WHAT LIES BURIED WILL RISE: EXPLORING A STORY OF VIOLENT CRIME, RETRIBUTION AND COLONIAL MEMORY

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ABSTRACT

This Masters thesis explores the intersections of story telling, narrative and art through examining the historical case of a colonial murder and retribution. The story I explore takes place in York, Western Australia. It involved the hanging of two Aboriginal men for the murder of Sarah Cook and child. This case caused retribution in the form of the worst massacres in WA history. I contend that by examining in detail this ‘cold case’ from an artistic perspective, we may gain insight into broader issues and connect in fact with the violence of colonization as evident in colonial art and representations of Indigeneity and whiteness. In this way, a story of colonial murder is a lens through which to demonstrate as an artist an oppositional gaze for understanding Australia’s iconic frontier images and nationalist discourse and the absence of positive Aboriginal representation. Key research questions include: What is the impact of continuous negativity of one culture and the national pride in another culture as communicated through art and imagery? How can this be seen through what is selected as worthy of memorialization and what lies buried and erased from pioneer nostalgia? How can a focus on storytelling as an artist allow for exploration of narrative with visual works to speak back to history? How might I tell a different tale from that taught in many Australian schools to this day and what resistances do I face both within and externally throughout this journey?
Declaration

This is to certify that

I. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the masters

II. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used

III. the thesis is 11507 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

Signed:

Dianne Jones
Acknowledgements

I acknowledge all the Noongars and Yorgas who fought. Sovereignty was never ceded.

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Section 1

Synopsis:

This thesis explores historical connections between colonial violence, memory and representations through art. It examines archival documentation and oral histories of an 1839 murder case in York, Western Australia; Sarah Cook and the hanging of Aboriginal men, Barrabong and Doodjeep. This case was the catalyst for some of the worst massacres in WA. As an Aboriginal woman from York, I examine how art engages with storytelling to investigate critical events in colonisation and imagine how what lies buried might rise.

Research Statement and Literature Review

Cold Case: The murder of Sarah Cook in York, WA: 1839

In the month of May, 1839, there was a murder of a young white woman and her baby in the wheat belt town of York in Western Australia. Her name was Sarah Cook. When the reports started to spread throughout the colony, outrage and fear erupted to the extent that vigilantes were reported as shooting any Aboriginal person they saw. In 1840 two Noongar men, Barrabong and Doodjeep, ‘confessed’ to the murder of Sarah Cook and were convicted and hanged from a gum tree near the murder site without an adequate trial. This thesis is a Noongar woman’s attempt, in word and image, to excavate this story of violence and retribution in order to examine and how art might engage with storytelling, history and memory to investigate critical events in colonisation and imagine how what lies buried might rise.

An artist’s investigation into history:
I was born in York in Western Australia in 1966. In this thesis I am exploring the impacts of historical connections within a rural town called York in Western Australia. I am interested in investigating how such events are remembered by the people who reside in these places. My focus is on the research of documentation and oral histories of colonial frontier violence. I became interested in making artworks in response to the story of Sarah Cook, her baby, and the hanging of Barrabong and Doodjeep. It is a story that captures the emotive violence of what is often described as ‘frontier conflict’ and gives flesh to the abstracted dates and often disembodied tone of the colonial archives.

In this thesis, I will examine the socio-political and cultural constructs of nation building narrative through Australian art. I argue that colonial textual and visual representations of Aboriginal peoples from early ‘settlement’ have created or greatly contributed to the damaging stereotype that is now part of contemporary Australia. I aim to utilise an oppositional gaze, to look at this story relating to the heart of colonial retribution and cultural genocide. The ‘oppositional gaze’ is a term and approach theorised by African-American race critic bell hooks, to describe a gaze which is active, politicised, critical, responsive and aware of reversing and subverting the objectifying gaze of white patriarchy\(^1\). Such a gaze is required when documenting and questioning the supposed reasons ‘retribution’ occurred and investigating stories of historic race violence and criminal punishment from that of a marginalised perspective that is often ignored and unheard.

The medium I am using to create the works is photography. Photography was an integral part of the colonial classificatory system and anthropological archives are filled with intensive photographic documentation of Indigenous subjects. Photography is and has been a powerful tool and weapon in the history of colonisers and Aboriginal Peoples because of the power of who holds the camera. However there are many Aboriginal photographers reclaiming the power of creating images. I am particularly interested in historical stories

and how they are told and remembered. I then create the visual concept using photography as a contemporary creative practice and response to the archives. As the photographer I make the conscious choice of how images will be constructed, used and represented which means that I am taking control of what is seen. Searching the archives for a glimpse of how Aboriginal People were coping in times of frontier wars is difficult as it does not take into context the intentions and beliefs of the photographer. For example a studio controlled photograph of people who were being forced to have their image taken in unnatural settings for non-Aboriginal eyes is a detached and othering eye. That image then becomes used as historical evidence and Aboriginal people were not in a position to challenge perceptions at this time in Australia.

If I am behind the camera I am able to decide how to reposition historical representations of Aboriginal Peoples respectfully. I can acknowledge the violent histories and look at how memorials are created, who gets remembered and how that is done. Sarah Cook’s remains of her house still stand but there is not an official memorial at the time of writing this thesis. I can visit sites and construct conceptual ideas around what I see and respond, taking shots of places where pivotal events changed lives. There was great difficulty in locating the place where Barrabong and Doodjeeip where hung as there were conflicting local opinion as to which were ‘hanging trees’. As I stood at the site of where Sarah was murdered there were several trees that locals indicated, could be the ‘one’. I would have liked to pay my respects not only to Barrabong and Doodjeeip but also to the unnamed Aboriginal people who were the victims of the revenge by white vigilantes. Photography is a personal form of creative memorialisation, ensuring theses stories and places are not forgotten.

For this research project I have studied scholarship on national art and whiteness, colonial history and the making of a heroic narrative as these works contextualise the foundations of nation. One of the key reasons this story drew my attention is that there has been talk of building a memorial to Sarah Cook. There has been no talk of a memorial for Indigenous Peoples massacred as a result of this case. The significance of raising a memorial to a
murdered white woman over the many massacred in her name illuminates the politicised nature of memory and commemoration in a colonial state.

