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Unsettling conceptions of Indigenous youth, reimagining the future: Beyond a problem for education and criminal justice

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Abstract

There is an absence of Australian scholarship regarding the emergence of Indigenous youth as a social category despite decades of intervention into the life worlds of young First Peoples. These interventions are often justified as attempts to solve the problem for young First Peoples while mutually constituting Indigenous young people—and their families, as the problem. In response to this absence and the rendering of Indigenous young people as a problem, this study addresses two questions: Why and in what ways have young First Peoples come to be known through *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth? And how have these conceptions of Indigenous youth been contested and imagined otherwise?

Indigenous women's standpoint theory guides the broad ethical and methodological approach undertaken in this study, while theories of time, normativity and fugitivity form the conceptual foundation from which I respond to the research questions. Time is theorised as a racialised imposition which works to determine a normative future. Normativity supports an examination of what constitutes the 'human' and its exclusions, and lastly, fugitivity provides a theoretical entry and identification point to engage with counter-stories told by Indigenous peoples which contest and escape normative conceptions of Indigenous youth. These counter-stories instead work to recuperate the present humanity of young First Peoples.

In attending to the way Indigenous young people have come to be understood as a problem, I draw on Foucault's approach to discourse analysis. This study traces allusions and references to Indigenous young people as they have circulated in government and institutional records and policies, State sanctioned commissions and reviews, and the media in response to the following sites: the inaugural inclusion of Indigenous people in an Australian national census in 1971; and the release of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report* (1991) prompted by the brutal death in custody of 16-year-old Yindjibarndi teen John Pat in 1983 at the hands of four off-duty policemen and a police aide. Through an engagement with these sites, it emerges that Indigenous

young people have come to be understood as a problem for education and criminal justice through two key discursive formations: inescapable deficiency and inevitable criminality.

These discursive formations work to problematise Indigenous children and young people, rendering the education and criminal justice systems as infallible while figuring the inequalities experienced by First Peoples, and the internment in detention and death of Indigenous young people, as inevitable. Inevitability functions in discourses of criminal justice in the same way Indigenous deficiency is normalised in discourses of education: by positioning an imagined Indigenous future both for Indigenous people and communities as contingent on postcolonizing systems which have often sought their erasure or compliance. The bodies of Indigenous children and young people, as the present manifestation of Indigenous pasts and futures, are the primary corporeal sites where these discursive strategies continue to attempt to unfold.

A desire-based approach, informed by the work of Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck guides the second question posed in this study: how have these conceptions of Indigenous youth been contested and imagined otherwise? Through an engagement with counter narratives authored by Indigenous people, this question orients toward the profundity of representations which transcend the limited and limiting conceptions of Indigenous youth as a problem.

The texts engaged with include a documentary film *In My Blood It Runs* (2019), a futurist live action television series *Thalu* (2020) and the creative writing of Indigenous young people published in an Indigenous-student led university magazine. These texts create fugitive spaces which force an analytical engagement beyond taken-for-granted registers of criminality and deficiency. In doing so these texts undermine the inevitability of settler futures, instead imagining the future as contingent on non-normative figurations of young First Peoples in the present moment.

This study makes a significant contribution to critical Indigenous studies and youth studies scholarship by urging movement beyond empirical analyses of the experiences of Indigenous young people to a parallel interrogation of the very concepts scholars use to make sense of these experiences.

Declaration

This thesis comprises only my original work towards a Doctor of Philosophy and contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due acknowledgement and reference has been made in the text. This thesis is fewer than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed:

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for those who sit holding
experience and knowledge
in their bones carrying
the stories of their families
on the tips of their tongues
holding fists tight fires burn
behind clenched teeth

for those who sit
with heart holding back
words hurting sweating
palms rushing blood red
sights set on where you are
going from where you come
holding heavy the future

Preface

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List of Acronyms

AEDP	Aboriginal Economic Development Policy
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RCIADIC	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and math
STMP	Suspect Target Management Plan
WA	Western Australia

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ..... **I**

DECLARATION ..... **III**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **IV**

PREFACE ..... **VII**

LIST OF ACRONYMS ..... **VIII**

INTRODUCTION **1**

Inception story: How I came to this research project 4
Locating Indigenous youth at the nexus of Indigenous and youth studies 9
Indigenous scholars and critical Indigenous studies scholarship 14
Chapter overview 17

CHAPTER ONE - THE FUTURE IS INDIGENOUS: THEORISING TIME, NORMATIVITY AND FUGITIVITY **21**

Introduction 21
Theorising time 23
The future as a white possession 24
Youthhood: An imposition on the present 26
The future absence of racialised youth 28
Theorising normativity 31
The Human and its exclusions 31
The norm and its deviations 38
Normalised settler colonial inevitability 41
Theorising fugitivity 44
Arresting damage and deficiency 46
Fugitivity in escape and refusal 49
Fugitivity as ensuring futurity 52
Conclusion 54

CHAPTER TWO - UNSETTLING METHODOLOGIES: TRACING, CONTESTING AND IMAGINING OTHERWISE **55**

Introduction 55
Study Overview 57
Indigenous standpoint theory: Methodological and ethical foundation 59
Methodological approach 62
A Foucauldian critique 64
Desire-based approach 71
Study methods and design 79
Tracing conceptions of Indigenous youth 80
Contesting and imagining otherwise 85
Conclusion 93

CHAPTER THREE - EMERGING CONCEPTIONS OF INDIGENOUS YOUTH: FIGURING THE FUTURE AS A WHITE POSSESSION **95**

Introduction 95
Disappearing young First Peoples in the population making of Indigenous youth 97
Indigenous youth and the rhetoric of continent self-determination 103
Depoliticising the Aboriginal problem of poverty and inequality 106
Troubling transitions, ensuring normative futures 110
The problem of 'Aboriginal youth' becomes an economic problem 112
Conclusion 119

CHAPTER FOUR - CRIMINALISING CONCEPTIONS: PRESENCING INDIGENOUS YOUTH AS FUTURE RISK . 121

Introduction 121
Racialised processes of criminal justice: Dehumanising Indigenous young people 123
Mitigating untimely death through education and employment 126
Neoliberal markers of civility 131
Discourses of inevitability: Presencing Indigenous youth as future risk 134
Conclusion 140

CHAPTER FIVE – CONTESTING CONCEPTIONS OF INDIGENOUS YOUTH: REFUSING A POLITICS OF INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION 145

Introduction 145
Difference as socio-economic: The interplay between deficiency and exceptionalism 148
Difference as onto-epistemological 154
Theorising density as an alternative to difference 157
Enacting a politics of refusal: Refusing inclusion 161
Unceded land, stolen land: The importance of place 166
Presencing Indigeneity - countering hypervisibility 169
Conclusion 172

CHAPTER SIX - COUNTERING CONCEPTIONS OF INDIGENOUS YOUTH: RESISTING NORMATIVE FUTURES 175

Introduction 175
Countering hypervisibility through complex personhood 177
Resisting normative futures 180
Navigating the discursive formation of inevitable criminality 184
Indigenous youth out-of-place: Geographical and temporal exclusion 192
Conclusion 196

CHAPTER SEVEN - FUGITIVE FUTURES: REIMAGINING CONCEPTIONS OF INDIGENOUS YOUTH 198

Introduction 198
The context: Making futures possible 202
Normalising Indigenous futures 206
Fugitive futures: Escaping registers of damage and criminality 210
Conclusion 214

CONCLUSION 216

Contribution of this study 217
More questions than answers: Future research possibilities 222

REFERENCES 225

Introduction

There is an old story that belongs to Noongar country in the south-west of Western Australia. It is the story of a young Noongar man who journeys in the belly of mamang, the whale (Scott et al., 2011). This young Noongar moves with the ease of safe passage from the moment his intrigue compels him to jump down inside mamang's belly. His fearlessness and trust are held in recognition of this moment and its potentiality. This moment is familiar; it is understood in the sapient knowledge bequeathed by his ancestors who have undertaken a similar journey, and thus the journey is embodied before it even begins. The "very old song" taught to him by his father guides the young man, fostering curiosity instead of fear (p. 8). Singing to the rhythm of the whale's heartbeat, the young Noongar "deep and dark within the whale…sang his father's song" (p. 12). In reference to the story of *Mamang* (Scott et al., 2011) and other old narratives that feature young Noongar protagonists, Wirlomin Noongar author Kim Scott (Scott & Robinson, 2011, p. 6) suggests that the:

> … protagonists take risks; trust their heritage and what their fathers told them, their mothers too. They venture out on their own. They orbit, they move away and return. Are very mobile, but held to a centre. Are like meteors and comets and stars. They suggest a respectful movement out to the periphery and beyond. Be what you can, of this centre. Perhaps there has been too much unbecoming, too much 'don't'.

I introduce this story as the starting point for this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, because the journeying of this young Noongar, as theorised by Scott, could be understood as reflective of the movement undertaken by young First Peoples in the present moment, particularly those young people who leave their families and communities for work, school or further study.[1]

[1] Throughout this thesis, I generally use "First Peoples" as the preferred term in the community (Narrm, Melbourne) in which I work and live (Grieves, 2020, p. 17). I use "Indigenous peoples" in alignment with recent critical Indigenous studies scholarship, which deploys the term when referring to First Peoples from Australia and abroad. This designation serves to connect the experiences of First Peoples from Australia with those in other places who also identify as Indigenous. I use the terms "Indigenous" and "Aboriginal" and/or "Torres Strait Islander" interchangeably throughout

I also refer to this story as a point of contrast. The story of this young man is a story of Noongar place. It is a story that Noongar people of that place have held since time immemorial. It is a story of bravery, and one which Scott describes as representative of First Peoples stories more broadly that feature young protagonists. However, these are not the stories most non-Indigenous people generally know, hear or value about young First Peoples. In fact, the narratives about Indigenous young people, which have come to be self-evident in the imaginations of non-Indigenous peoples, are stories which, as I argue in this thesis, often tell of lack, criminality or exceptionalism. Such narratives, whether found in policy, research or the media, rely on a number of key ontological assumptions about young First Peoples as inherently disadvantaged and damaged as the result of intergenerational impacts of colonisation. In this way, the description of the young Noongar as fearless and brave is in contrast to the unbecoming way *a priori* or taken-for-granted conceptions of Indigenous youth mark Indigenous young people as almost if not already at-risk of coming under the purview of criminal justice or of disengaging from school, as deficient or if not, then exceptional. I argue in this thesis that these conceptions, produce an over-determined idea of what is constituted as 'Indigenous youth'. Importantly, as the story of *Mamang* attests, Indigenous young people are not always represented or understood as the problem. In various texts authored by First Peoples and in the negotiations young people undertake in their movement out to the periphery and beyond, as Scott would say, these *a priori* conceptions are not only contested but imagined otherwise.

This thesis emerges in response to taken-for-granted conceptions of Indigenous youth, which figure young First Peoples as a problem while simultaneously being inspired by how these ideas are contested *and* imagined otherwise. In doing so, this study addresses two questions: Why and in what ways have young First Peoples come to be known through *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth? And how have these

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this thesis to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I acknowledge the limitations of this language in accounting for the complexity and diversity of Indigenous identities and experience (Moreton-Robinson, 2011a, p. 414). I capitalise the term Indigenous, as I am referring to a specific group of people. Wherever possible, I will refer to individuals and groups by their specific ancestral Country of origin. I will also make it explicit when referring to indigenous groups that belong to places other than Australia. Throughout the historical analysis presented in this thesis at times I make reference to First Peoples using terms emergent from their historical context.

conceptions of Indigenous youth been contested and imagined otherwise? The work of this thesis is bifold. Firstly, it traces the emergence of conceptions of Indigenous youth as they have emerged in the discursive practices of government. Secondly, this study contends with how these *a priori* conceptions are contested by Indigenous peoples' stories, and by young First Peoples. Part of this contesting work is in imagining otherwise through an engagement with textual representations that transcend the limited and limiting conceptions of Indigenous youth as a problem, instead reimagining the future as contingent on non-normative figurations of Indigenous young people in the present moment.

In attending to these two questions, I am able to make a number of points which I will briefly mention here and expand on in the substantive chapters of this thesis. Firstly *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth have been produced via discourses of education and criminal justice through the discursive formation of inescapable deficiency and inevitable criminality, respectively. Despite these distinct discursive formations' historical genealogy, I highlight how they are entangled and work in relation to each other throughout this thesis. For example, I show that the refusal of young First Peoples to comply with the demands of a normative education system is framed by discourses of criminal justice as signalling inevitable criminality, which in turn justifies educational exclusion and a punitive criminal justice response. Secondly, as a contest to the discursive formation of inescapable deficiency and inevitable criminality as they coalesce around and indeed produce conceptions of Indigenous youth, I demonstrate that these *a priori* conceptions are anything but inescapable and inevitable. This demonstration is made possible by an engagement with textual practices that imagine young First Peoples beyond deficiency and criminality and instead recognise their complex humanity and value beyond that which is demanded by normative systems of education and civic participation such as employment.

