify or (most likely) both challenge and reify colonial power? Most confronting were the instances when upholding the ideals of decolonizing research went against institutional ethical codes or, conversely, when adhering to institutional codes resulted in compromising decolonizing research ideals. We are not claiming our instance of doing government-commissioned research in indigenous communities is exemplary. As do all researchers, we made many compromises along the way. However, we do feel an analysis of our experience informs both the ethical complexities of conducting government-commissioned research – especially at the tension between adhering to institutional codes and decolonizing ideals -- and suggests doing government-commissioned research in indigenous communities involves ethical considerations born out of its limitations that researchers tendering and conducting them ought to consider.

Analysing Ethics
The ethical analysis of our government-commissioned review began as an ongoing conversation before, during and after we 'completed' the review. This conversation was held informally on e-mail, in corridors and over coffee. Later we began to formalize the conversation, bringing with us to a series of three analysis meetings our project documents, field notes, interview transcripts and e-mails. Our analysis during those meetings sought out times when were most troubled by an ethical issue. We recorded the nature of that issue, the kinds of ethical dilemmas it posed (e.g., participation, respectful relationships and accountability), and how it was (or was not) resolved.

This analysis resulted in two instances that best exemplified the ethical struggles we experienced throughout the project. We wrote-up descriptions of these instances and, through revising the write-ups, together examined the ways codes, ideals and practice were continuously (re)negotiated in an effort to maintain the research process and outcomes as ethical endeavours.

Findings/Discussion
In this section we describe and analyse our interactions, before and after the field research was conducted, with the local Aboriginal Land education committee that exemplify the complexities of negotiating top-down ethical codes and community-up, decolonizing ethical ideals. These two interactions were intended to 1) at the beginning – obtain approval for the review and 2) at the end – disseminate the findings and obtain approval for the final report. In particular, these interactions had us re-examining ethical issues around indigenous participation, building relationships and accountability.

Meeting 1: Soliciting Approval, Participation and Building Relationships
Our first research activity in the Aboriginal Lands was to present our research plan to the Aboriginal Lands education committee for feedback and approval. This meeting was held at a local community school and was attended by Indigenous Education Workers (IEWs) and community members throughout the Aboriginal Lands. In total, approximately 40 indigenous and 10 non-indigenous persons were in attendance.

Aligning with both the NEAF standards for including indigenous researchers and our ideal of conducting participatory research, one of our requests was for one or more community members to join our team as co-researchers and interpreters. Based on a

recommendation from another researcher who had recently completed a project in one of the communities, we had one particular person in mind. Upon proposing this person we encountered some unexpected resistance that didn't seem to be solely in reaction to the person proposed, but more broadly to employing a local indigenous researcher at all. Frankly, the committee appeared insulted. "Why do we need someone to interpret what we are saying?," was the gist of the resistance to a local indigenous researcher joining out our team. We explained the importance of working with indigenous people and having a local indigenous person on the team, but the general consensus was that a local indigenous person would introduce bias into the research. As 'outsiders' we four White women were seen as more neutral and objective. Bishop (2005) suggested this is not uncommon in indigenous research where, "there are concerns that insiders are inherently biased, or that they are too close to the culture to ask critical questions" (p. 111).

The Aboriginal Land education committee's denial of a local indigenous co-researcher brought us face-to-face with our assumption that to do ethical research we must have a local indigenous community member on our research team. Our assumption was not ill-founded and, on one level, seemed to be advocated by both institutional ethics and decolonizing ethics. The HREC committee made it quite clear we would need indigenous involvement throughout the research by asking us to include an indigenous researcher on our team. And we felt a local indigenous translator was essential to assist us in bridging social distance and building respectful relationships.

Pragmatically, we knew we needed an interpreter to translate interviews as many indigenous community members did not speak English fluently (often a second or third language). If we were to conduct the research without a translator, we would risk failing to understand the depth of responses given in English and to build positive research relationships due to miscommunications. We were left quite puzzled as to an ethical course of action.

We seemed to have two options: 1) to maintain what we believed to be an ethical course and insist the committee recommend a local co-researcher and interpreter, or 2) to accept the committee's wishes and not hire a translator. The problem was, neither of these options was easily justifiable by institutional or decolonizing ethics, or a combination thereof. Below we will analyse each of these options in turn.

Option1: Insist on a co-researcher/interpreter. To insist the committee come to consensus on at least one appropriate local indigenous interpreter would have most easily maintained our commitment to upholding our institutional ethics. And, on one level, we would have upheld our ideals of conducting indigenous research by our accessing a skilled translator and co-researcher, keeping the aim of relationship-building at the forefront of our research priorities.

But this decision would have been problematic. The Aboriginal Lands education committee, no matter our suspicions about its power and autonomy from the state government department of education, is a body that represents the indigenous communities we would research. And therefore to work within existing decision-making processes and build relationships with the committee were institutional and decolonizing ethical imperatives (Bishop, 2005). Sticking to our ethical stance would

further risk imposing a moral authority; that "we know better how to conduct research in your local community than you," and reifying the very power we sought to undermine by soliciting feedback and advice on the research in the first instance. Ultimately it was these sets of concerns that led us to reject this decision.