The politics of race and power ensures that Australian Aboriginals exist with limited agency. How this is conveyed and its impact on Australian society deserves interrogation. Art Historian and cultural critic, Jeannette Hoorne’s *Australian Pastoral The Making of a White Landscape* (2007) has proved most influential in my research as Hoorne connects art with race discourse and colonial history. This book looks at making links between nationhood and landscape paintings through examining different paintings from the 1700s. Hoorne’s interest is how there is a male-centered culture in Australia due to the nature of colonisation and the arrival of much large number of men than women from England. This is an interesting idea at what values would be important. Ultimately this would reflect in artworks of dreams of conquering harsh lands, white fantasies which did not include the Aboriginal Peoples. It is a “beautiful lie” in which the creation of a utopian land is said to have been achieved through the hard work of honest people. This is myth as many were convicts, with soldiers and sailors. Convicts and colonisers were experiencing cultural shock. Although aware of the violence of their presence in an unwelcoming land, ‘settlers’, were determined to remain regardless of the presence of Indigenous Peoples. Hoorne looks at Glover, Lycett and artworks by artists such as Tom Roberts. These are some of the artists that I consider crucial to pride in nationhood representations. Hoorne states:

The task of the painter of pastoral landscapes was to separate pastoralism from the forced occupation of the land. Decorum- the rules governing what could and could not be represented in painting-worked in favour of the colonists and against the traditional owners in the narratives contained in Australian landscapes. Conflict and violence were unrepresentable under the dictates of decorum, and it was the role of the painter of pastoral landscapes to efface this other, darker side in celebratory, decorous images…The mostly male pastoral painters of Australia excelled in this role².

In this project then, I am looking at the ‘unrepresentable’ and attempting to reverse some of the effacing achieved so efficiently by iconic pastoral artists which as Hoorne goes on to argue, erase not only conflict but the black body from the frame of the land, asserting a visual terra nullius.

There are many artworks dedicated to maintaining this heroic frontier narrative of struggle and victory such as ‘a classical hero, the marble bust of Captain Cook’ by Lucien Le Vieux, 1790. Glyn Williams’ *The Death of Captain Cook: A Hero Made and Unmade* (2008) examines the ultimate national hero tale in the story of Captain Cook, exploring the myths and uncovering the realities of life at this time for Cook. There are descriptions of his journeys and what actually happened. I found the ways that Williams explodes the myth making with a critical perspectives useful for my own work here around disrupting frontier narratives of conquest and peaceful ‘settlement’. Glyn includes many artworks about Cook, which include the memorial in Hyde Park, Sydney. This discussion of a memorial connects with the current move to build a memorial to Sarah Cook and I am interested in this connection through monuments from a ‘great explorer’ to an Irish shepherd’s wife. Is this a way of creating heroes that connect the epic adventurer to the everyday white ‘man’ or in this case ‘woman’? And is this epic adventure filled with brave figures a romantic whitewashing of the history of genocide?

Dirk Moses’ book *Genocide and Settler Society in Australian History* (2004) is also most relevant to this project for exploring the colonial context for violence and retribution. Moses talks about how the British knew exactly what it means for them to be in Australia uninvited, stating ‘Clearly, the British understood the effects of their presence in Australia and other colonies’³. He discusses different theories like triumphalism and humanitarian narratives to explain the justifications that the English were ‘unfortunately’ forced to utilize unused land and defend themselves against the ‘natives’ who were rejected by them. Although there was full knowledge of the ways in which devastation and death resulted

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from their presence, the British had a strong need to be able to deal with it psychologically with arguments such as it is:

morally right for a Christian Nation to extirpate savages from their native soil in order that it may be people with a more intelligent and civilised race of human beings⁴.

Triumphalism is deciding on the rights of all based on the decisions that the Aboriginals were not civilized and therefore could not and were not a part of colonisation. We came, we conquered and that is necessary for survival. The other argument which is proposed by Moses is the ‘humanitarian’ view; that ‘we did these awful acts and must now face up to them.’ These are all interesting to take apart as they show the fragility and hypocrisy required to attempt a justification for colonisation. Moses’ detailed investigation of genocide highlights the tensions and arguments that place Australian invasion in a global context connecting frontier violence with the eugenic policies of twentieth century Europe. I agree that there is trauma and white guilt but would like to go further with how the past is dealt with by Aboriginal People as well as understood and theorised by historians.

Mary Durack’s *Kings in Grass Castles* (1959) has proved central to my literature review as she traces the personal journey of the Irish to Australia. For the purposes of understanding Sarah Cook, a young Irish girl, this has been most enlightening even with its focus on the male experience. Durack’s text, which spans from life in Ireland to arriving in NSW in 1849 is celebrated as one of the classic Australian stories. Durack writes about her grandfather and his experience in Australia as a man’s struggle in a new country. Through information that was gleaned in family memories and documents such as her grandfather’s letters, cheque records and diaries Durack shows us the lived experience of making a new life in this country. The title of the book with the description ‘Kings’ appears to be about a quote by her grandfather, Patrick Durack. In the foreword to the book he notes that grass castles may be blown away and likens this vulnerability of the castles to surviving in a

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harsh land. There are numerous references to Aboriginal people often in disrespectful language even when talking about how skilled or hardworking they are:

The new settlers found their dark skinned visitors good humoured and amusing, even helpful in a desultory fashion, until a whim seized them and they were on their way.

The overall feeling that I was left with is that Aboriginal people were necessary for survival in the Australian environment but as soon as not needed, their death is subsumed as an inevitable outcome of colonisation. Germaine Greer, in her critique of Durack’s book, describes the representations with insight in this case:

There are dozens, even hundreds of other blacks in the Durack story. Of Michael Durack’s offside Black Willie, the Larrakia men Pintpot and Pannikin, one-eyed Jimmie, his gin Susan, little Waddi Mundoai with his wooden leg, Cherry, Davey, Billy, Sultan, Tommy, Charlie, “that flash abo Pompey”, Ulysses, Maggie, Boxer, Dick, Aled Meith or Meid, Barney and Nipper we know little more than their names; in this saga of the heroic endeavour of the white man, the hordes of “wild” blacks who struggled to prevent the invasion of the Kimberley and paid with their lives are no more than shadows on the backdrop.