In essence, this study responds to a divergence between representations of young First Peoples as damaged and deficient and how these representations have been resisted through First Peoples' textual practices. As a response to these research questions, this study, in part, provides a history of the way taken-for-granted conceptions of Indigenous youth have characterised young First Peoples. Yet this thesis's imperative orientation is

toward the future, as guided by First Peoples' stories. Indigenous children and young people as the present manifestation of an Indigenous futurity have always been integral sites where the settler colonial project of elimination has attempted to unfold in Australia. This manifestation is evident in the intergenerational trauma inflicted by practices of removal throughout much of the twentieth century of Indigenous children from their families, known as the Stolen Generations. It continues in the current state-sanctioned and unprecedented removal of children from their families under the child welfare system and, as I outline later, in the rates of deaths in custody and hyper-incarceration of young people in detention centres across the country. These practices, like conceptions of Indigenous youth, are not ahistorical. As this study demonstrates, such practices have been enabled and informed by how young First Peoples have been figured, yet these figurations remain largely unexamined. With this in mind, in this introduction I begin by sharing the inception story that led to me undertaking this doctoral research. I then turn to youth studies and Indigenous studies as the disciplinary places where critical considerations of Indigeneity and youth respectively have been undertaken, yet there is also a lack of similar critical engagement with conceptions of Indigenous youth. Then, before providing a brief overview of the chapters that make up this thesis, I make my disciplinary situatedness clear while emphasising critical Indigenous studies as foundational to this research project.

Inception story: How I came to this research project

The story of how I came to this research project begins when I was 17 years old and in high school. Around the time I was preparing to sit for the university entrance examinations, I confronted my high school history teacher when she said something racist about Indigenous people. I had been doing well in the subject up until that point. I had worked hard throughout the year to keep my mouth closed and head down, despite feeling alienated during lessons on the settlement of Australia, where representations of First Peoples and our experiences of colonisation did not sit right. Shortly after I stood up and told my teacher what she was saying was wrong, I walked out of that classroom, off the school grounds and didn't go back. I did sit the exams but probably for a whole range of reasons didn't do well. However, I gained entry into a university as part of a provisional entry scheme for Indigenous students who did not get the grades to get into university on

their own marks. After a first failed attempt, I later completed an undergraduate degree in arts.

Over a decade after I left that history classroom, I graduated with a research master's degree in education from the University of Cambridge and found myself working with young First Peoples at high school as a mentor and curriculum writer in a residential academic enrichment program. Part of this work included supporting a cohort of 90 young First Peoples and their families across New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia to navigate their experience of high school for five and a half years. These young people spent a significant proportion of their school holidays—about 20 days each year—for over half a decade attending this residential program. When I started working with them, most of the young people barely stood tall enough to reach my chin. Five years later, after many sleepless nights making sure they didn't sneak out of their rooms and countless conversations which revealed their brilliance, some of them towered above me. Many of the young people completed school, and some did not.

What I learned from working with these young people is immeasurable, including the realisation that my experience of schooling was not an anomaly. In fact, nearly every Indigenous young person on the program had felt, at some stage in their schooling, excluded. I explored these experiences of violence in my master's research (Brown, 2019). Some of the students had learned to deal with it and were framed as resilient and often exceptional. Others could not, and in their resistance were further alienated, and indeed disciplined, through exclusion, suspension and expulsion. One of the program sites was based on Noongar country. I remember reading the story of *Mamang* (Scott et al., 2011) and feeling proud that the bravery of the young man who journeyed in the belly of the whale was reflected in the bravery of the young people I worked with in their engagement with the education system and often, in their strategic decision to disengage with it.

When I began this doctoral journey, I was still working with these young people in the high school program. In addition to working with the young people, this role included securing program funding, delivering professional development for teachers and school administrators, and advising policy writers and government departments on Indigenous youth issues. This doctoral research project, while about Torres Strait Islander and

Aboriginal young people, responds to countless moments where as a Gumbaynggirr woman working in a professional context with Indigenous young people, I was called on to define, qualify, elaborate on and articulate the ostensible disadvantage possessed, or harm and risk faced, by these young people. As I entered different spaces for different purposes—funders' meetings, workshops to tackle disadvantage, symposiums on the challenges facing young First Peoples—I was expected to carry these stories of damage, ready to trade for goodwill and financial support when the opportunities arose. Often the request was made to tell my own story. As I sat there in my navy suit, appearing as an exception, I was asked: 'How did *you* overcome it? What were the challenges *you* faced, and how did you get here?' More often than not, my intrigued trading partners, who got to decide how much what stories were worth, were older white men or women in suits themselves. These people, and the organisations, funding bodies or departments they represented, wanted these stories to show how their money and generosity was going to good use. In these moments, I attempted to challenge, complicate or shift their understandings but again and again left feeling frustrated and weary.

I understand these and other related experiences as an accumulation of crucible moments critical to the conception of this thesis that are imperative to theorise within the Australian context. During these bright-lighted, white-walled meetings, the desire to solve the problem of Indigenous young people was made visible as mutually constituted by the positioning of young First Peoples, and their families, as the problem. Each of these moments urged me to question the ease with which such stories of disadvantage and damage were assumed, demanded and then consumed. I began to ask: why are Indigenous young people thought to be *a priori* so knowable? And how did the language of disadvantage and risk in relation to the experience of young First Peoples become so common sense? When these questions arose, I turned to the academic literature hoping for guidance in making meaning of and theorising what I was observing. Instead, I was troubled by an immense body of Australian scholarship which overwhelmingly reflected, rather than challenged, these taken-for-granted conceptions of Indigenous youth. This thesis is compelled by the presence of these limited and limiting conceptions of Indigenous youth and the absence of representations of Indigenous young people that might begin to reveal otherwise in academic scholarship and broader political discourse.

Despite Indigenous studies and youth studies' critical engagement with Indigeneity and conceptions of youth respectively, very rarely do Australian scholars in Indigenous and youth studies, cultural studies, sociology, educational research or otherwise take up the formation of the Indigenous youth figure let alone in its utility in relation to settler colonial power, with few exceptions. Dave Palmer and Nyungar scholar Len Collard's (1993) important early work in their article titled: *Aboriginal Young People and Youth subcultures* is one exception. In response to debates within youth studies about the utility of youth culture and subcultures as analytical frames, Palmer and Collard brought youth studies scholarship concerning the voices and experiences of Nyungar young people shared in interviews with the authors. Interview data was not used to ask empirical or normative questions about who these young people are or ought to be, but rather as a way of troubling the concepts and theories of youth studies as inadequate in accounting for the complexity of the lifeworlds of Indigenous young people. Palmer and Collard (1993, p. 26) offered the contention that the "formal and academic work in Australia largely mirrors popular or 'everyday common-sense' ideas about Aboriginal young people." Their research highlighted that either Indigenous young people were absent or invisible in youth studies scholarship and research more broadly, or where they were considered, there was an "over-reliance on problematic assumptions" about the realities of Indigenous young people informed by "discourses on deviance and criminality, or more 'racial' discourses that are often romantic or overly deterministic" (p. 26). In arguing for meaningful engagement between non-Indigenous researchers and Indigenous people in establishing research projects, Palmer and Collard concluded that the "result of such work will be research and policy that is informed, sophisticated and which takes into account the multifaceted, complex and sometimes contradictory identities and experiences of Nyungar and other groups of young people" (p. 31). Although published almost three decades ago, this article is still relevant and its provocations timely, as evidenced in the lack of research that contends with Indigenous young people's lifeworlds (as noted in Cuervo et al., 2015). Furthermore, research that seeks to represent and respond Indigenous young people's lives and issues continues to take as its starting point, as Palmer and Collard noted, 'common-sense' or *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth as a problem.

In parallel to a dearth of scholarship in youth studies and broader scholarship relating to Indigenous young people, there is a modest yet cogent body of Australian

scholarship that poses questions to trouble the way Indigenous childhood is figured in research, policy and popular culture. Cultural studies scholar Kristina Gottschall (2015), for example, engages with films created by Indigenous filmmakers which tell the stories of Indigenous children. They argue that these films, which feature young Indigenous protagonists, provide entry points to examine how gender, poverty, race and place inform conceptions of Indigenous childhood as simultaneously at risk, vulnerable and sick—and in their potential—as capable, good and agents of social cohesion. In doing so, Gottschall poses an important question of cultural production: How might these practices form and govern concepts of childhood, making meanings around the costs or benefits of being particular subjects in particular times and places? Gottschall argues that Indigenous filmmakers challenge viewers to rethink the discursive assumptions around race, childhood and poverty that inform how Indigenous children are understood and how they are responded to in social policy. Appealing to researchers to "consider how the realities of Indigenous children are made and remade, and to what effects" they offer that "we must reflect on how our thinking is potentially enabled and constrained by such discourses" (p. 57). Gottschall proposes that cultural production such as films created by Indigenous people is an important source of re-presentation, which may challenge normative ideals of childhood while also calling to account, particularly in the academy, those who seek to represent Indigenous children through their scholarly practice.

Torres Strait Islander political theorist Sana Nakata (2015) likewise surveys representations of Indigenous childhoods, although in the contemporary children's rights scholarship. Nakata (2015b, p. 7) argues that the literature on Indigenous childhoods is "currently dominated by empirical approaches that ask questions about who children are and normative approaches that ask questions about what childhood ought to be." In making this critique, Nakata argues for a study of childhood which instead examines the representative claims made on behalf of Indigenous children. In referring to the way Indigenous children are often invisible in discourse more broadly or overdetermined in ways which work to problematise Indigenous adults, Nakata (2015, p. 7) offers that a study of representations:

> … de-emphasises the need to know who that anonymous child is, what their capacities are, and what sort of childhood he or she, his or her family or

> community desires. By studying representative claims, we are able to pose questions that are less preoccupied with the supposed truths of childhood and instead focus upon making adult representatives accountable for the claims they make and the effect those claims have on Australia's political landscape and the children that punctuate it.

Anchoring this research project are Nakata's arguments which like Gottschall and Palmer and Collard, focus on the need to question the way Indigenous children and young people have been represented and to what effects. They do so by providing reference points in a void of available literature while indicating productive possibilities for further research, which this research project responds to.

Locating Indigenous youth at the nexus of Indigenous and youth studies

As a starting point to addressing the lack of a critical engagement with taken-for-granted conceptions of Indigenous youth, here I bring attention to Indigenous studies and youth studies because of their respective interrogation of the concepts of Indigeneity and youth. What is more, an argument often made in Indigenous studies and youth studies is that discursive figurations produce material affects. Thus, the absence of considerations of conceptions of Indigenous youth and the way you First Peoples are represented in the scholarly fields one might expect to find it, serves to signify the extent of the dearth of scholarship on the way Indigenous young people have been represented by the academy and further afield. Theorists within youth and Indigenous studies in the Australian context have sought to hold their fields to account troubling conceptions of youth and Indigeneity, respectively. Yet neither has brought the same level of nuanced and critical insight to bear on how Indigenous young people have been discursively figured and materially responded to.

Young people are often figured as the present future. Youth is an educational ideal, a social, ideological and aged based category, and a site of affective energies. Likewise, Aboriginality is a discursive marker of multiplicity. It is a racialised, social and ideological category; a signifier of contested nationhood; a cultural marker of difference; and, most importantly, a sovereign embodiment (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Discursive figurations of Aboriginality and youth are dynamic, varied and multifarious in the media,

research and political sphere. In response to Philippe Aries *Centuries of Childhood* published in 1962, scholars have recognised that childhood, like gender, race and class, is socially constructed (S. Nakata, 2015a; Norozi & Moen, 2016; Prout & James, 1990). Likewise, 'Indigenous' and 'youth', in the way that they are socially constructed markers, are temporally, legally, politically and socially malleable. In parallel and response to this malleability, critical engagement with figurations of Indigeneity and youth occurs across disciplines, challenging how Indigenous people and youth correspondingly have come to be represented, and the utility of these representations. This response occurs alongside acknowledging that these figurations are also intimately tied to the realities of both First Peoples and young people. For example, the relationship between research as disciplinary knowledge and practice is evident where racialised representations of Indigenous people have continually augmented practical interventions into Indigenous people's lifeworlds (Dodson, 1994; Langton, 1993; Moreton-Robinson, 2004b; M. Nakata, 2007a). Gomeroi legal scholar Alison Whittaker (2018, p. 24) emphasises this point concerning the production of knowledges whereby Indigenous people are "assumed to be beneficiaries but of which we are rarely the experts." Whittaker continues that critical Indigenous epistemologies "which scrutinise institutions that extract and produce knowledge from Indigenous peoples in the academe" counter this dynamic by suggesting that "scorn, pity and horror produce ill-aligned knowledges—or at least knowledges that can only fit colonial purposes" (2018, p. 25). Early markers of Aboriginality, such as the wandering nomad, justified dispossession via the doctrine of terra nullius. Since then, as Goenpul Quandamooka scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004b, p. 76) reminds us, "we have been represented in many ways, which include treacherous, lazy, drunken, childish, cunning, dirty, ignoble, noble, primitive, backward, unscrupulous, untrustworthy and savage." "Since their first intrusive gaze," Yawuru scholar Patrick Dodson (1994, p. 2) states, "colonising cultures have had a preoccupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling [Aboriginality]. Under that gaze, Aboriginality changed from being a daily practice to being 'a problem to be solved.'" These representations have had material effects, informing how non-Indigenous people view, understand and respond to First Peoples, and to an extent, the way we as Indigenous people view ourselves.