Option 2: Do not hire a local indigenous co-researcher/interpreter. To honour the committee's wishes was, however, as problematic as ignoring them. As stated above, we ran the risk of violating both institutional ethics and the ideals of decolonizing research by conducting our review without the assistance of a local indigenous co-researcher and translator. We had been tasked by the education committee (and state government) to review education on the Aboriginal Lands, including gathering what the indigenous community thought of the education system and its services and attempting to bring together the indigenous community's hopes and dreams for the future. Our prior knowledge of the local area made us well aware that the only way we had a chance of building relationships necessary to collecting this very personal information would be through the use of a local interpreter.

Yet to honour the committee's wishes opened up a different line of thinking about our (power) relationship with the community and about the nature of relationship-building in general. Smith (2005) makes the point that institutional ethics codes are about protecting the individual research participant and not the community, which is often of greater concern when researching indigenous issues. To insist on a local indigenous translator privileges developing relationships through one-on-one interactions over building relationships between our research community and the indigenous community as represented by the Aboriginal Lands education committee. In other words, to accept the committee's wishes would be to acknowledge the importance of building a relationship between the education committee and our research group. Especially given our limited timeframe, we came to see this kind of relationships building as of far greater importance, and more easily attained, than developing one-to-one relationships during 30 minute fieldwork interviews.

What resulted. At the end of the one hour we'd been allotted to negotiate the research with the education committee, we agreed not to hire a local indigenous person to translate and research with us. Instead we later sought out and received approval to employ an indigenous translator who spoke the local language, but was far enough removed from the communities to be considered enough of an 'outsider.'

The research was conducted over the following two months. We conducted semi-structured interviews over 200 individuals, of which half were indigenous. The indigenous translator was paired with the indigenous researcher on our team and together they conducted in depth interviews with community members who were less fluent in English.

After the two months of field work we began to analyse the interviews and write-up the report. When the report was mostly completed we were asked to present the findings at the next meeting of the Aboriginal Land education committee. The purpose was for the committee to hear and discuss the preliminary findings and provide feedback so we could write the final report and recommendations. Ultimately the Aboriginal Land education committee would be responsible for approving or rejecting our report.

Meeting 2: Presenting the Findings, Accountability and Dissemination
At the second meeting we were allotted another one hour block to present and discuss our preliminary findings about education, work and training on the Aboriginal Lands. We explained that, to our eyes and those of many we interviewed, the education system was not effective, training seemed to be haphazard and little viable work opportunities were available. We made it clear we did not think there was any one easy solution and that many discussions would need to be had as to the best ways to solve these problems. We were careful not to lay blame, but argued that the current system was producing what its design suggested it would. We argued for 'radical reform.'

Despite our intention that the meeting was to discuss preliminary findings, within the scope of our contract this was our final opportunity to work with the Aboriginal Lands education committee. From the perspective of the state government and our HREC, the end of the contract signified the end of our (ethical) obligations. But from the perspective of conducting community-up research we remain obligated to the community and the research we'd conducted there – indeed, after our presentation we were immediately asked when we would return and during a break we worked with the committee chair to strategize ways to workshop the findings and recommendations.

The final meeting brought us to another decision point around the issue of accountability, whether to abide by the contract and ostensibly end our work in the community (accountable to the state government and the HREC requirements) or whether to continue to advocate for workshopping and disseminating our findings (accountable to the local indigenous community and our ideals for conducting decolonizing research).

Decision 1: Discontinue work. Save perhaps for presenting the final report to the committee at a future meeting of the Aboriginal Lands education committee, we were well within our legal bounds and institutional ethics requirements to cease our efforts to workshop the findings with indigenous community members, disseminate the report and promote radical reform in the indigenous communities we'd researched. It was obvious to us that this decision was not an option if we wished to maintain our commitment to a "transformative agenda that moves indigenous communities to someplace better than where they are now" (Smith, 2005, p. 88).

And yet, the decision to continue our efforts is not one that is made at a single point in time and then done with. Rather, the decision calls into question our accountability, to whom are we ethically responsible, in what ways and in what instances? What are the limits of our responsibilities and when might it be more ethical to forsake our obligations?

Option 2: Continue to advocate for radical reform. Since the Aboriginal Land education committee meeting we have submitted the final report to the state government and the Aboriginal Land education committee and received written verification of the committee's support of the report. We were unable to present the final report to the committee as it fell on a date when all four researchers were either interstate or out of the country. We requested invitation to the next scheduled meeting and have yet to receive a reply. We consider this to be a small issue.

Our primary concern is that our recommendations have yet to be fully workshopped by the Aboriginal Land education committee or the broader indigenous communities they represent. This participation is essential if the final report is to be said to represent the communities' wishes and for real transformation to begin to occur. We have written letters to this effect to the state government and received no reply.