The photos included in the book are romanticized ones of settlers and Aboriginal people and have inspired my current work where Sarah Cook’s identity is veiled and obscured to highlight anonymity and concealment over a romantic imagery of femininity or whiteness as coded in the images throughout Durack’s text.

In many ways Henry Reynolds books, Why Weren’t We Told? A Personal Search for the Truth about Our History (1999) and The Other Side of the Frontier (1981) are some of the most inspiring texts as they show that a non-Indigenous historian can attempt lucidly and honestly to interrogate the personal dimensions of historic violence. Reynolds foregrounds

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5 Durack cited in G. Greer, Whitefella Jump Up, Quarterly Essay 11, 2003, p.27.
6 Greer, Whitefella, p.31.
Aboriginal resistance to invasion and challenges the prejudices that simplify and deny frontier wars demonstrating that ‘the costs of colonisation were much higher than traditional historical accounts have suggested.’ In order to understand the racism in Australia today and the significance it has on representation of Aboriginal people, it is important to hear from white voices like Reynolds to counter the countless untruths from other white voices. His recognition that whiteness was an inherited, unearned asset became an important catalyst in his writing. There was a time in his life, during his research into violent colonial frontier histories, when he began to have nightmares and this came to influence the nature of the work. I would argue that this was trauma. There is a shift when your beliefs starts to change that unrattle the very bones of your ideology – the foundations cave in as doubt about the truths of learnt ‘history’ can no longer be silenced. These are the gaps I wish to exploit as an artist.

From this work I have come to understand that text and imagery created by and in trauma can cause an upheaval in mind and make you question everything. Reynolds talks about his personal experience when he began to ask these questions. I have been asking these questions for most of my life and this current work is the first time I take on the oppositional gaze in such a confronting way for myself. I am exploring now both my own trauma, national amnesia and a real nightmare in this murder story.

Of all the literature I have read, the most influential work for understanding the relationship of power, whiteness and race war, is that of Indigenous theorist, Aileen Moreton-Robinson. She explains what she calls ‘the pathology of white sovereignty’ as she argues that:

> The pathological behaviour of patriarchal white sovereignty has been produced by the contradictions and imbalances in its fundamental constitution originating in Australia through theft and violence.

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In many ways, my investigation of a historical ‘cold case’ is an attempt to expose ‘contradictions’ and ‘imbalances’ in history, the place of story telling and the mapping of a pathology that harmed and continues to harm so many people.

I felt an incredible desire to find Sarah Cook’s killer, whom ever that maybe. I wondered who this woman was and thought about how certain white women’s deaths can cause grief and anger on a large scale. Princess Diana was a global example and in Melbourne 2011 there was a rape and murder of a young woman called Jill Meagher, which caused over ten thousand people to march in honour and grief. People reacted deeply and it was on the news on television, radio and in the papers everyday for a month. So this made me wonder if Sarah Cook had this same kind of reaction as the reports seemed emotive and the language used were words like outrage, barbarous, savage, hideous, atrocious, ferocious, diabolical, shocked, vengeance. There seems no doubt that justice was sought and needed for the colonists to feel protected. The question for me, as an artist, was how could I use my art to raise questions and awareness about this case? How could I explore the tensions around whose bodies this nation grieves and why? Who matters in this country and what are the missing pages from the past that might tell other stories? Beyond pathology, mythmaking and colonial tales, is there more that lies buried?

Sarah’s Story:

Sarah Farrell arrived in Western Australia from on board the Ellen & Emilia on 18 March 1830 as a servant for Captain Rae and his family. In 1829 Captain Rae and a man called Henry Clinton brought an 83 ton ketch (type of boat) named ‘chaser’ which was renamed ‘Emelia & Ellen’ and was built in Bombay. Rae, his family and Clinton took the ‘Emelia & Ellen’ to the Swan River Colony with a crew of eleven. Captain Rae was not a popular man and ‘judged to be a totally worthless man, a perfect terror to the women and a nuisance to the men’ as stated by a contemporary of Rae’s. Captain Rae decided that Western Australia was not for him and he departed in1831 on the ‘Resolution’ to leave Australia.

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forever. There seems to be no records of what Sarah Farrell did in this time until 1837 when she married Elijah Cook in Guildford, Western Australia. Elijah Cook arrived in Western Australia on the ‘Drummore’ with his parents and siblings on the 1st of February 1831. Elijah and Sarah had their first and only child Mary Ellen Cook who was born in 1837. Sadly she is the baby who died with her mother at the house. Elijah later married again.

The location of the murder was 13 miles from the small rural town of York. Elijah worked as a shepherd and was one of two shepherds who were registered. The other one being his brother, Henry who, following the murder, inherited the property that Elijah claimed was his. It was a place where there were very few British colonisers and it was highly populated by the original owners of the land, the Balladong Noongars. According to A.O Neville:

> There are not many now whereas not so many generations ago there were a great many. When Western Australia was first settled in 1829 it is alleged that there was a population within the state of 55,000. In 1901 the native population in the south-west was reduced to 1,419 of whom 45 per cent who were classified as ‘half casters’.

It is important to note right here that terms like ‘half-cast’ or various uses of blood percentages are offensive to myself as this language is part of problematic race theories at the time constructed to suit the English colonisers and an agenda of race supremacy.

Elijah and Sarah were both known locally to the colonisers as ‘friendly with the natives’, and were known to have Aboriginal people around their house often. Sarah had attended corroborees with a white female friend and was initiated into that tribe. There could have been several reasons for this. I believe that Sarah was indeed lonely as prosecutor George

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Moore described and the Noongars were getting moved off their lands. The archival records state that:

Her husband was working some distance away from the farm. She was alone and vulnerable…Sarah had always treated the Aborigines well and they were friendly toward her. She would have greeted their approach with open friendship.

These accounts of friendship are interesting to hear given that Captain James Stirling who was the first Governor of the Swan River Colony, had expressed to the colonisers to not engage with local Aboriginal people in 1837. As described in Neville Green’s Broken Spear’s (1984):

The resistance, the shooting and the spearing continued in the York district throughout the first half of 1837, causing James Stirling to warn the settlers against associating with Aborigines.