Like representations of Indigenous people, over time conceptions of youth have held immense influence in the way they have worked to order young people's lifeworlds.

Yet, since youth studies developed as a field of inquiry, its scope and subject of analysis—youth and young people—has been under contestation. Youth is commonly understood as a moment of transition between childhood and adulthood. The concept of transition has also been used to mark a young person's movement from school to work. However, this understanding of youth-as-transition has been complicated within youth studies (Cuervo & Wyn, 2011; Furlong et al., 2011; Wyn, 2015). In developmental psychology, youth has been framed as a distinct and biological stage in human development, and more recently, as a stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett & Tanner, 2016; Melendro et al., 2020). Youth is also an age-based legal category that governs what young people can and cannot do. Foundational to the way young people are regulated through these legal and social concepts have been understandings of young people as non-citizens (McLeod, 2012), and more so during late modernity with rising unemployment in the context of changing state-market relations, as at-risk and risky (Bessant, 2002; France, 2008; Kelly, 2000a; Te Riele & Gorur, 2015). Furthermore, beyond complicating the concept of youth, the epistemological and ontological limits of youth studies as a multidisciplinary field are also contested.

In 1997 Australian youth studies researchers Johanna Wyn and Rob White argued that the concept of 'youth' is a historically constructed process whereby "outcomes are shaped by the relations of power inherent in the social divisions of society" (p. 3). In making this point, Wyn and White suggested that ideas of a mainstream or universal experience of youthhood as a "linear and uni-dimensional process of growing up" (p. 149) are deceptively simple. The notion of a universal category of youth limits an analytic focus on the effects of social division as "the exclusion, failure and devaluing of groups of young people through systematic institutional processes" (p. 150). More recently, Wyn, in collaboration with Dan Woodman (Woodman & Wyn, 2013), focused on the ascription of youth at risk as the justification for social inclusion policies. This justification that often relies on normative patterns of a successful transition from school to higher education to employment to which "all young people should be 'included'" (p. 264). Instead, they argued for a social framework that enabled policies shaping and responding to the lives of young people to:

> … address the realities of young people's lives today, one that focuses not on the individual and their characteristics that lead to or perpetuate social exclusion, but a framework that focuses on what kinds of societies and communities are inclusive, including in the sense of being open to change (for example, by giving a new generation the opportunity for meaningful participation in shaping not just their own future but collective futures). (p. 273)

In a more recent article, Australian youth theorist Steven Threadgold (2020, p. 688) invited Youth Studies researchers to trace the way young people are positioned across different ontological and discursive spaces to develop "a clearer conception of our research object, reduce confusion, and ensure that those engaged in Youth Studies in all its forms are reflexive about how our own work may be implicated in processes of governmentality." Such a project provokes critical engagement with the way young people are figured through a "material-semiotic assemblage" (p. 688) which he suggests "forms powerful affects for the ways that 'youth' is brought into being, how young people are governed and exploited, and the ways young people – their selves, their lives, their struggles – are researched." Threadgold's provocation follows on from decades of mounting critiques from within youth studies by youth studies scholars in sociology of the basic principles and organising concepts deployed within the interdisciplinary field as analytic frames for making meaning of the lives of young people (Furlong et al., 2011; Woodman & Threadgold, 2011; Wyn & Dwyer, 1999; Wyn & White, 1996).

These critiques have also called into question the utility of youth studies in informing and contesting how young people are governed and responded to in policy and practice. For example, Rob White (1994), in calling for greater attention to the values and politics embedded in the sociology of youth, signalled the bourgeoning Australian study of young people in the mid-1990s. White criticised the growing field of youth studies in its privileging of empirical research on young people's experiences rather than an explanation of the issues impacting their lives. He argued that this focus was leading to the adoption of "problem-centred approaches rather than more holistic structural analyses" (p. 83) within youth research. In 2000, Peter Kelly likewise appealed to youth studies researchers to account for the abstract and institutional nature of:

> … processes of representation, and of the implication of these processes in the regulation of populations of young people; populations which are rendered knowable in all their diversity through the activities of those who do youth studies. (p. 469)

These critical discussions have tested and extended the limits and utility of the field of youth studies and the concepts compelling it to account for the changing social, political and economic conditions that impact Australian young people's lives. These debates have also enabled the theorisation of youth as a discursive construct that has real implications for research and policy and the governing of young people in education, criminal justice and health (Te Riele & Gorur, 2015; Wyn, 2009b, 2009a). However, this recognition of theoretical and conceptual complexity has rarely been brought to bear on Indigenous young people's lives or, importantly, figurations of Indigenous youth.

In following on from this point, Sana Nakata (2018) positions Indigenous childhoods as foundational to conceptions of Australian childhood more generally. She emphasises, a history of Australian childhood cannot be divorced from the representations, descriptions, and constructions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:

> It turns out that the history of Australia is a history of interventions into the childhoods of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. And it turns out that the concept of childhood that emerges in Western political thought, alongside ideas of modern democracy, is entirely at odds with the idea of Indigenous childhood that emerges from the West in very closely related literatures and time frames. (p. 106)

While acknowledging that "Indigenous populations" have "attracted enormous scholarly attention" (2015, p. 4) youth studies scholars Cuervo, Barakat and Turnbull flagged a paucity of scholarship relating to Australian Indigenous young people in their analysis of the four leading academic journals in the field of youth studies. This absence in youth studies scholarship reflects a broader failure across the disciplines to consider the lifeworlds of Indigenous young people. But more than that a large proportion of the scholarship that does begin to attend to the lives of young First Peoples takes the category of Indigenous youth as a given.

Indigenous scholars and critical Indigenous studies scholarship

There is an absence of scholarship that problematises Indigenous youth as an analytic, despite a significant body of empirical research across health, education and criminology, which deploys Indigenous youth as a category to understand the everyday lived realities of and problems faced by young First Peoples in Australia. In addressing this absence, this thesis emerges at the interplay of critical Indigenous studies and post-structural approaches to the analysis of discourse while also taking direction from the critical scholarship produced by non-Indigenous scholars in cultural studies, education, criminology and youth studies. In this way, this study's approach is heavily anchored by my interdisciplinary situatedness in the fields of critical Indigenous studies and youth studies. While I have implicated Indigenous studies and youth studies in their failure to attend to the way Indigenous young people have been figured, I note critical Indigenous studies as particularly foundational to this thesis's work. Critical Indigenous studies has emerged as a scholarly field in the last two decades (Andersen, 2009a; Hokowhitu et al., 2020; Moreton-Robinson, 2016) and provides theoretical and critical guidance throughout this study in addressing how Indigenous young people have come to be known; and, in turn how conceptions of Indigenous youth as a problem have been contested and imagined otherwise through the stories of Indigenous people.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson defines critical Indigenous studies as "a knowledge power domain whereby scholars operationalize Indigenous knowledges to develop theories, build academic infrastructure, and inform our cultural and ethical practices" (2016, p. 5). While historically Indigenous studies has been informed by and held in conversation with a wide range of disciplines (Hokuwhitu, 2016), *critical* Indigenous studies is asserted by an increasing mass of Indigenous scholars across the world as a distinct disciplinary field (Hokowhitu et al., 2020; Moreton-Robinson, 2016). Brendan Hokuwhitu (2021, p. 3) states a key focus of critical Indigenous studies is "how we engage, disrupt, and live within the worlds that we are immersed in" while simultaneously critiquing, considering and contemplating "how Indigenous peoples situate themselves within, outside, and in relation to dominant discourses, dominant postcolonial cultures, and prevailing Western thought" (p. 3). The genealogy of this field emanates, Hokuwhitu

continues, from Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples' scholarship, which has criticised the "unsettler/white claims to possession over knowledge itself" (p. 3). Critical Indigenous studies scholarship is thus grounded in resistance to the violence Indigenous peoples and communities face "every day in their neocolonial realities" while simultaneously upholding "sovereign claims to Indigenous lands, languages, cultures, ecologies, ontologies and existentiality" (ibid). In aligning this thesis as a work of critical Indigenous studies scholarship. it is likewise brought into being in resistance to the epistemic violence produced through the category of Indigenous youth, which figures young First Peoples as a problem for normative systems of education and criminal justice. But beyond this resistance, in the work of imagining young First Peoples as otherwise, I also centre the importance of sovereign claims, particularly as they are made through the textual practices of Indigenous people. This centring is strengthened by the deployment of Indigenous standpoint theory, which guides the broad ethical and methodological approach undertaken in this study. Indigenous standpoint theory, as Torres Strait Islander scholar Martin Nakata (2007a, p. 215) describes it, is a "method of inquiry", a process for making more intelligible "the corpus of objectified knowledge about us' as it emerges and organises understanding of our lived realities."

In attending to the way Indigenous young people have come to be figured as a problem in this corpus, this study begins by tracing allusions and references to Indigenous young people as they have circulated in the discursive practices of governments and institutions, in their records and policies, state-sanctioned commissions and reviews, and in the media. Seeking to make this corpus more intelligible, I undertake a Foucauldian post-structural analysis of policy and political texts. In doing so, I ask: how have Indigenous young people been figured?; When did these figurations emerge, and what did they emerge in response to?; How have they shifted and changed?; What is the extent of these figurations in terms of what they enable to be visible and valued?; and, What is misrecognised or not recognised at all? These questions lead to the politicising of conceptions of Indigenous youth and an identification of how such figurations may limit what is known and understood more broadly in research and the discursive practices of government. In tracing the emergence of Indigenous youth as a category and contouring its figurations, I then re-search how they have been contested and imagined otherwise. In doing so, I engage with representations of young First Peoples in film, television and

Indigenous writing that may be read, I suggest, as responding to and opening up possibilities for moving beyond the historical and present *a priori* concept of Indigenous youth. An engagement with the textual representations of young First Peoples is an essential part this study. The absence of critical engagement with conceptions of Indigenous youth in the scholarship orients me toward cultural production as knowledge produced beyond the academy. Palkyu scholars Ambelin Kwaymullina and Blaze Kwaymullina, in collaboration with Laura Butterly (2013) define these textual productions created by Indigenous people as forms of intelligibility that can be read as part of an ongoing intellectual tradition that has existed well before the authority of the academy came into being, and have been adapted and changed with the appropriation of new mediums and changing social, political and economic contexts. This way of reading foregrounds the creative and productive in changing the limits of what is and can be known and what knowledge is valued.

Changing those limits has been an ongoing focus of Indigenous scholars' work in critical Indigenous studies and more contemporary Indigenous studies scholarship more broadly. Yiman intellectual Marcia Langton argues that this productive undoing is about "trying to move boundaries and undo the restrictions which make it so difficult for any of us to speak" (1993, p. 7). These particular boundaries or parameters, which Langton notes, are often epistemological and have been forged via academic disciplinary knowledge as part of colonisation's ongoing processes. Research as the mode through which the West has come to know the Other "is one of the ways" Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 7) notes, "the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realised." Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 91) asserts that "problematizing the indigenous is a Western obsession" and that "for many indigenous communities research itself is taken to mean 'problem'; the word research is believed to mean, quite literally, the continued construction of indigenous peoples as the problem" (p. 92). The disciplines of anthropology and history, in particular, have been examined extensively by Indigenous scholars. Anthropology in Australia, for its racialised representation of Indigenous peoples as only intelligible as unsophisticated and inferior, and history for the narratives it has informed which serve to legitimise, maintain and reinforce Australian nationhood and Australia as a nation (Elder et al., 2004; McGreggor, 2006; Moreton-Robinson, 2011b,

2015a). These historical narratives do not tell with nuance of an Australian nation built on attempted Indigenous dispossession.

In his seminal text *Disciplining the Savage*s (2007a), Martin Nakata examines how historical and contemporary knowledge produced by the academy has manifested in the regulation and disciplining of Torres Strait Islander bodies through formal education. Nakata's interrogation of these disciplinary approaches reveals how these figurations continue to impact and regulate the lives of Torres Strait Islanders today. He notes that accepted disciplinary knowledge and practice was inscribed through anthropological and theological texts, subsequently imbibed by the colonial administration and worked into a web of policy and legislation that has come to "both inform and delimit how we can understand Islanders today" (p. 11). For Moreton-Robinson (2004b), the parameters defining what is known about Indigenous people via disciplinary knowledge are mediated by whiteness as normalised and invisible. The purpose, placement, existence and arguably violence of these epistemological parameters have been increasingly contested over the last three decades as Indigenous scholars historically positioned at the periphery have strategically infiltrated and unsettled boundaries separating knower from known. The scholarship produced at the nexus of, and in response to, this messy encounter brings critical insight into the *a priori* knowledge and ways of knowing that regulate what is valuable and valued within the academy. In doing so, this scholarship also shifts boundaries to enable an articulation of previously subjugated intellectual standpoints that account for Indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing and experience while simultaneously unsettling the surety, or objectivity, of "the corpus" (M. Nakata, 2007b).

Chapter overview

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter One and Chapter Two form the theoretical and methodological foundation of this study. Chapter Three and Chapter Four present my response to the first question guiding this thesis: Why and in what ways have young First Peoples come to be known through *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth? In the final and remaining Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I attend to the second research question: How have these conceptions of Indigenous youth been contested and imagined otherwise?