Our final report has yet to be released by the state government and we are contractually obligated not to disseminate any findings without permission.

So to continue to advocate for radical reform means we have to work 'behind the scenes' and negotiate the ethics of privileging our accountability to the indigenous community over our accountability to the state government. It means we have to co-ordinate with other agencies (such as the Dare to Lead foundation) to plan a findings workshop. It means we ask for permission to present at conferences and assume a lack of response is a "yes." It means we may have to consider consulting media and other outlets to talk about why we think the report and its findings are important and should be disseminated. It means we may have to risk slaps on the wrist from state governments, for the greater good of workshopping and disseminating what we believe to be potentially transformative findings. Ultimately it means we may have to risk breaking this paper's silence about where, with whom and for whom our research was conducted.

But lest we risk painting ourselves as anti-government rebel-heroes of the indigenous education cause, we also are very aware that our accountability to state governments is not simply contractual. The state government is intimately intertwined with the communities we researched, so much so that we could not clearly discern where the Aboriginal Lands education committee began and the state department of education ended. To make any improvements in the indigenous communities requires a co-ordinated effort between indigenous community members and government bureaucrats. Following Smith (2005) who argues "the ability to enter pre-existing relationships; to build, maintain, and nurture relationships; and to strengthen connectivity are important research skills in the indigenous arena," our ethical obligation lies more in fostering the relationship between government and indigenous communities than undermining it (p. 97). For us to work against the state government would be, in dangerous ways, to work against the aim of workshopping findings and our ultimate aim of engendering revolutionary reform. Our accountability to the state government means we are careful in walking the line between advocating reforms and maintaining silence.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was two-fold. First we sought to point out the complexity of negotiating the ethics of government-commissioned reviews. Second, we desired to point to ethical considerations/activities government-commissioned researchers may want to consider prior to tendering for reviews.

Our analysis suggests that, in practice and especially within the confines of a government-commissioned review, that negotiating institutional ethical codes and maintaining decolonizing research ideals is complicated. Neither can be upheld constantly and at times adhering to one set of ethics comes at the expense of another.

What we believe to be the ethical success of our research, if we can make any claims to success, is that we remained flexible in our ethical approach and did not shy away from difficult questions as to the ethics of our research project. In other words, we remained ethically reflexive. But there were limits even to this reflexivity and we knew that, due to the limited timeframe and resources, it would be nearly impossible to conduct the type of participatory research (Kemmis & McTaggert, 2005; Whyte, 1991) in which our collaborative research relationships challenged distinctions between Outsider/Other (Fine, 1994; Martin, 2008). We imagine our future work with the communities, especially in planning and conducting the findings and recommendations workshops, as working toward this aim.

In terms of conducting government-commissioned reviews of indigenous communities, the greatest constraints on our ability to maintain our ideals (and institutional ethics) were time and resources. Obviously all research projects are thusly limited to varying degrees, but six months was clearly not enough time to develop collaborative relationships and, within those relationships, negotiate all aspects of the research including the findings and recommendations. And in hindsight we would have tendered for the resources to organize a findings and recommendations workshop.

Because time limited our ability to establish collaborative relationships on an individual level, we turned our focus to the communal level and worked to build a collaborative relationship between our research team and the Aboriginal Land education committee. And we viewed our ability to maintain a respectful relationship with this organization and the state government as a kind of ethical success. We did not and have yet to burn any bridges and our advocating of a findings workshop is, we believe, a way of building relationships between our research team, the education committee and the state government.

Time was also a limiting factor in that once the report was delivered, the project was deemed complete. Yet we remain accountable to the indigenous community and to the state government. The challenge is to negotiate the ethics of these accountabilities, at times privileging one at the expense of another for what we consider to be the greater good of advocating a transformative agenda. The necessity of this post-contract 'work' is nowhere better exemplified than with the authors of the *Little Children are Sacred* report (Wild & Anderson, 2007). Despite containing recommendations to the contrary, the report was taken up to justify the actions of the Commonwealth Intervention. Both Wild and Anderson have spoken out against the Intervention, making clear they did not intend their research to eventuate in the government policies and actions that followed its release (Wild, 2008).

The aim of this paper is not to suggest researchers should not take-on government-commissioned reviews of indigenous communities and issues. Nor is it to argue that researching with a decolonizing ethic is impossible. Indeed, we believe it is imperative. Our aim, rather is to suggest those tendering for government-commissioned review continually interrogate the ethics of their work, consider the time limitations and what is possible within the time frame (ask for indefinite time and infinite resources), what kinds of relationships can they expect to develop during the review and how best to nurture those relationships, how can they best work to include indigenous decision-making processes and participation throughout the

research, to whom they are accountable at every phase of the research and to what
extent are they prepared to continue the review work (for there is no doubt the work
will and should continue) once the review is 'completed.'

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