The Aboriginal people were losing all the food sources to the colonisers who were letting sheep trample on or in the rivers. This caused native bird nests and eggs to be trampled and the waters became a highly treasured location. The kangaroos were being shot at a rate that was unseen. The normal food and water resources were becoming scarce for the Noongar person. The danger increased when the colonisers considered that the original land owners were trespassing and would shoot to kill. It was not illegal to murder a Noongar person and it seemed that there were no consequences if you claimed you were defending your own land.

What this does not take into account is that it was not the land of the colonisers and that it was plainly a situation of war and history chooses to remember it selectively. In Donald

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12 Moore cited in Adams, Unforgiving, p.11
13 (Colonial Secretary, W.A correspondence records, Battye Collection, C.S.O. – C.S.R./74, York R.M. 20.5.1839 et seq)
Garden’s *Northam: An Avon Valley History* (1979), there is a chilling description of ‘punitive expeditions’ after sheep were eaten by Aboriginal Peoples where the colonisers:

Went at night to an encampment of the natives and, while they were sitting round their fire, poured the shot among them – men, women and children. The cries were dreadful.

There is a telling excerpt from the Perth Gazette which notes that the York Agricultural Society passed a motion:

That the district of York may be considered, at present, in a state of war, and this meeting concurs unanimously in the necessity of adopting the strongest and most energetic measures to bring it to a speedy termination.

Garden goes on to describe how after the murder of Sarah Cook and her baby:

….another period followed of ruthless and apparently indiscriminate reprisals. Hutt [Governor] was forced to concede the right of Europeans searching for the culprits to fire upon suspects who tried to escape. Such a case occurred one night in August when a party under Resident Magistrate Bland came across a camp of Aborigines. Some of them were suspected of involvement with the Cook murders and were called upon to surrender. When they ran, the Europeans fired into the camp, killing a woman and child and wounding four men. The whites considered it simply one of those unfortunate accidents, better forgotten.

When the ‘killers’ of Cook were executed:

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Some of the Europeans subsequently expressed their feelings by shooting at the bodies and cutting off their ears\(^{18}\).

As opposed to these accounts of genocide, I learnt a different story at the school in this town of York, which I attended as a child. I was told that a few Aboriginal people were troublesome and unfortunately mostly did not survive. The ones that did were often drunk or lived on the outskirts. What is often omitted is the truth of what happened all those years ago. Who were the Aboriginal woman and child murdered in the reprisals or the many Aboriginal People killed? I will never know their names….

**Barrabong & Doodjeep’s Story:**

Barrabong and Doodjeep were brothers in a spiritual sense and not with the same mother or father and they were accused of the murder of Sarah Cook and her baby. The realities of the time were that even if they did do this horrendous crime, it was not their lore that took them to a court in the city of Perth. This was another law, a different culture’s law. There was already a system of ‘lore’ in place that punished this type of crime. The Noongar community did not get the chance to apply their lore. As Neville Green notes:

> The application of English law to Aborigines became a contentious issue in all Australian colonies during the 1840s and provoked heated argument as to whether the Aborigines were conquered and able to maintain their own system of laws and punishment as the setters in each Australian colony\(^ {19}\).

Barrabong and Doodjeep were placed on board a cart and horse and spent three days travelling to Peth. After the guilty verdict, they were returned to the site of the murder where they were hanged from a gum tree near the remains of the burnt house. One of the troubling factors for me is the fact that there was war happening in York. Even if Aboriginal People were deemed British subjects, they were unable to give evidence in court.

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\(^{18}\) Garden, *Northam*, p.54.
\(^{19}\) Green, *Broken Spears*, p.161.
for ‘as heathens they were unable to swear a valid oath’\textsuperscript{20}. Therefore how could it be justice to arrest two people on little evidence in a time when many, many Aboriginal people were murdered, raped, abused and left often to die from diseases such as measles or smallpox?

The Aboriginal people were often described as ‘native help’ whenever any of the colonists became lost or could not find water as was often the case with ‘explorers’. The white people who tried to travel the land often needed the assistance of the local Aboriginal people. However in return for what may have been compassion or simply humanity to ‘save’ white people, the response was not in kind with white people often acting or behaving in horrendous ways as described in the accounts of massacre above. In Australia, a coloniser could be the ‘king of the hill’ or ‘castle’ with a rifle. To me, the humanity seems not to exist in the treatment of Indigenous Peoples. When Sarah Cook and her baby were killed, what made her death different to every single Aboriginal person who died in her name?

\textbf{Probing the Evidence:}

How did the court convict the accused killer(s), Barrabong and Doodjeep? There were spear tips that were discovered at the murder. To be exact they were glass tipped spears and were made by the Aboriginal people from the glass that was brought to western Australia by the colonisers. Glass was a strong and effective spear tip. Barrabong and Doodjeep were both known to use this style of spear. One year had gone by but as time went on, the trial led police to this particular group where Barrabong and Doodjeep were. I wondered at the proof exactly and realised that there were many Aboriginal people who had visited Sarah many times. Is it possible that someone had dropped a spare spear tip and it then became evidence? Another factor was that quartz, which was used in York to make spear tips and tools and was very similar in look to glass once it was carved. So then was it a glass spear tip or a quartz spear tip?