In **Chapter One,** I introduce theories of time, normativity and fugitivity as the conceptual foundation from which I respond to the research questions. My theorisation of time and normativity is integral to tracing conceptions of Indigenous youth as they have emerged in discourses of education and criminal justice to position young First Peoples in the present as a site of intervention in the production of normative futures. My theorisation of fugitivity provides an entry and identification point to engage with counter-stories told by First Peoples, which contest and escape normative *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth and imagine young First Peoples as otherwise.

In **Chapter Two,** I detail the methodological approach directing this study. I introduce Indigenous standpoint theory and outline the utility and limits of a Foucauldian critique of discourse. Attending to the second aim of this thesis—to imagine young First Peoples as otherwise—I then turn to Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck's articulation of a desire-based approach to research. A desire-based approach supports the recognition of and engagement with the texts of First Peoples as fugitive practices that contest *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth as inherently damaged, deficient and criminal. Lastly, I describe the study design used to answer the research questions underpinning this thesis, including text selection and methods of analysis.

In **Chapter Three,** I trace how *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth emerged in discourses of education from 1967 to 1986. By analysing the government's discursive practices during the period under examination, I show how Indigenous youth emerged as a problem for education through the formation of inescapable deficiency. I argue that through this discursive formation, First Peoples' mounting demands for a self-determined future were slowly co-opted within sanctioned political discourse, which positioned Indigenous young people as a malleable site of redress—through education and employment—for the inherent poverty and disadvantage Indigenous people were figured as facing.

Building on Chapter Three, **Chapter Four** traces *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth as they shifted from a problem for education to also a problem for criminal justice. This shift is examined in the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in*

Custody (1991) report alongside the contemporary example of the Suspect Target Management Plans currently implemented by the New South Wales police force. Through discourses of criminal justice, I suggest, conceptions of Indigenous youth are figured through the discursive formation of inevitable criminality. This framing rationalises the death of young First Peoples in custody and their hyperincarceration and surveillance while rendering the criminal justice system and its representatives as infallible despite the demonstration of persistent homicidal conduct in its encounters with Indigenous young people.

In **Chapter Five,** I return to the discursive formation of inevitable deficiency and consider how it has been produced in education discourse to render knowable young First Peoples in higher education as the exception to the rule of Indigenous deficiency and criminality. In countering representations of young First Peoples as knowable, in this chapter I deploy Métis scholar Chris Andersen's theorisation of density as an analytical frame which supports the recognition of the complex and nuanced onto-epistemological presence of young Indigenous university students. In doing so I assert a recognition of the multitudinous subject positions that Indigenous young people occupy, particularly in educational institutions such as universities. This desire-based recognition values the complex humanity and strategic negotiations of young First Peoples in their engagement with settler colonial institutions such as universities. The analysis in this chapter centres around the on-campus magazine *Under Bunjil* produced by young First Peoples at the University of Melbourne. Here I examine how conceptions of Indigenous youth have been figured in an attempt to ameliorate and arguably reinforce—through the rhetoric of exceptionalism—the seemingly inescapable deficiency of Indigenous people. I then assert that the promise of inclusion is fundamentally contested by young First Peoples' actual presence in educational institutions.

Chapter Six responds to the documentary film *In My Blood It Runs* (2019), directed by Maya Newell and co-created and produced by the Arrende and Garrwa families it represents. The film follows 10-year old Dujuan Hoosan as he refuses to comply with a schooling system he experiences as problematic, and as a result, comes under threat from the criminal justice system. This film demonstrates how the discursive formation of Indigenous youth as inescapably deficient and inevitably criminal manifest in

the harm experienced by Dujuan, his peers and broader community. An engagement with *In My Blood It Runs* also reveals the concerted desire of Dujuan and his family to imagine a different future. This future is demanded via the assertion of a sovereign and self-determined present despite these assertions being continually framed as non-compliance by the systems that seek to discipline and punish Dujuan, his family and other young people in his community.

The last chapter in this thesis, **Chapter Seven**, engages with the five-part live-action television series and futurist text, *Thalu* (2020). Given the concerted attempt of the white Australian nation state to erase Indigenous peoples and how this erasure continues to work on Indigenous children and young people's bodies, in this chapter, I ask: what does an engagement with Indigenous futurisms enable when thinking through the ways Indigenous young people have been represented? This chapter theorises the fugitive futures of Indigenous young people, futures beyond the arrest of the linear development narrative and colonial constructions of Indigenous youth.

Lastly, I conclude this thesis by reflecting on the contribution of this study to broader scholarship. I also share some of the tricky questions or what Quechua education theorist Sandy Grande (2018, p.60) terms "incommensurable tensions" that have emerged from this undertaking this research.

Chapter One - The future is Indigenous: Theorising time, normativity and fugitivity

> The Government has to explain why it happened. What was the intention? I have to know why I was taken. I have to know why I was given the life I was given and why I'm scarred today. Why was my Mum meant to suffer? Why was I made to suffer with no Aboriginality and no identity, no culture? Why did they think that the life they gave me was better than the one my Mum would give me?
>
> — Confidential evidence 139, Victoria: woman removed at 12 months old in 1967, *Bringing Them Home* report

> Damage narratives are the only stories that get told about me, unless I'm the one that's telling them. People have made their careers on telling stories of damage about me, about communities like mine. Damage is the only way that monsters and future ghosts are conjured.
>
> — Eve Tuck and C. Ree, *A Glossary of Haunting*

Introduction

Black feminist theorist bell hooks (1991, p. 1) writes about the power of theory, and the possibilities theorising presents as "liberatory practice" in the way it enables the status quo to be challenged. Theory has been defined as "creative and emancipatory" (Trowler, 2012, p. 277) and as an "intervention" (hooks 1995, p.1). British educational theorist Stephen Ball (1995, p. 266) likewise describes theory as "a vehicle for 'thinking otherwise'; it is a platform for 'outrageous hypotheses' and for 'unleashing criticism.'" Ball continues:

> Theory is destructive, disruptive and violent. It offers a language for challenge, and modes of thought, other than those articulated for us by dominant others. It provides a language of rigour and irony rather than contingency. The purpose of such theory is to de-familiarize present practices and categories, to make them

> seem less self-evident and necessary, and to open up spaces for invention of new forms of experience. (Ball 1995, p. 266)

Theory is deployed in this thesis as a starting point in the way it provides a place from which to proceed and respond to assumptions; it both guides and augments my study design and analysis. As an analytical tool, theory is a refractor through which I trace and make meaning of conceptions of Indigenous youth as they have emerged; and lastly, theory forms the foundation from which I do the work of imagining otherwise.

In this chapter, I introduce three theoretical frames: time, normativity and fugitivity. Time and normativity are used throughout this study as prisms through which to examine and understand the way conceptions of Indigenous youth have been figured. The theoretical development of the third frame—fugitivity, provides the foundation for examining how these conceptions of Indigenous youth have been contested and imagined otherwise. In this chapter, I begin by discussing the temporal dimensions of the future as a white possession. In theorising the future as a white possession, a deeper understanding of time's racialised nature emerges, but so does the imposition of time—imposed via normative trajectories and standard transitions—to the malleability of youthhood in producing particular futures. Thus, the present moment is theorised as a site of intervention in producing a future where Indigenous children and young people are anterior to white linear time. Such a theorisation provides the grounding in this study from which to understand how time has been used in the formation of normative trajectories and how Indigenous young people are continually positioned as perpetually, if not for benevolent state intervention, deviating from the standards set as the conditions for civic participation.

Building on this theorisation of time, I then turn to theorisations of normativity which provide analytical support in considering how in liberal humanist thought the conflation of 'Man' as Human has relied on the infantilisation of First Peoples and other people of colour. The ideological designation of the primitive-as-childish as it emerged throughout the twentieth-century forms not only the foundation of normative systems of education for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and young people alike but also the justification for the inclusion *and* exclusion of Indigenous young people across education

and hyper-surveillance in criminal justice, as I demonstrate later in this thesis. But importantly, the rhetoric of the child as grafted onto the primitive and vice versa has worked to infantilise all Indigenous people, undermining the self-determination of Indigenous adults, particularly when it comes to determining the future through our children. Before concluding, I introduce the theoretical frame of fugitivity. Fugitivity provides a theoretical orientation throughout this study to recognise, value and reframe the non-compliance of young First Peoples as the generative escape from the temporal logics and normative demands of settler colonialism. Lastly, I locate the stories of First Peoples, in which Indigenous young people are figured outside of and beyond normative and linear temporality, as fugitive practices that generate horizons of Indigenous futurity.

Theorising time

To contend with Western time in its relation to conceptions of Indigenous youth reveals it as a mechanism of colonial dispossession. Despite the important role of time in justifying and structuring settler colonialism, settler Australian historian Giordano Nanni (2015, p. 2) notes an absence in the scholarship highlighting the intimate connection between European territorial expansion and "the conquests of space and time." Nanni states that just "as the history of colonialism is often written without much reference to time, the history of time is frequently narrated without due reference to colonialism" (p. 4). Throughout this thesis, I contend with the order of time as an ongoing mechanism of settler colonialism and how it circulates in relation to problematizing conceptions of Indigenous youth on a number of levels. I trace the emergence of conceptions of Indigenous youth in parallel to the temporality of linear progress and development and its seeming inevitability in discourses of education criminal justice. This tracing enables me to complicate the normative linearity of youth transitions and youthhood as they are naturalised as a stage in an individual's lifetime in their development from child to adult. This tracing reveals how normative conceptions of Indigenous youth figure young First Peoples as a critical site of intervention in the present in determining the future. Likewise, instead of conceptions of Indigenous youth, the existence of Indigenous young people challenges the hegemony of linear time and normative progress while unsettling settler colonial claims to the future. I examine how First Peoples re-claim and reimagine the

future, subverting linear time, rendering Indigeneity as fugitive and fleeing, thus undermining the inevitability or inescapability of settler colonial futurity.

Foundational to these later claims, in this section I contend with how First Peoples have been represented and rendered as stuck in the past and outside of time and history. I also consider how Indigenous people have been posited as the starting point in the evolution of Man and are thus denied a determination of the future. Further, I draw on theorisations of time that problematise its hegemony, naming this hegemony as white and thus racialised. These theorisations inform an analytical frame which supports throughout this study a consideration of the future as a white possession and youthhood as an imposition that works to regulate the inclusion and exclusion of white and racialised young people. This regulation produces in the present moment a future imaginary where the Indigenous/racialised presence is seemingly absent. A consideration of Indigenous young people's regulation through the temporal imposition of youthhood is useful to this research in tracing how the figure of youth works with the figure of Indigeneity.

The future as a white possession

In so much as this thesis is about conceptions of Indigenous youth, it is also about the future of First Peoples. The epistemic violence of imagining a time absent of Indigenous peoples, an absence which also signals a lack of contest over settler claims to stolen land, has often been brought into being on the bodies of Indigenous children and young people. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Kidman, McDonald, Funaki, Ormond, Southon and Tomlins-Jahnkne (2021, p. 6) attend to the imperious role of linear time in its relationship to dispossession in their statement that the "freezing in time of indigenous histories, by Western standards, along with systematic attempts to erase native temporalities, closely accompanies colonial invasions of land." So, I begin with the future as a contested site, the struggle for which often plays out corporeally in the present moment on this bodies of children and young people, and discursively in the way they are imagined as its contingent. In making this point about the future, I briefly turn to the past.

The turn of the twentieth century heralded the birth of a federated and self-governing Australia. However, the conception of nationhood began not with Federation in 1901 but

in concerted deliberation in the decades leading up to this important moment which legally bound formerly disparate colonies together as states and territories under the Commonwealth of Australia. Before Federation, the men who debated the makeup of the Australian Constitution held the responsibility for shaping a document regarded as the birth certificate of this nation. In doing so, they often contemplated the historical legacy they were forging for generations of Australians to come. The weight of this responsibility is reflected in a statement made three years before Federation by Josiah Symon at the Australasian Federation Conference in 1898 to a contingent which included the first Prime Minister of Australia, Edmond Barton. Symon stated:

> It will be a union with strong foundations set deep in justice, a union which will endure from age to age, a bulwark against aggression and a perpetual security for the peace, freedom, and progress of the people of Australia, giving to them and to their children and to their children's children through all generations the priceless heritage of a happy and united land. (p. 2509)

Here Symon talks with passion of the people of Australia and their children, the children of the future. Settler state futurity and childhood intimately correspond as the state's existence and its citizens' imagined future became contingent upon one another. This contingency is not only evident in Symons' sentimental reflections on the legacy Australia's founding fathers were keen to bequest for future generations but in the exclusions writ large in what constituted the 'people of Australia.' These white middle-class men who inaugurated Australia's early political life, were concerned for the children of the future as future-citizens, in as much as they were adamant about securing a liberal white Christian Anglo-Saxon future for the nation. In this way, the future, and the nation, has been figured from the outset as a white possession.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson theorises the possessive logic of whiteness as a mode of rationalisation:

> … that is underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state's ownership, control and domination. As such it is operationalised to circulate sets of meanings about white ownership of the nation, as part of common-sense knowledge, decision making and socially produced conventions. (2004a, p. 5)

The reproduction of relations of control and domination also occur in the way time is understood and the future is imagined within the logic of white possession. In *The chronopolitics of racial time,* Charles Mills (2020, p. 312) argues that white racial time structures normative judgements about and dominant understandings of "the past and present of the contemporary world order." In outlining the importance of, and little scholarly attention given to, chronopolitics—the politics of time—Mills notes the hegemony of the chronopolitical discourses of empire, which synonymise whiteness with progress in the socio-legal political and cultural imaginary of the Western world. Mills argues that this discursive temporal regime is an imposition on the material world where time is both a resource and commodity, thus having implications for those positioned as obstructing, anterior to or outside of linear progress. As has been forged through racialised conceptions of time, the linear progress narrative, also structures the temporal impositions and experiences of non-white individuals and collectives at varying intersections of ethnicity, class, age, gender and ability.