\textsuperscript{20} Green, \textit{Broken Spears}, p.161.
The idea that it was Barrabong and Doodjeep was apparently the decision that was made based upon local talk with Aboriginal people, however it is clear that those who were questioned were afraid for own their lives and wanted the white people seeking revenge to stop their vigilante behaviour\textsuperscript{21}. The motive was said to be an act of vengeance in retaliation for one of Barrabong and Doodjeep’s relatives\textsuperscript{22}. But then another question that I had was why was the blood swept up with a broom if the intention was retaliation? Accounts in the Perth Gazette state, ‘It was supposed she was murdered just outside the house, as a stream of blood was found there, which it appeared the natives had attempted to wipe away with a broom’\textsuperscript{23}. This did not make sense to me as I thought one would want everyone to know you committed this crime to show it was payback. If you start trying to cover up the evidence what does that mean? Was the spear tip left there on purpose? Who was the doctor who examined Sarah Cook and the baby’s charred remains? His evidence after supposedly examined her body was used in court, however his diary entry, which I found in the Battye library archives, for that time showed he never reached the site, contradicting the court transcripts\textsuperscript{24}. There were more questions than answers. For example, why would Aboriginal people choose to murder a person who was considered a friend, and obviously in a time when food was becoming scarce, someone who did have access to food and water? Elijah and Sarah had picked a natural spring to live nearby but were not territorial at all. This may have been a place where if you were Aboriginal, you were not likely to be shot, poisoned or beaten or worse. This was a time of war in York and tensions had been building for quite a while and this murder seemed to be the catalyst for justifying killings. I imagined comments like ‘in the name of Sarah’ or ‘this was for Sarah and her baby’. Is this because I have a vivid imagination or is this because one aspect of human nature is anger and revenge?

None of my exploration managed to answer the question that was the most important. Who killed Sarah Cook? The facts here are too deeply buried. I began suspecting the husband. Scenario one, Elijah arrives home and finds Sarah in a passionate embrace with a Noongar

\textsuperscript{22} Adams, \textit{The Unforgiving Rope}, p.11  
\textsuperscript{23} Perth Gazette 25\textsuperscript{th} May 1939.  
\textsuperscript{24} Dr Viveash’s Diary, 1839, pp.81-84.
man and goes into a rage and does the unthinkable and then attempts to implicate local Aboriginal People? Scenario two, Henry, Elijah’s brother never warmed to Sarah but did Sarah cause shame to the family when she continued to ignore Governor Stirling’s message about not engaging with the Aboriginal people? Did the brother try to talk to her and it turned fatal and so he needed to make it look like someone else did it? Maybe Barrabong and Doodjeep did do it but should they have been hanged for it? Who made this decision? I am interested in raising this provocative question. To hang a body to rot as deterrent to criminal activity is an English custom practiced as early as the 5th century according to Michael Stone’s research in *The Anatomy of Evil* (2009). The idea was if you were ashamed at the idea that your body was for public view then you would ensure that you were a good citizen. As history shows it does not work and at one time twenty-four bodies were hanging from a English town square and the townspeople complained at the smell. I began to think about what that would be like to see someone you know rotting slowly with no chance of burial. How did the families cope with this? Accounts tell of Doodjeep and Barrabong repeatedly asking to be shot or speared instead of hanged. It was said that this practice effectively quietened the natives. I draw on the proper way to bury people specifically from my area, for my art piece Boodjar (Noongar word for burial) which I made in response to these questions.

**A memorial?:**

In 2011 I first came across this historic murder case through taking part in the York Court House exhibition titled (appropriately for my future research) ‘Heroes or Villains?’. While learning about this story, I heard talk at the time amongst people in the community of a possible memorial for Sarah Cook. There was no definite detail yet but it made me think what such a memorial might mean - I needed to work out if this was going to include the names of everyone who died directly related or indirectly in the following year. It did seem as though acknowledgment of a white person’s death was considered important but not any of the Aboriginal people who bodies lay buried and unnamed all over York. In this moment there was a realisation that this is one of the ways history actually becomes history. A

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memorial, with a name, date, time and what happened might be erected. So would Barrabong and Doodjeep become immortalised murderers through this memorial of Sarah and her baby? I did not feel comfortable with this at all. Another statue or bust in the vein of Captain Cook to tell one side of a violent story.

I started to make photographs around York in the sites of massacres using my niece as a model. I was really affected by one of the first hand accounts I read many years ago by a white man of his experience of being at a massacre. I cannot recall his name but this man wrote about seeing dead and dying bodies of Aboriginal people everywhere. Then he says he noticed a small Aboriginal girl standing near a tree with a shocked look on her face looking lost. He seemed not to care what she was going through. He does not mention her again and I could not stop thinking about her and did she survive? If she did how was this possible? Was there any compassion shown to this child? This memory of reading a first hand account has haunted me. I wanted to take photographs of my niece in these places and try to shift the deep emotion that I had been feeling.

I am not always interested in emotional art experiences but I felt that this particular story needed this emotive approach. If I were able to visualise what I had read than maybe I could further explore what was happening in the bush, in the isolated places around York where there is no sound except birds, kangaroos and sometimes water. I needed to place a body in the space and examine what happens. I felt as though Wenonah (my niece, the model) seemed to become different in this space. I expected a lone figure and dread possibly but the opposite happened with her becoming part of the bush but also strongly visible at the same time. Perhaps transformed through the oppositional gaze, her image strikes me as a complete counter to colonial images of white children in the bush such as McCubbin’s ‘Lost’ (1886). Wenonah belonged. This captured a deep, deep feeling that I didn’t know was there but explained my love of this beautiful part of the country. A place that I always loved but knew that there was blood just beneath the surface. Many Aboriginal people died on this place and I knew that there were Aboriginal bodies that had been here in, on and around this land for so long. There was frontier violence with massacres and genocide but there was also this long history that I felt not for the first time.
Did the bodies including Sarah Cook’s need to tell some truths? I know that it is hard for an Aboriginal person to create a memorial because there is so much resistance from white people. Even if it does happen, it is often because of a white person who was killed or was killing. I know there is a statue of Yagan, a famous Noongar warrior described as the ‘colony’s most feared outlaw’ in Perth, which has continuously been damaged by vandals. His statute is violently beheaded – re-enacting colonial retribution - with his head stolen time and time again…

Painting the white nation: forging possession through imagery

Other than the statue of Yagan, which came about through strong Noongar community struggle for recognition, there are very few memorials of Aboriginal Peoples. This erasure is the case not only in Western Australia, but across Australia. I became interested in my work being about positive representations or even just a representation of an Aboriginal person that was not from a white person’s perspective. I looked at Eugene Von Guerard and John Glover and saw that although they were beautiful paintings, I wasn’t particularly moved by them. I thought of them as a narrow view. I was more intrigued by Frederick McCubbin and Tom Roberts - again not because I was moved but because I thought this is about nationhood. Obviously if I was white, I could feel some belonging and pride of the ‘pioneer’s’ hard work and that this agenda was about creating a narrative where the white body is the nation of Australia. Later Max Dupain, Olive Cotton, Lawrence De Guy, to name a few, would photograph the cities and the people in the 1930s and 1940s and continue the narrative of a hard working white Australian.

My work was about the invisibility of positive images of Aboriginal stories, bodies and faces. In ‘Shearing the Rams’ (1890) by Tom Roberts I was interested in repositioning the representation to create what I knew was my reality and one that I felt was being ignored deliberately sometimes or forgotten. Many conversations with the Elders taught me how much Aboriginal people worked in this country on farms and stations. I found that if you show me the everyday of my life, through art, media, newspapers, radio and conversations,

27 Adams, Unforgiving, p.16.
there would be every possible representation of white Australians. This is part of what whiteness does to societies, to make the norm ‘white’ and erase my body and my experience. This is when I noticed that the time of the late 19th century is when Aboriginal people disappeared from the landscape, literally being moved into missions and reserves. Artists like Tom Roberts made it obvious that they had disappeared as they literally vanished from the paintings of the landscape. This was at a time when the white population was growing and government and councils looking at ways to create a national pride and belonging. One of the ways to create ideas of nationhood was to commission artists like Frederick McCubbin and Tom Roberts to create the visual representation of a new country.

![Fig. 1. Frederick McCubbin ‘Pioneer’, 1904](image)

Roberts literally painted a white woman and called the painting ‘The Australian Native [Portrait of a Lady]’ (1888). This work and the title’s use of the term ‘native’, encapsulate how art can be used to appropriate the place and identity of Indigenous Peoples. The fact that this is a representation of a ‘lady’ is also interesting in terms of how leading up to the time of federation, Roberts captures how the nation may desire to be embodied through an image of genteel white femininity. This makes me think about how the murder of a white woman led to massacres in my area and what that meant to those seeking retribution. Today
the artworks created by these two men in particular are very familiar to Australians and what it means to represent the ideal of beauty and nationhood.

Fig 2 Tom Roberts ‘An Australian Native’, 1888
Oil on Canvas
127.2h x 76.2 w cm framed (overall) 1672 h x 1168w x 125 d mm.

Paintings of ‘Australians’ as part of the landscape embodied the Australian bush, living a life as a pioneer, father, mother, child, shearer and always white. Aboriginal people did not ‘die out’ and so the control of their lives continued. In Western Australia Aboriginal men were sent to Rottnest Island, which is located just off the coast of Perth to be imprisoned for crimes against white colonisers. Many never left that island. If I am standing in any art gallery anywhere in Australia I am aware of the ‘pioneer’. So is this important for the morale of a people? If so then what would cause the opposite effect. This brings me back to how do I look at history and what works do I make in response through the oppositional
gaze? It is tempting to not talk about white people at all and mimic the colonial erasure of Indigenous Peoples but the reality is white people have an effect on my life every single day. If I were to embrace white ways of being then I would never have to think about representations without pretending that it isn’t about alienating what is seen as ‘difference’. I am interested in what would the reverse look like or what would it look like if I just change the colour of the person?

I am interested in how violence gets depicted in relation to gender and race issues. The power structures in colonial times in York in Western Australia were designed to protect the perpetrators. The Aboriginal people did not know how long the colonisers were staying. They did not realise that soon there would be war and that the colonisers would use violence to obtain land. One of the key issues was that not many white women that had travelled in the beginning and the white men did not want to be alone or be denied any women. There are many reports of white men stealing Aboriginal women and murdering the Aboriginal men.

If you murder, jail or enslave many able bodied men from a tribe, then you have only old men, women and children to resist you. Add to this, weapons such as guns and rifles, and this becomes a situation for which the Aboriginal people were completely unprepared. How then does the Aboriginal man become seen? Is it believable that Barrabong and Doodjeep would murder an innocent woman and her baby? Is it naïve to think that this was not something that was happening?

Louis Nowra wrote about the violence of Aboriginal men in his book Bad Dreaming: Aboriginal Men's Violence Against Women and Children (2007). The first page is harrowing reading let alone the rest of the book. The ‘intervention in the NT’ in response to the abuse of children by Aboriginal men was a successful campaign to cause the average Australian to believe that the abuse was widespread and at a crisis point that has since proven to be largely fabricated. The damage was done. The newspapers had done their job. The government sent in the army to control the situation. There were reports of soldiers sitting in trucks bored out of their minds. There were situations of violence in some of the communities but is it cultural? Why are people so ready to believe that Aboriginal men
could be violent to women and children and that ‘Australia’ would need send in army tanks to take care of the women and children. If you were to talk to Aboriginal activists living under the NT Intervention Laws today such as Barb Shaw and ask about what is happening in their Aboriginal community, then they will tell you that they are humiliated and angered by these allegations. Sadly the intervention continues in the NT and Australia is silent on this outrage. If I were to talk about Barrabong and Doodjeep being violent I am afraid that it would become a race issue. Did they do this crime? Would they have done it if they were white men? Would they have been hanged to set an example? I thought this would need an exhibition that was able to narrate emotion through photography and open up a dialogue about this case and the troubling elusive nature of truth and history.

Section 2: Creative Works

Throughout my research for this project I became aware of how artists like Vernon Ah Kee, Christian Thompson, Fiona Foley and Julie Gough were talking about their work. All these artists each have a particular way of approaching historical events and concepts. In Vernon Ah Kee’s work there is an obvious controlled intent to present a specific approach to drawings, in particular to his portraits of people. One of the artworks in an exhibition at the Ian Potter in Federation Square was of a drawing of ‘William Barak’, 2011, which was researched and examined to portray an accurate representation of who he perceived William Barak to be. Fiona Foley created a work called ‘Disperse’ 2008, which is exhibited at the NGA and this work was a sculpture piece approximately one metre high with the word D of the word ‘Disperse’ spelt out with bullets. This is a comment on the word being used in fact to explain the shooting of Aboriginal people in historical records. I was interested in exploring ways of using colour and bodies to create what Noy & Noy Sharav called ‘meta-emotions’\textsuperscript{28}. I was looking at ways to convey the complexities of an event that may or may not have happened the way in which it was remembered.