Youthhood: An imposition on the present

Youthhood, for example, as a life stage on the continuum from child to adult, has been the focus of sociological analysis, which seeks to trouble the way registers of youth are deeply embedded in the way risk is framed and understood. Australian youth theorist Peter Kelly (2001) suggests that discourses of youth-at-risk are "an aspect of the (neo)liberal problematisations of liberal welfare government" (p. 29). These problematizations are framed as foundational to a regime of truth about the nation's future and the nation-state's potential to secure its economic well-being. In troubling the concept of youth as a given, Kelly emphasises that youth, as representative of neither child nor adult, is an artefact of history and expertise. Kelly continues:

> … youth is principally about becoming; becoming an adult, becoming a citizen, becoming independent, becoming autonomous, becoming mature, becoming responsible. There is some sense in which all constructions of youth defer to this narrative of becoming, of transition. Moreover, there is a sense in which becoming automatically invokes the future. Youth, as it is constructed in at-risk discourses, is

> at-risk of jeopardising, through present behaviours and dispositions, desired futures. (2001, p. 30)

In tracing the figuration of the child in the making of the adult world, Claudia Castañeda (2002) asserts that a child is understood as an adult in the making. Inherent to this self-evident assumption is the "conceptualization of the child as a potentiality rather than an actuality, a becoming rather than a being" (p. 1). In this way, all children are lacking; children and young people, as Kelly emphasises, are humans becoming rather than human beings and have not yet acquired the universal skills necessary to participate in society as autonomous, responsible individuals. This naturalised distinction between childhood and adulthood based on the lack, or possession, of autonomy and responsibility positions children and young people as the beneficiaries of political, legal and academic representative claims made by adults on their behalf. Childhood and youth, as temporal distinctions, are governed by the decisions of adults.

Responding to Nikolas Rose's (1991, p. 123) contention that "childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence," Torres Strait Islander political theorist Sana Nakata (2015a, p. 55) notes that the formative years of childhood are "spent regulating the potential and risk of the child, with to produce the kind of individual that liberalism both identifies as its end and as its only source of legitimacy." To note, this dynamic progression from childhood to adulthood centres on a normative conception of the child as a "subject for improvement" (2001, p. 105) who through, as sociologist Barry Hindess (2001, 101) suggests, "more or less extended periods of discipline…can sensibly be left to manage their own affairs" (p. 101). Within Western societies, "this conceit has provided an important rationale for the education of children" (Hindess, 2001, p. 104). However, a distinction also needs to be made between the expectations of the normative white child and corresponding future imaginaries and how racialised childhoods and youth are tempered in the present moment in the production of normative futures.

Queer theorist Lee Edelman (2004) conceptualises the Child as a signifier mobilised teleologically toward the production of neoliberal futurity. According to Edelman, the figure of the Child is not only crucial to contemporary politics but is that which "[s]erves to regulate political discourse" itself. Edelman emphasises this point in arguing that the:

> … figural Child alone embodies the citizen as ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights 'real' citizens are allowed. For the social exists to preserve for this universalized subject, this fantasmatic Child, a national freedom more highly valued than the actuality of freedom itself. (2004, p. 11)

In response to Edelman, North American scholar Bryanne Young (2015, p. 72) in her study of residential schooling makes clear that the figural child is a white child and that racialised and Indigenous children are not only excluded from inhabiting the universalised subject but exist in relation to it on only "the most spectral of registers." Young's theorisation of the Indian, or Indigenous, child as a spectral figure is useful in following the teleology of assimilatory logics, which are simultaneously temporal and racialised, and work to order conceptualisations of Indigenous youth and the dominant practical responses, in education, criminal justice, and child welfare, to young First Peoples.

The future absence of racialised youth

When simultaneously applied to an analysis of youth and childhood, a theorisation of racialised time reveals the extent to which the future is asserted as a white possession. Mary Zaborskis (2016, p. 606), in their examination of the historical production of the "native child", puts it so concisely, "[i]nnocent children, seen as free of a past, can enter the future," but the innocent child is irreconcilable with the racialised child who is seen "as having a past" and hence is "barred from the future." Thus time in relation to whiteness is an essential intervention in sociology, suggests Rahsaan Mahadeo (2019, p. 187), who argues that "the cold, perfunctory, impersonal character of modern or progressive time is conducive to individualism, competition, and capitalism." These tenets also constitute a possessive investment in whiteness (Lipsitz, 2006). An investigation of the power dimensions of time shows how both collectives and individuals are "rendered legible, illegible, and/or non-existent within conventional temporal terms" (Mahadeo, 2019, p. 186). Mahadeo draws on conceptions of time as a white possession as part of their research work on the temporal perspectives of racialised young people in the United States to argue that the figuration of some young people as critical to the future is

contingent on the extent of their coevalness with "white-androcentric-modern-linear-progressive-bourgeois time" (p. 198). Mahadeo continues that:

> Those who refrain from participating in such a competition or who lack the various forms of capital to do so remain at a temporal disadvantage. Temporal disadvantage is not, however, a product of individual decisions or irresponsibility within the temporal economy. A broader assemblage of structural inequalities works to deny, steal, and compress the time of multiply marginalized persons, particularly racialized persons. (2019, p.187)

In this way, the possessive logic of whiteness is evident in the actions and modes of governing that occur in the present to determine the course of the future. Australian sociologist Barry Hindess (2001) attends to this entanglement in his consideration of Man's individual liberty as an organising principle within Western nation-states. He notes that freedom and unfreedom are two sides of the same coin, and that:

> Liberal political reason has been as much concerned with paternalistic rule over minors and adults judged to be incompetent as with the government of autonomous individuals, as much concerned with the subject peoples of imperial possessions as with the free inhabitants of Western states. (2001, pp. 94–95)

According to Hindess, Indigenous young people as the nexus in which childhood or adolescence and imperial dispossession encounter one another have been, and continue to be, one of the most intensely governed populations. This convergence is particularly evident in varying examples, including the state-sanctioned attempt to erase the futurity and thus sovereignty of First Peoples through the forced removal of children and the continued over-policing and hyper-incarceration of Indigenous young people. The figure of the Indigenous child, as emblematic of Indigenous futurity, is thus dangerous in its challenge to the normativity of the linear progress narrative and the seemingly inevitable process of settler colonisation, which seeks the erasure of an Indigenous presence, an action often manifested on the bodies of Indigenous children and young people.

The interplay between the child as an adult-in-the-making and the adult as foundational to the purpose and legitimacy of democratic liberalism is complicated by considering intersecting conceptions of gender, race and class. Regarding the historico-

political emergence of the concept of race as an organising principle which legitimates colonial rule, the racialised-child is figured differently from the normative child; the figuration of the non-white child as inferior occurred in relation to the normalisation of the white child as superior. As Indigenous children become adults, they continue to be Indigenous. However, within liberal frameworks referenced by Nakata (2015) and Hindess (2001), there exists limited possibilities for Indigenous children to become Indigenous adults. Indigenous adults have been historically (Haebich, 2008; Jacobs, 2005; McGreggor, 2012) and arguably continue to be (Altman & Russell, 2012; Proudfoot & Habibis, 2015) understood and responded to as children, child-like and childish via discourse that infantilise. Within the liberal logic of assimilation, an Indigenous child can only become adult if she forgoes her Aboriginality. Yet as the maxim "killing the Indian in the child" (see B. Young, 2015) suggests, to do so according to this logic renders this individual no longer Indigenous. This a precarious state of being and an even more fraught process of becoming.

In the present moment, this accumulated dissonance between the conceptualisation of the normative child and the non-white Indigenous child, and their respective relations to adulthood's potentiality, renders Indigenous children and young people a paradox. The Indigenous child-body is doubly marked as the Child and the Native. Or, as Philip Deloria states, "paired rhetorically" (1998, p. 106) in a seemingly inescapable double bind. Although as I continually assert throughout this thesis, this seeming inescapability is not so inescapable at all. As I demonstrate in the next section, the paired rhetoric of the primitive-as-childish was brought into being through pseudoscientific discourses in the early decades of the twentieth century. These discourses I suggest worked to render First Peoples as stuck in time or as relics of the past existing as remnants in the present; as the evolutionary starting point and control in the development of Man; and as existing outside of history. Next, I theorise the normative role of the human as 'Man' and its exclusions to illuminate the non-normative possibilities of figuring young First Peoples as otherwise and thus as fugitive.

Theorising normativity

Theories of normativity, particularly concerning the universality of the category 'human' and the hegemony of the linear progress narrative, have been useful throughout this study for thinking through how Indigenous young people have been figured in their inclusion in and exclusion from institutions of power and authoritative discourses which guide the practices of those institutions and their representatives. Theories of normativity have supported me to consider questions like: how have these practices been rationalised; and what are the implications for those young people who do not comply with the normalising aspirations of education, for example? In attending to this thesis's aim to 'imagine otherwise' conceptions of Indigenous youth, in what ways do First Peoples unsettle normative systems of colonial rule? In this section, I contend with the historical emergence of and critical responses to the conflation of human with Man and what this conflation excludes. I ground my discussion of theories and concepts of normativity in the way Indigenous people have been infantilised via linear conceptions of progress. This infantilisation process has important implications for how both Indigenous people and young people respectively have come to be understood and responded to in the Australian context. I highlight this point next by contending with the way white civility is normalised via notions of progress which position non-white populations and individuals, depending on their proximity to what constitutes normal conduct, as deviant. What emerges in this theorisation of normativity is how racialised bodies are either excluded from the category of human or included only as exceptional. Lastly, I draw on settler colonial theory to discuss how temporal and normative impositions attempt to produce in the present moment a future imaginary where the Indigenous/racialised presence is seemingly absent. This absence I suggest is a fantasy that animates the settler colonial drive for Indigenous land. In doing so, I qualify my use throughout this thesis of the term 'settler colonialism'.

The Human and its exclusions

Central to the formation of Indigenous youth is the normalisation of the category of human as synonymous with 'Man' in liberal humanist thought as it has been demarcated to exclude particular classed, racialised and gendered collectives. North American scholars Latty,

Scribe, Peters and Morgan (2016) interrogate the category of 'human' in light of Indigenous and people of colour's ongoing dehumanisation. They suggest:

> The deployment of modern race through the inscription of racial difference on colonized subjects assists in delineating the boundaries of humanity. In other words, through the process of racialization, colonized others come to form the constitutive outside of humanity, thus "creating the conditions of possibility for that freedom" for modern liberal subjects. (p. 150)

Their analysis is grounded in examples, one of which details the cases of seven Indigenous young people who died while away from their home communities at school in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada, between 2000 and 2011. While this example enables a critique of assimilatory logics, which position Indigenous communities as places not worthy of accessible and quality education, Latty et al. (2016) also critique the human as a racial project emerging from modern liberalism. In making this claim, they assert it "needs to be said again that racialized peoples will not secure justice by gaining entrance into humanity because the human as a frame is always already violent" (p. 153). The violence of 'the human' as a frame is evident in the entanglement of racialisation and temporality as it emerged in the dual rhetoric of the child and the 'primitive' via the childish-primitive in the 20th century.

The infantilisation of Indigenous and other people of colour mapped the liberal humanist subject onto the heteronormative white subject relative to the racialised Other's inferiority. Cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter (2003), in her critique of the "overrepresentation of man" (p. 267), deems racialised rhetoric as "descriptive statements" or "governing master codes" (p. 271) which have normalised and produced the Man as human. In Australia's specific geopolitical context, this overrepresentation has occurred through discursive strategies that have grafted notions of the child as the early stages of individual human development to ideas of Indigenous peoples as the primitive and early stages of the development of modern Man. This racialised mapping from which both whiteness and relational notions of 'the native' have emerged is critical to attend to. Such a mapping is foundational to the conceptual framework of this thesis not only because it has implications for the way youthhood more generally has come to be understood, but because it has justified the paternalistic mode of governing relations between the state and Indigenous

people. This paternalistic relationship has manifested in the state's assertion as a proxy parent to both First Peoples and our children.

In the first instance, the conceptual convergence of the child and the savage did not give rise to the "savage child," but instead to the idea of the primitive-as-childish, particularly within natural history and later anthropology (Chamberlain, 1900; Robinson, 1894; Spiller, 1913; Wake, 1872). In 1872, for example, anthropologist C. Staniland Wake concluded in his article *The Mental Characteristics of Primitive Man, as Exemplified by the Australian Aborigines,* that "…it is evident that the aborigines of Australia, as compared with the races who have made further progress in mental culture, are yet in the condition of children" (p. 82). In 1925 the photographer and anthropologist Herbert Basedow (1925, p. 54) observed that "the Australian aboriginal stands somewhere near the bottom rung of the great evolutionary ladder we have ascended — he the bud, we the glorified flower of human culture". Freud (1913, p. 1) believed that the "mental life" of "savages" provided utility in the way it would "reflect a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development." In grounding his argument with an example, he states:

> For external as well as for internal reasons, I shall select as the basis of this comparison the tribes which have been described by anthropologists as the most backward and miserable of savages, the aborigines of Australia, the youngest continent, in whose fauna, too, we can still observe much that is archaic and that has perished elsewhere. (ibid.)