I began my masters by research talking about ‘Aboriginal Iconography’: Contemporary Indigenous art and the emergence of ‘postcolonial’ representations’, and found that although this was a subject that felt like an academic extension of the path that my work had been travelling, I was really interested in taking these concepts further. What became glaringly obvious was that there was a particular story that was already pushing these boundaries to uncomfortable places. I realised that this project of ‘What lies buried rises’ would look at everything that I was interested in, remembering the past and feeling the loss.
STICKS AND STONES

Fig. 3. Dianne Jones ‘sticks’ 2014,
archival rag paper
60 x 60 cm
I collected rocks from the York area that I could potentially carve into the spear tips that would look similar to the way the glass tips look like, which became the evidence to hang Barrabong and Doodjeep. I obtained gum tree wood from the York area, which could be turned into clubs or hitting sticks. I was worried that I maybe getting too morbid but I wanted to imagine the objects before they became weapons. Edgar Penzig’s interest in weapons is well documented and describes Australia’s wild colonial days and knew that
each weapon came with its own story. The weapons became the identifiers and were used to as proof that Barrabong and Doodjeep must have done this crime.

I curated an exhibition at Linden Gallery in St Kilda in August 2013 and invited two Genevieve Grieves and Della (my mother) to respond to this story in an exhibition. I used one of the spaces to look at objects that I had brought back from Western Australia. Chains that were over a hundred years old and that were given to me by a farmer, and I added bits of bone, ceramics, glass and tin that I found whilst walking around York.

2) CHAINS

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Fig. 5. Exhibition documentation of;
‘what lies buried rises’ exhibition curated by Dianne Jones
17 August – 22 September 2013
Artists: Dianne Jones, Della Jones and Genevieve Grieves
Linden Gallery, 2013

3) THE WOODS

I wanted to explore the relationship between haunttings and how stories are imagined. I changed the light in the images to focus upon the figure of a young girl. The dark edges served two purposes one to draw the view to the figure and also to create a sense that in the ground and the air and the trees held the cries of what really happened. I wanted an Aboriginal body, in this instance my niece Wenonah, to emphasis that this was a place that still belongs to Aboriginal bodies and that the place itself hold the memories.
Fig. 6. Dianne Jones ‘untitled # 1’ 2013, archival print on paper
100 x 120 cm
4) SARAH’S JOURNEY

Once I had returned from Western Australia I decided that it was important to work out exactly who Sarah Cook was and to express the importance of her story rather than homogenising her in some generic idea of whiteness and womanhood. I became intrigued by the fact that she was a servant. When she arrived in Western Australia her name was Sarah Farrell. This meant that she was probably Irish. She was without her own family and I wondered where they were and what had happened that meant she was so far away in a new land. She was also a servant to Captain Rae who as described earlier was not a pleasant man. This crime happened before photography arrived in Australia and so I had no idea of
what she looked like. There were no descriptions and I began to imagine how she would look. I wanted to show her arrival as hesitant steps onto land, what she might have thought as she looked out as she got off the boat. I wondered how lonely she must have been in such isolated country when she was married and Elijah, her husband, went to work each day. Even when she had her baby I wondered if she have missed her life before she became one of the colonisers. Did she want to go back to where she came from and how many choices did she have as a young woman?

Fig. 8. Dianne Jones, 'Sarah Cook Series' 2014, archival print on paper
70 x 90 cm

The only clues that I had to what experience Sarah’s life may have been are colonial accounts and the remains of the house. The remains are situated in the back paddocks of a farm. No other house is within sight. It was easy to imagine the isolation that would have been felt by Sarah. The stones that were gathered by Elijah to build the house and the remains of the chimney is all that is left standing. As I walked around I imagined the ghosts of all four here in the ground. In these photographs below I was able to take photos and wanted to capture a gum tree, of which there were quite a few around the remains. I did not know what gibbetting was before this project but was shocked to realise firstly that it meant hanging bodies with chains so that they were not able to bury the bodies. At the site I was
struck by seeing the trees surrounding the remains and realised that they were probably very similar to the one where Barrabong and Doodjeeep were hanged. I feel passionate about violence against women and children. I cannot resolve the fact that in the process of making art I feel a range of strong emotions. I am not sure if it is possible to fully describe the complexities of knowing and not being able to not know the history of this place and to feel the need to tell the story.
The next set of works I started to look at were rituals of burial. I was unable to find the location of where Sarah Cook and her baby were buried. I am sure that there was a ceremony as it had impacted the community so hard. This raised questions to which I asked many people until a historian at the Midland Library replied ‘the chances are that the bodies would have been buried at the site’. So where were the remains of Sarah Cook and her baby? The research that I did on gibbeting showed me that there were ways in which

Fig. 9. Dianne Jones, Photographs (2) of site of the remains of Elijah and Sarah Cook’s house situated 13 miles from York, Western Australia, 2013
culturally Barrabong and Doodjeeep should have been buried. The act of not allowing a someone to bury their dead is in itself as violent as the hanging. This may seem a little exaggerated but to be confronted with all that happens to a body and be powerless to do anything about it made me think they should be buried, and facing the sun even with the chains remaining. The objects of chains are interesting to work with as the weight and rust of such old chains gave me an idea of how one would swing the chains over the branches. The compliance to follow the orders to execute in this isolated area with so few people present to supposedly learn from the grim warning is hard to understand but I was curious as to when is such hanging by the ‘law’ a ‘just punishment’ or simply murder?

5) IMPLICIT BIAS TEST

I attended Psychologist Professor Nicholas Haslam’s lecture at Melbourne University as he was talking about racial profiling and the police. I found that there were various sets of psychological tests called ‘implicit bias testing’, which were very interesting as he explained one of these tests in detail. The first of approximately thirty images are presented to people who are taking this test. When it begins people are not told what the image is that they are looking at as a blurred version flashes onto the computer screen. Each frame becomes a little less blurred. By the time the eighteenth image is flashed on the screen, it becomes clearer that it looks a little like a gun or is it a hair dryer? As this goes on there are flashes in between of either a white person or a black person. What it this test showed, was that when there was a flash of a white person, people were ‘primed’ with ideas around whiteness and tended to lean towards seeing the pixelated image as a hair dryer. When people were ‘primed’ with images of a black person, then they tended to lean towards seeing a gun.