As Freud's comment indicates, diagrammatic and ethnographic accounts representing the evolutionary hierarchy and nature of man more often than not positioned Indigenous peoples in extreme opposition to the civilised European man. In these accounts, Indigenous people were considered to epitomise the missing link between man and 'brute' as the exemplar of humanity's childhood. This equivalence of the primitive with the child was referenced extensively in anthropology (Chamberlain 1900; Robinson 1894; Wake 1872) and took hold in education within child study (Dewey, 1902; Hall, 1916; Porteus, 1929). Foundational to the emerging field of child study in the late nineteenth century was the appropriation of anthropological representations in their utility as evidence attesting to the childish nature of 'primitives' and, inversely, the primitive nature of children.

In the United States in 1909, Granville Stanley Hall, President of Clark University and often referred to as the father of child study (Baker, 1998; Hulbert, 2011; Kessen, 1979), commemorated the twentieth year of the institution by hosting several international seminars and conferences ranging in topics from psychology and pedagogy, child study to international relations. Notable figures in attendance at the Clark Conference were Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, drawn to Hall's notoriety and eager to share their ideas in an American context (R. B. Evans & Koelsch, 1985). Opening the *Child Conference in Research and Welfare* (1910), Hall asserted "[w]e all believe in eugenics and its viewpoints should temper all our work" but that it is "the young with whom we can do most and who best respond to our efforts and through whom we can do most for the future" (p. 58). Significantly, Hall then stated:

> The child is ages older than the adult who is a relatively very modern institution, and both its body and soul are full of rudimentary organs by the score that belong to a remote past. Some of these must be left to atrophy and others must be actively developed. The very vices of the young hark back to savagery. Their diseases and abnormalities are often connected with embryonic stages, which persist. Their perversities are only good traits out of proportion or out of their time order. (Child Conference for Research and Welfare 1910, pp. 58–59)

These comments made by Hall, who in more contemporary times has also been referred to as the father of adolescence (Bynner, 2005; Green & Cormack, 2008; Lesko, 1996) and the modern research university (Goodchild, 1996; S. H. White, 1992) allude to the early influence on child study of eugenics and recapitulation theory—the idea that the development of the child can be traced in parallel to the evolution of the human 'race' (G. S. Hall 1900, 1918).

A groundswell of support for the study of the child was formalised in the United States and across the Western world at the turn of the twentieth century within a political context where school-based education was increasingly recognised as the responsibility of liberal democratic nation-states (Hawkins, 2007; Lesko, 2001). From this perspective, the primitive was interpreted as simultaneously embryonic and a living relic, representing the nascent beginning and living ancestor of modern man. The primitive inhabited the

childhood of humanity, and just as understanding the primitive enabled a deeper comprehension of the child's developmental stages, understanding the child was vital to understanding the origins of Man. It was proposed that theorists and educators could define the child's needs in reference to a recapitulation framework. As Hall (1891, p. 196) asserted, "the pupil should, and in fact naturally does, repeat the course of development of the race, and education is simply the expediting and shortening of this course." These ideas featured prominently in intellectual discussions about the nature of the child and corresponding educational interventions and informed practical implications for schooling curriculum, pedagogy, teacher education and child psychology, extending well beyond the United States to Europe, Britain, New Zealand, Canada and Australia (Gould, 1996; Lesko, 2001; Morss, 1990).

Stephen Gould (1996) describes the transnational level of engagement with recapitulation theory, which "intruded itself into every subject that offered even the remotest possibility of a connection between children of the 'higher races' and the persistent habits of adult 'savages'" (p. 117). Furthermore, youth theorist Nancy Lesko (2001, p. 29) suggests that "recapitulation's analogy of primitives and children set up basic ways of knowing, labelling and ranking that were endlessly repeated in child rearing but also in psychological knowledge and public polices about adolescence." This theoretical framework worked as a technology of civilisation which positioned adolescence as the:

> … crucial divide between rational, autonomous, moral, white, bourgeois men and emotional, conforming, sentimental, or mythical others, namely primitives ... Adolescence became the social space in which progress or degeneration was visualized, embodied, measured, and affirmed. (Lesko, 2001, p. 29)

The prevalence, permeability and scope of this theoretical perspective formed a significant part of early intellectual considerations across a range of disciplines interested in the study of adolescence. Prominent educational theorists such a John Dewey (1902) and Jean Piaget (1929) and developmental psychologists Freud (1913) and Jung (1940) can be counted as contributing to debates on the validity and applicability of recapitulation to education, developmental psychology and understandings of young people. These ideas were instrumental in the early conceptions of adolescence *and* Indigenous peoples.

Examples of ‘primitive man’ were drawn from colonised peoples worldwide, but a prevalent example relevant here is the specific and concerted preoccupation with Aboriginal Australian people as the prime example of primitivity.

In Australia in 1921, Professor Richard Berry and Frank Tate, then Victoria’s Director of Education, were commissioned to present two of the three biannual Stewart Lectures at the University of Melbourne in a series titled *The Modern Psychology*. In his lecture, Professor Berry shared the findings from his research undertaken with educator and psychologist S.D Porteus (1920). This research combined intelligence tests with methods that compared the brain capacity of different populations enabling, he argued, a distinction between the normal and subnormal. In referring to a table, Berry (1921, pp. 32–33) urged the audience to “observe the lowly place taken by the evolutionary backward Australian aboriginal, who is seen only to have the cerebral development of the 13-year-old school boy.” In the publication of this research undertaken by Berry and Porteus (1920, p. 26), they believed **“**the inclusion of the representatives of a primitive race, like the Australian Aboriginal of the Northern Territory of Australia, furnished us with a useful evolutionary ‘control,’ and has added to the general scientific interest of the work.” Throughout his lecture, Berry indicated the saliency of his research within the context of the Australian school system post World War One. This is also evidenced in his concluding remarks, where he stated:

> In the essential work of post-war education and reconstruction, there are two great problems—the one concerns the normal child, the other the mentally subnormal. Amongst the normal school population, one of the most urgent things is the removal from their ranks of the feeble-minded—the grit in the wheels of the educational machine. (Berry, 1921. p. 22)

Following Berry, Frank Tate, presented the third lecture in the Stewert Lecture series titled *The Psychological Failures of Life*. Here Tate (1921, p. 53) reflected on the potential burden of “mental defectives” or what he preferred to call “social inefficients.” He pondered the question: How are we to discover *a priori*, from the school inefficients, the social inefficients of adult life?” In concluding, his answer included intelligence testing, like that utilised by Porteus and Berry, and national support for child study through state-

based child study institutes. Tate was concerted in his efforts to establish child study centres across Australia and received international attention in his endeavours.

For example, in attendance at Stanley Hall's 1909 Clark Conference was Professor James Russell, who in 1928 travelled from the teacher's college at Columbia University of which he was Dean, on an "educational mission" (Russel, 1928) on behalf of the Carnegie Institute to visit Frank Tate in Melbourne. The Carnegie Institute was interested in providing financial support through monies allocated for "British Dominions" to establish a child study institute in Australia modelled on those already developed in the United States under Professor James Russell's guidance. Two years later, this meeting's outcome culminated in the establishment of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (see Connell 1980). The first Director was K.S. Cunningham, an Australian educational researcher based at the Melbourne Teachers College. Cunningham had assisted Berry and Porteus in their research endeavours years prior and spent time under Russell's tutelage at Columbia (Connell 1980; Watts 1994).

These men of influence were part of a transnational movement of people and ideas over time concerning child study and the study of adolescence, which had significant bearings on the formation of Australian education as a regulated and uniform system. Richard Berry's assertion that Aboriginal adults had the mental capacity of thirteen-year-old "normal" children resonates as a reformulation of ideas relating to recapitulation theory. The research tools employed by Berry to arrive at this finding were used in educational research by Porteus and Cunningham and reinforced as valid in the support they received by the first state-based Victorian Director of Education, Frank Tate. They were then formalised in the establishment of the Australian Centre for Educational Research (ACER). These ideas were fundamental to establishing a normative Australian education system modelled on logics of linear progress, which positioned Indigenous peoples as outside of history. Through this designation, white children have been afforded the possibility of developing into fully human through normative systems of education, while Indigenous children and young people, as the future of Indigenous people, have been excluded from doing so (S. Nakata, 2018).

The norm and its deviations

In considering the 'norm' as part of the imposition of order upon human conduct, European sociologist Zygmund Bauman (1997, p. 58) makes a distinction between abnormal conduct, that which departs from the norm, and deviation, which is cast as a more "extreme sort of abnormality" activating "therapeutic or penal intervention." Deviation signals that not "everything is as it should be." This signalling is productive: it prods and presses "toward lifting reality to certain standards not yet fully reached." This imposition Bauman (1997) suggests gestures toward the:

> … intent of separation, amputation, excision, expurgation, exclusion. They promote 'the proper' by sharpening the sights on the 'improper'; they single out, circumscribe, and stigmatize parts of reality which are denied the right to exist, destined for isolation, exile or extinction. (p. 59)

Yet many racialised collectives, despite their demonstration of proper conduct, will never be admitted to the category of 'human.' The indication of cohesion and stability in Bauman's statement: "everything as it should be" in the Australian context is intimately tied to the settler colonial fantasy of Indigenous elimination, through assimilation if not erasure (Wolfe, 2006). The jurisdictional, cultural and political hegemony of the settler state is normalised in the apolitical figure of heteronormative white masculinity as the epitome of patriarchal white sovereignty. Within normative frameworks of cohesion, this figure is both aspirational and instructive as it is circulating, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004a, p. 5) describes, "as part of common-sense knowledge, decision making and socially produced conventions." As a mode of rationalisation, the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty designates the limits of humanity by promoting the:

> … the idea of race neutrality through concepts attached to the ideals of democracy such as egalitarianism, equity and equal opportunity. This allows patriarchal white sovereignty to remain transparent and invisible - two key attributes of its power. Yet as the premise of white national identity it defines 'the human condition...it alone defines normality and fully inhabits it.' (Moreton-Robinson, 2004, p. 6)

Patriarchal white sovereignty works through the figurative ideal of heteronormative white masculinity to obscure its demarcation of the 'human', which is "predicated on racial difference and domination" (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b, p. 87). This definition of the human, in its exclusionary and presumptive superiority, has come into being via the negation of the value of Indigenous people in juxtaposition to the superiority of whiteness. As Chris Andersen (2009a, p. 92) suggests, such a dynamic "anchors and shapes white recognition of the normative, social and legal boundaries of class, race, gender, and, ultimately, citizenship." Thus, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis, Indigenous youth and young First Peoples are continually ascribed value, via normative systems of colonial rule, based on their attempt or lack thereof to inhabit the normative category of 'human' as it is tethered to exclusionary liberal humanist ideals.

Interdisciplinary scholar Lisa Lowe (2015, p. 6) elaborates that "while violence characterizes the exclusion from the universality of the human, it also accompanies inclusion or assimilation into it." Useful to this study is the critique of inclusion enabled by theories of normativity which reposition the role of institutions such as schooling and higher education as fallible in a broader policy context which presupposes these systems as the antidote to the problems facing Indigenous young people rather than as part of the problem. The importance of recognising this fallibility at the risk of otherwise reinstating the normalising role of education has been identified by education theorist Gregory Bourassa (2019), who critiques the justice education literature which they suggest approaches the "ailments of schooling" (p. 20):

> … as if they are merely unfortunate tendencies of an otherwise sound institution. There is little to no recognition that the construction of the system and its production of normate subjective figures and epistemologies are contingent on the absorption, containment, and eradication of the educational life of many others.

However, engagement with and success within these institutions becomes the yardstick of civic participation. This success denotes a valuable member of society, rather than a deviation from it. Those that deviate from standard normative trajectories, such as the transition from school to higher education and then onto employment, are designated as either at-risk or risky. This designation has been imperative in the production of

racialised populations as disadvantaged and criminal. Moreover, as non-Indigenous Indigenous studies scholar Mark Rifkin asserts:

> … the institutionalized production of racialized populations generates geopolitical distinctions (home versus colony, citizen versus subject), but in a register that appears not to be about space and sovereignty at all. Such categorizations appear as if they were derived from the natural facts of health, reproduction, and racially differentiated embodiment. (2014, p. 154)

In this way, First Peoples individuals and populations are normalised in their deficiency and disadvantage against the settler collective's normalised superiority. Through these articulations of normativity, particularly concerning the category of human, Indigenous people are perpetually excluded, the signs of this exclusion, poverty and disadvantage, criminality, exceptionalism, then become its rationalisation in the way it attests to Indigenous deficiency and the inability of Indigenous people to participate in society fully.

This argument can be extended further to suggest that the inclusion of First Peoples into the body politic of the nation-state has been done so through discursive strategies such as the accounting of statistical inequality. These strategies work to attest to Indigenous deficiency, invoking the bestowal of rights on behalf of the state as a sign of morality, civility and democracy. Moreton-Robinson (2011b, p. 641) makes this point in stating that "[g]overnments dehumanised Indigenous peoples in order to legitimise their actions and then sought to make us fully human by exercising benevolence and virtue in its many forms." The virtuous state is able to generate itself as paternally benevolent further securing its claims to sovereignty within the eyes of international law while discursively rendering Indigenous people as inherently incapable of determining the present or future. Moreton-Robinson (2014, p. 67) reinforces this argument in *Imagining the good Indigenous citizen: race war and the pathology of patriarchal white sovereignty* where she states that within "this discourse social problems are considered to be any forms of behaviour that violate the norms of white civility." In this way, virtue functions via discursive strategies to "dispossess Indigenous peoples from the ground of moral value, enabling racism to be exercised with the best of intentions" (Moreton-Robinson, 2011b, p. 657). Next, I want to draw briefly on settler colonial theory to outline how the idea of

settler colonial inevitability works both concurrently and relationally with racialised time and the future as a white possession in the attempted dispossession of First Peoples.

Normalised settler colonial inevitability

For this study, settler colonial theory provides limited conceptual devices for understanding Indigenous children and young people's centrality to the broader colonial project: a project underpinned by the desire to eliminate First Peoples and acquire Indigenous land. For example, theorising the linear progress narrative as the temporal logic upon which settler colonialism is based provides an analytical entry point in this study which enables me to respond to how the settler colonial state is always working toward an imagined future where an Indigenous presence is no longer a threat to the foundations of Australian nationhood.

Settler colonial theorist Lorenzo Veracini (2011b, p. 207) makes the distinction between colonialism as characterised by a circular narrative structure reproducing "cycles of opposition between civility and barbarism" and settler colonialism which follows a "linear narrative structure" grounded "in the teleological expectation of irreversible transformation" (p. 207). The insistence of settler sovereignty is enacted via an ideology of expansion that relies on assumptions about the inevitability and self-evidence of linear development and progress over time, in addition to essentialist beliefs about the racial inferiority of Indigenous peoples. This racialised ideology has been animated by the other foundational condition of settler colonialism: the elimination of the native (Wolfe, 2006)—this logic of elimination centres around the primary desire of settler colonialism, land. The ongoing desire to acquire land, which is unceded and thus stolen Indigenous land, requires disappearing the 'native'. This attempted disappearing has occurred through iterative processes which began with marking the Australian continent as *terra nullius*—a land belonging to no one—and has continued via bureaucratic, institutional and discursive practices ever since. Indigenous children and young people's bodies are an important site of struggle and intervention where this imagined future attempts to unfold in the present.

One of the most oft-cited axioms emergent from settler colonial studies as a field of inquiry is that "settler invasion is a structure, not an event" (Wolfe 1999, 163). This statement is useful in theorising colonisation not as something located in the past but as an ongoing process that continues to have implications for both First Peoples and non-Indigenous people living on unceded and stolen lands. Settler colonial theorist Patrick Wolfe argued that settler colonial states are structured on a logic of elimination as an "organizing principal of settler-colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence" (2006, p. 388). This logic, Wolfe proposed in earlier writings, informs a persistent institutional tendency to "supplant the indigenous population which reconciles a range of historical practices that might otherwise seem distinct" (1994, p. 96). Further, analysing settler colonialism via these practices and how they manifest, he suggests, "enables us to perceive the underlying coherence of Australian history, which links present government policy to the initial invasions" (p. 96). The ongoing permeability of colonial power is also acknowledged by education scholars Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia (2006, p. 250), who argue that it "continues to shape most of our contemporary discourses and institutions – politically, culturally and economically". Yet, while settler colonial theory enables attending to settler colonialism and its logics in both the past and the present, in the context of this study, it also provides a departure point for contending with the importance of the future and how it is imagined in the present.

One of the most distinctive tenets distinguishing settler colonialism from other colonial contexts is that the settlers came to stay. As Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012, p. 5) make clear, "[s]ettler colonialism is different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain." But this homemaking, importantly, is not something of the past—it is ongoing and heavily oriented toward the future. In implicating education as an essential part of the settler colonial project in producing normative futures, Laura Ishiguru (2016, p. 18) implores scholars of settler colonialism to attend to "the critical significance of expectation, aspiration, and the reproductive family", particularly as children and young people "are invested with the generational power and responsibility to create racialised and exclusive settler futures." In their examination of schooling curriculum as invested in settler colonialism and "the permanence of the settler colonial nation state" (2013, p. 71), Tuck and Gaztambide-

Fernández write: “When we locate the present of settler colonialism as only the production of the past, we overlook how settler colonialism is configured in relation to a different temporal horizon: the future” (p. 80). The way in which settler colonial logics seek to project settler normativity and thus an Indigenous absence into the future reveals a troubling and persistent Indigenous presence in the present.

In attending to the limits of settler colonial theory as a structural approach, it is important to note critics who call into question the scholarly fields’ tendency to reinforce what Macoun and Strakosch (2013, p. 436; see also Snelgrove et al., 2014) term “a kind of colonial fatalism.” They warn against positioning settler colonialism as an always forever ongoing process of “suspended temporality” (p. 435), which can lead to portrayals of settler colonialism “as an inevitable structure likely to exist across time – the fact that the past persists in the present implies that this past will also persist in the future.” Such portrayals risk re-naturalising settler occupation, suggests Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Corntassel (2014, p. 23; see also Konishi, 2019), making settler colonial studies a field which goes from asserting a disavowal of colonisation “to its representation as inevitable.” The inevitability of this future, reinforced both by uncritical origins and applications of settler colonial theory and the logics which structure settler colonialism as a process, is also ironically a fundamental fantasy of settler colonialism. This fantasy is one in which First Peoples no longer exist. To bring this inevitable future into being, First Peoples must be rendered in the present moment as incapable or unable to determine the future, exist in it or own it. Like Māori scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville (2020), who acknowledges a limited utility in settler colonial studies, I find “the logic of elimination” useful in accounting for the homicidal intentions of the settler colonial state toward Indigenous peoples. I also resonate with Te Punga Somerville’s statement that nonetheless, settler colonial studies “enjoys the privilege of whiteness in the academy (regardless of whether individual scholars are white)” (2020, p. 4). She continues that: “While settler colonial studies must always contend with the Indigene (vanishing, exterminated, agentic, or whatever), Indigenous studies and Indigenous worlds are always bigger than experiences, and even analyses, of colonialism” (p. 4). Likewise, Tiffany Lethabo King (2019) critiques “white settler colonial studies” in its preoccupation with “settlement, settler subjectivity, and land” which makes it “increasingly difficult to register the far-reaching and ongoing violence of conquest in everyday life” (p. 45). This preoccupation also

accounts for the lack of theorisation from within white settler colonial studies scholarship in recognition of the value of life beyond those anchored by, and in, liberal humanist conceptions of humanity. White settler colonial studies is preoccupied with settler colonialism's violence rather than those who survive and contest it and those instances of First Peoples complex existence that occur beyond it.

Throughout this study I use Aileen Moreton-Robinson's term "postcolonizing" (2003, 2007). Postcolonizing holds immense theoretical utility and also acts as a reminder of the foundational dissonance of settler colonial studies. Postcolonizing, Moreton-Robinson (2015b, p. 197) posits, is a verb that signifies "the active the current, and the continuing nature of the colonizing relationship that positions [First Peoples] as belonging but not belonging". Despite the ongoing violence of colonialism, Moreton-Robinson makes clear that settler colonial inevitability is impossible:

> There is always a subject position that can be thought of as fixed in its inalienable relation to land. This subject position cannot be erased by colonizing processes which seek to position the Indigenous as object, inferior, other, and its origins are not tied to migration. (2003, p.11)

This study, which finds aspects of settler colonial theory useful, also extends beyond its limits in theorising Indigenous futurity and the future as Indigenous. The conceptual frame throughout this study that enables decolonial imaginings of the future is grounded in theories of fugitivity.

Theorising fugitivity

Theories of fugitivity, which gesture toward escape, refusal and futurity, are a contest to settler colonial inevitability. When considered in relation to conceptions of Indigenous youth and the way these conceptions have been contested and imagined otherwise, fugitivity orients my analysis to the interplay of discursive and material captivity of Indigenous young people in time, through representation and by the institutional responses these figurations justify. I argue in this thesis that figurations of Indigenous youth in

discourses of education and criminal justice attempt to arrest young First Peoples via the deployment of deficiency, criminality or exceptionalism. In relation and parallel to this, the actual arrest and incarceration of Indigenous young people occurs at a disproportionate rate in response to non-compliance with the demands made by normative education, criminal justice and welfare systems. However, in the face of this ongoing arrest, First Peoples have always creatively rebelled and resisted the imposition of temporal logics, conceptions of the human as 'Man' and normative systems of colonial control. This resistance to the order of time and refusal to invest in the conditions ascribed as necessary for civic participation, particularly for young First Peoples as the present determination of an Indigenous future, has often been framed and responded to as non-compliance.

The disciplinary response to this 'non-compliance' is most immediately visible in the hyperincarceration and deaths in custody of Indigenous young people. Yet the presence of First Peoples in and of itself indicates a refusal to comply with the demands of the state, particularly when the state's existence is contingent on the (non)existence of Indigenous peoples, as evidenced in the sanctioned attempts to eradicate and assimilate. This presence, as unsettling non-compliance, is reckoned with as such in classrooms, in policy, by child welfare and in the media as sites of complicity in producing settler colonial futures. In this section, I draw on the work of critical Black studies and Indigenous studies scholars to theorise non-compliance as fugitivity, and I theorise fugitivity as escape, refusal and the generation of futurity. I begin by introducing the story of the state's corporeal and figurative arrest of Malcolm Smith as an example of the broader deployment of damage and deficiency, which rationalises material apprehension and detainment of Indigenous young people. Next, I theorise fugitivity to reframe non-compliance as refusal and as necessary to the creation of other-worlds through the practice of imagining lived lives and futures not bound by what it means to be human when to be human, as Black studies scholar Tiffany Lethabo King (2019, p. 119) states, is to "center a laboring figure that works itself into humanity through alienation—that is, by separating itself from other life-forms that it must denigrate, such as land, water, and animals." Lastly, I theorise First Peoples' stories as acts of fugitivity that figure the present and Indigenous futures as not only contingent on or in resistance to settler colonial normativity or temporality.

Arresting damage and deficiency

The release of the *Royal Commission into the Deaths in Custody of Aboriginal People* Report was prompted by the brutal death in custody of 16-year-old Yindjibarndi teen John Pat in 1983. Commissioner J.H Wooten (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1989, p. 1), in his report on the death of Malcolm Smith, in asking "why did he die?", stated:

> … a life destroyed, not by the misconduct of police and prison officers, but in large measure by the regular operation of the system of self-righteous and racist destruction of Aboriginal families that went under the name of protection or welfare well into the second half of this century.

Malcolm Smith, a Barkindji and Ngemba man, was 30 years old when he died in 1982 of suicide in prison. Malcom Smith was not technically a child or young person, but his life was understood as "destroyed" before it barely began. He was 11 and was described by Wootan (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1989, p. 3) as "happy, healthy and free…albeit grubby, living in a humpy, and truant from school" when he was stolen from his family and interned as a ward of the state in Kempsey, a town on the mid-north coast of New South Wales, a thousand kilometres away from his hometown of Wentworth, Victoria. I refer to the untimely death of Malcolm Smith because it so succinctly demonstrates how the past is understood to profoundly and negatively impact the future possibilities of Indigenous people and communities.

Commissioner Wooten's comments are significant because they were made at a moment of reckoning when Australian colonial history was under revision, exposing the harm perpetrated against and experienced by First Peoples in the making of the Australian nation-state. In this way, Wooten's acknowledgment of the present manifestation of past harms was a progressive stance when public recognition of Australia's ongoing colonial legacy was still tentative. Six years after Wooten delivered his comments on the life and death of Malcolm Smith to the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* report, the *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* was released in 1997.

Like Wooten, the Inquiry recognised the immensity of the impact of child removal on the Stolen Generations:

> The histories we trace are complex and pervasive. Most significantly the actions of the past resonate in the present and will continue to do so in the future. The laws, policies and practices which separated Indigenous children from their families have contributed directly to the alienation of Indigenous societies today. (Wilkie, 1997, p. 4)

The stories of Malcolm Smith and those that were shared as part of the *Bringing Them Home* report (1997) attest to a profound collective experience of child removal for the purpose of assimilation.

In 2007 then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered a national apology to the Stolen Generations. During this watershed moment which held deep meaning for many of the people removed as children and their families, Rudd stated that "the time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future" (2008a, p. 1). In his apology, Rudd introduced Closing the Gap, which would become the linchpin of Indigenous affairs policy, and has remained the primary policy platform relating to Indigenous people since. During the Apology, Rudd looked forward to:

> A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity. A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed. (2008, p.1)

I introduce the story of Malcolm Smith and Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations as a gesture toward the context from which this thesis has emerged and responds to. In response to and in acknowledgment of the immeasurable collective pain experienced by First Peoples because of forced child removal throughout much of the 20th century these examples expose how the present and future for Indigenous people is seemingly contained by an experience of the past: a past almost wholly marked by intractable damage. This damage is a bulwark, impenetrable and insurmountable, or so it seems. It is animating, it becomes the reasoning as to why gaps exist, and Indigenous

people continue in their vulnerability, disadvantage and criminality. Often in its inception in the figure of the child, and as intergenerational, this damage is also anchoring; it anchors the past to the present and future. And lastly, it is arresting—it apprehends what seems an inescapable bind, marking First Peoples as first and foremost colonised. While this study seeks to attend to the past and its implications for both the present and future, it also speaks back to how the ongoing impacts of settler colonial harm are continually and reiteratively used against First Peoples, particularly young people, to justify further settler colonial intrusion.