This was evidence of implicit bias – lifting the seal on the unconscious - and I felt this was very much like looking at Australian history and trying to work out exactly how and what was happening. Primed by images of blackness, people saw and ‘remember’ violence. Primed with images of whiteness, people saw a benign nation. I wanted to create the effect of the experience of reading and re-reading because I am not sure where I started or when I
became confused by the details. I felt as though the stories, documentation and reports snaked through truths and untruths. To try to describe this feeling was to have the same image on a photograph repeated except for the change in clarity. In my artwork, of the thirty-six images that were on the one page, I completely blurred the first image and clarified this blur effect in stages until the final image became completely clear. These are images that hurt the eye to try and read. The eye keeps slipping off them, repelled by the effort to see and as such, it is not possible to penetrate the surface of the image. Sliding off the surface of these photographs is my attempt to capture the feeling of digging into a past that is impossible to read and ‘know’, the past is slippery, sticky and when that past is filled with trauma, to read as an Aboriginal woman is to literally feel hurt.

Fig. 10  Dianne Jones Darlarinj, 2014 (English: Hunting)
Archival inkjet print on cotton paper, 70 x 90cm

Fig. 11. Dianne Jones ‘Yonga Koorndi’, 2014 (English: Kangaroo club)
Archival inkjet print on cotton paper, 70 x 90cm
Fig. 12. Dianne Jones, ‘Boodjar’, 2014 (English: Country)
Archival inkjet print on cotton paper, 90 x 70cm
CONCLUSION

With the research questions I had, I wanted to create an exhibition that could explore this story as I have journeyed with it and the complexities that were observed during the research for this thesis. In the research I travelled back to the site of Sarah’s murder in two primary roles, both as an investigator and also as a witness. I adopted a methodology of excavation, both literally at the site and also through my archival research in the Battye library and York archives, in order to “witness” and reveal that which has been hidden and concealed. This particular journey was a challenging process and I found myself in new, albeit haunted spaces because of the content of the historical archives. I do not regret this because of several reasons. My work is going to places that I had avoided due to the fear of trauma and for me it has reclaimed a space and story that has been suppressed. I would say that being able to research this history and the exploration as an artist has been an enriching experience that does important cultural work through reclamation of an untold history and living with the trouble that comes with unearthing the past.

Lyn McCredden’s writings around haunting and memory speak strongly to this project as she talks of the haunted dimensions of remembering in a ‘post-colonial’ nation and the ghosts that are invited and those that are uninvited: ‘Ghosts move freely between the past and present, haunting us at will’30. As a witness, I am always seeing ghosts and as an artist, I deal in excavating these memories but in my research, I find that my ghosts are not the same that seem to haunt white people.

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One of the first writing I came across of this historic murder case was a work by Peter Bridge - a short text called *Savagery on the Swan River* (2010). The subtitle is ‘The Aboriginal murder cycle and the murder of Sarah Cook’. This is a strange text, which argues that ‘social manipulators and thieving academics stole the suppressed documents to side step the fallout that would come from the exposure of ongoing Aboriginal criminality’\(^{31}\). The Abstract goes on to declare that: ‘In these times of cultural reversals, where criminals are lauded by debased portions of the ‘intellectual’ mafia, we must rediscover the true past, for in these traditions is the guide to the only acceptable future’\(^{32}\).

I had to read this a few times but remain unclear as to what is an ‘Aboriginal murder cycle’ or what ‘traditions’ will guide us to an ‘acceptable future’, let alone who the mafia and thieving academics could be. It would appear to me that the main emphasis of the work is to focus on Aboriginal criminality. Such conspiratorial words might be easy to dismiss except that this was one of the few writings around this case. Over and over, it spoke of gang rape with a sensationalist tone, drawing on an earlier work around the case published in a 1948 volume of *Famous Detective Stories*. It reminded me that the desire to simplify the frontier wars and criminalise Aboriginal bodies is often the only story that gets told, much like the stories of York’s past that I learnt in school. This may account in part for the excessive and rising numbers of Aboriginal people in our prison system. Primed with these stories, we learn to see guns and violence but the accounts of white killing raids morph into peaceful settlement, occasional accidents, forgotten truths. This text made me even more passionate about exploring this story for the complexities and tensions, for the voices that do not get heard. When I researched the case in York, I asked around to learn the oral


\(^{32}\) Bridge, *Savagery on the Swan River*. 
history, the Noongar stories of what happened. I was told the story goes that it was a shepherd who committed these crimes. There were only two shepherds in the area, Elijah Cook and his brother.

There is a quote from Adams ‘The Unforgiving Rope’ that stays with me and speaks to the constant negative representation of Aboriginal people and why this murder case is for me a microcosm of colonisation and important for me to do this work around:

The society that killed Barrabong and Doodjee, the society that Captain James Stirling inaugurated in 1829, although built during Pain’s great ‘age of reason’, still rested firmly on the gibbet, the hangman’s noose and the gallows’s tree.33

I would suggest this ‘gallows’s tree’ is a useful metaphor for assumptions of black guilt, of an inherent primitivity. The tree is a current presence that speaks to a national belief in black criminality and upon which hangs the legacies of trauma and the ongoing justifications for dehumanising Aboriginal People.

There is a story in one of the newspaper accounts of this historic case that relays how as they were about to be hanged, the younger of the two Aboriginal men conveyed an impression that he would rise up as a “white fellow”34. This is written in the account as though this was a form of revenge. There is a local legend that says that there are two

33 Adams, Unforgiving, p.19.
34 ‘Execution of Two Aboriginal Native’, Perth Gazette, Sat 18 July 1840.
patches of ground underneath the hanging tree where no grass grew. As clear from the photographs in this thesis, I was able to visit this site. My visit was short as I was told to leave by an angry farmer for trespassing. There was no irony in his tone in recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, only fear. Given my time at the site was brief, I did not find the gallows tree or the dead grass but I hope to create works that continue to trouble the ground and stir up many of the truths which are buried.

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