Critical race scholar Patricia Williams (1991) in her book *Seeing a Colour-blind Future: The Paradox of Race,* argues that racialised dehumanisation invisibilises the dignity of people of colour in the context of the United States while normalising the presence of whiteness. She states:

> How, or whether, blacks are seen depends upon a dynamic of display that ricochets between hyper visibility and oblivion. While the real lives of real black folks unfold outside the view of many white, the fantasy of black life as a theatrical enterprise is an almost obsessive indulgence. (Williams, 1991 p. 15)

Likewise, First Peoples are pathologised in the Australian context via narratives of damage and deficiency, which inform how Indigenous people are seen and what is visible and made legible. As I argue throughout this thesis, Indigenous youth have been figured as hypervisible through the discursive formations of inescapable deficiency, inevitable criminality, and exceptionalism. Sociologist Avery Gordon (1997) terms this hypervisibility as post-modernist positivism, which she says has led to the belief, held by what she calls social analysts and sociologists that everything can be seen but also that everything is available and accessible for consumption. Such an entitlement Gordon suggest, "is a kind of obscenity of accuracy that abolishes the distinctions between 'permission and prohibition, presence and absence.' No shadows, no ghosts" (p.16). What Gordon means by no shadows and no ghosts is that the complexity and nuance informing the histories, desires and strategic negotiation of everyday life that is attributable to the complex human is denied those who are fixed in and indeed arrested by their hypervisibility. This hypervisibility, as the denial of a complex humanity, is dehumanising. To undermine this dehumanisation, I draw on various concepts such as

Chris Andersen's (2009) notion of density in Chapter Five and Avery Gordon's (1997) concept of complex personhood in Chapter Six. These concepts offer exit points from the hypervisibility of Indigenous disadvantage and damage and force an engagement with the presence of young First Peoples

While the disadvantage experienced by racialised populations is accounted for and damage is attributed to racialised and Indigenous peoples thus invoking a response, particularly in light of human rights demands for justice and equality post-1970s the Western world over, it is also a racialised response cloaked in the language of social policy. As various scholars have argued (Griffiths, 2016; Harney & Moten, 2013a; Moreton-Robinson, 2011b) and as theorist of time, Charles Mills (2020) asserts, race might have disappeared as an overt marker post-Second World War, but in its retreat a vocabulary emerged dichotomising developed and underdeveloped via "a white time map" which "is still orienting our understanding, in that the nations and peoples in question correspond to the groups earlier characterized in racial/racist terms, and the temporal hierarchy remains, albeit now framed in terms of degrees of development along a stadial timeline" (p. 312). The language of rights; of equity, equality and gaps; of standard transitions and development; diversity and inclusion; of individuals, populations and communities, still arrests as the settler colonial language of racialised difference.

Fugitivity in escape and refusal

In their essay *Blackness and Governance,* United States-based critical Black studies scholar Fred Moten with Stephano Harney write of these governing narratives and what they enable to be enacted as "transformative impositions" (p. 47). Such impositions, as they are given weight and exist to condition the lived realities of those subjected to them, both respond to and bring into being 'Blackness' as a problem. However, Moten says: "there's nothing wrong with us… precisely insofar as there is something wrong, something off, something ungovernably, fugitively living in us that is constantly taken for the pathogen it instantiates." Moten is referencing here the ungovernable aspect of Blackness, which refuses to be captured, included, accounted for, in policy, research and in census data yet which animates the State's desire to know, capture and include Black

people. In the same way, Indigenous young people are present, knowable, and visible as hypervisible in their inescapable deficiency, inevitable criminality and exceptionalism and yet remain unintelligible, fugitive beyond this hypervisibility. Moten (in Harney & Moten, 2013a, p. 53) continues that:

> In the newest language of the social sciences we might say that governance is generated by a refusal among biopolitical populations. Or perhaps by the self-activity of immaterial labor. But maybe we would like to say it is provoked by the communicability of unmanageable racial and sexual difference …

From the 'incoherence' of unmanageable difference and the unending attempt to arrest it, fugitivity emerges. As queer theorist Jack Halberstam (2013) points out in the preface to Moten and Harney's (2013) edited collection, fugitivity is not only or always negation, or even escape but "fugitivity is being separate from settling" (Halberstam, 2013, p. 13) and it is in the recognition that "there are spaces and modalities that exist separate from the logical, logistical, the housed and the positioned." Provoking this consideration of alternative versions of the human beyond the world of Man as I have theorised previously, Alexander Weheliye (2014, p. 8) asks, "what different modalities of the human come to light if we do not take the liberal humanist figure of "man" as the master-subject but focus on how humanity has been imagined and lived by those subjects excluded from this domain?" The theorisation of non-compliance as fugitivity, and fugitivity as more than only escape, has assisted me throughout this thesis to both recognise and value—outside of and beyond the value ascribed to compliance as a condition of humanity—the generative role of refusal in and as fugitive practice.

Critical Black studies scholars (Best & Hartman, 2005; Campt, 2017; Harney & Moten, 2013b; King, 2019; Sojoyner, 2017) theorise fugitivity in response to and as a way out of the particular context and experience of slavery and anti-Black racism. For both Indigenous studies (Boon et al., 2018; Martineau & Ritskes, 2014; Ritskes, 2017; L. B. Simpson, 2016; Tuck, 2009) and critical Black studies scholars, fugitivity also opens up the potential to theorise escape as the generative refusal to participate in or comply with the conditions placed upon what it means to be civil, to be human. The casting out of young First Peoples in their potentiality as fugitive, as escapees of normative and temporal colonial logics likewise forces a denaturalisation of humanist boundaries. However, this

refusal is not necessarily or always oppositional but instead is the enactment of living "life stolen by enlightenment and stolen back" (Harney & Moten, 2013a, p. 28). Best and Hartman (2005) talk of this refusal, of the life living in the face of a denial of humanity, as "black noise." They write:

> Black noise represents the kinds of political aspirations that are inaudible and illegible within the prevailing formulas of political rationality; these yearnings are illegible because they are so wildly utopian and derelict to capitalism. (Best & Hartman, 2005, p. 5)

This refusal to invest in capitalism is framed within policy and responded to in practice as First Peoples' inability to value and work toward productive futures. Throughout this thesis, there are moments where non-compliance, both as overt and mere presence, is made visible by the response it receives. For example, I introduce the story of ten-year-old Dujuan told in the documentary film *In My Blood It Runs* (Newell, 2019). Dujuan's family instil a strong cultural identity and historical sensibility of injustice in the fight for their children, including Dujuan, to have access to their ancestral language and homelands, despite the resulting constant threat of child removal and youth detention because he refuses the violence perpetrated against him in his experience of schooling. Fugitivity is also evident in the story Sienna tells of being in university classrooms in Chapter Five, where she is cognisant of her presence justified from the institution's stance as inclusive, and yet for her 'being included' instantiates unbelonging. For some, it is physical escape from arrest and incarceration, and for others, it is rebellion against dehumanising representations coded by postcolonizing logics and what these representations justify in response. For many, it is both. It is a refusal to comply with normative systems and temporal impositions; refusal also to 'being included' according to the conditions of inclusion while simultaneously asserting an Indigenous presence in those spaces of inclusion. It is to refuse the offer of inclusion into humanity when to be human is to be employable, to be compliant, to be engaged in the economy. It is to refuse the offer of learning for the purpose of employment when the only employment available on your ancestral Country is in resource extraction. Fugitivity is escape and refusal of corporeal and discursive captivity; it is rebellion with the future in mind. Thus fugitivity, or what Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2016, p. 23) calls "fugitive escapes", is about generating new worlds in as much as it is also about

escaping the violence of settler colonialism. Fugitivity is a refusal to participate in these systems, beyond resistance as opposition toward the recognition of the active making of worlds unintelligible to the colonial state. Fred Moten (Harney & Moten, 2013b, p. 125) terms these practices as a refusal of the "call to order." Escape, as resurgence, Simpson continues, "creates profoundly different ways of thinking, organizing, and being." These generative acts of fugitivity are also practised in the stories told by Indigenous people, which likewise figure young First Peoples in ways not recognisable to and valued within normative and temporal registers of coloniality which prefigure the 'human' and its exclusions.

Fugitivity as ensuring futurity

In looking toward and searching out future imaginaries where Indigenous children and young people are not knowable as deficient or damaged, the centrality of place and the importance of land emerges as integral throughout this study. By centring and recognising young First Peoples in their varied relationships to land and Country, I use this notion of fugitivity as a theoretical guide to engaging with texts created by First Peoples in the present moment, which work to secure the future as Indigenous. This generative temporal interplay is understood by Cherokee writer and scholar Daniel Heath Justice (2018, p. xvii) as an ongoing project of Indigenous peoples who have since time immemorial, and particularly more recently in response to attempted settler colonial erasure, actively worked to articulate "lived truths and imaginative possibilities through spoken, written, and inscribed forms and project them into a meaningful future." For First Peoples to be figured generatively as fugitive, it is not to be liminal, unbounded, and groundless. Instead, it is to stay put, to return to the land, to relate to place as not only property; it is to refute normative colonial logics of linear development—a refutation completed by the enduring presence of First Peoples; an endurance which continues to taunt in its illegibility.

Martineau and Ritskes (2014) suggest that Indigenous art evokes a fugitive aesthetic in the way it escapes seemingly benevolent settler colonial gestures of inclusion, recognition, and betterment. Extending Walter Mignolo's refusal of colonial modernity as

"a house we're not interested in inhabiting" (Mignolo, 2014, p. 205), Martineau and Ritskes (2014, p. iii) identify freedom "in the critical ruptures where normative, colonial categories and binaries break down and are broken open." Freedom realised through refusal and flight is:

> … the freedom to imagine and create an elsewhere in the here; a present future beyond the imaginative and territorial bounds of colonialism. It is a performance of other worlds, an embodied practice of flight. The fugitive aesthetic is not an abdication of contention and struggle; it is a reorientation toward freedom in movement, against the limits of colonial knowing and sensing. It seeks to limn the margins of land, culture and consciousness for potential exits, for creative spaces of departure and renewal. (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014, p. iv)

Theories of fugitivity have thus oriented me to meaningfully engage with the profundity of Indigenous texts that not only push the disciplinary empirical boundaries and frameworks that have directed understandings of and practical responses to young First Peoples, but which obliterate these boundaries altogether. The recognition of this obliteration prompts a conceptualisation of Indigenous youth that transcends the fixed markers dictating what is known about Indigenous young people and how they are responded to. Instead, it forces an analysis of textual revelations which, by their very existence, trouble the settler colonial present and its ongoing desire to own Indigenous lands and the future. Texts which imagine otherwise also undermine the fixation, and literal and figurative arrest, of Indigenous youth as inherently deficient or criminal by re-figuring fugitivity as desirable. To be fugitive, fleeing and refusing to be arrested in time or place, is to be free. Thinking and theorising beyond, or imagining otherwise, is made possible in this thesis by reading with intent the stories of First Peoples as expressions of existence in the face of settler colonialism's desire for our elimination and as assertions of futurity via fugitivity. These stories, like the texts I contend with in Chapters Five, Six and Seven "offer us a way to imagine otherwise", they remind us, as Daniel Heath Justice so eloquently puts it:

> That there is no inevitability in colonialist claims or control, that there are now *and have always been* peoples and perspectives that belong to these lands in ways that will never belong to the settler colonial regime and its citizens. (2014, pp. 298–299)

Throughout this thesis, the texts I engage with story a horizon of Indigenous futurity, which counters settler colonial inevitability as Justice emphasises.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined three interrelated theoretical frames as part of a framework that has guided and informed this thesis's work: time, normativity and fugitivity. These theoretical frames have enabled me to make meaning of the emergence and figuration of Indigenous youth as it functions in relation to young First Peoples and how these figurations are contested. The theoretical frame of time provides the analytical support for understanding how conceptions of progress and development enable the imposition of life stages, including youthhood, on individuals and how the hegemony of linear time sets standard trajectories and thus produces the possibility of deficiency. Through this production, the disciplining of non-compliance as deviance is rationalised in the present to ensure particular futures. In this way, time is racialised and works to secure the future as a white possession. A theorisation of normativity as the second frame supports an understanding of how the production of deviance and deficiency is intimately tied to the production of the human as Man in liberal humanist thought. This production includes the designation of who is excluded and included in this category and on what conditions. In theorising the hegemony of linear time and the universal category of human as a normative category, I also considered how damage and deficiency are normalised as intractable aspects of Indigenous lifeworlds. This damage both animates and justifies the state's intervention while also depoliticising this intervention. The third theoretical frame I introduced here is fugitivity. Theories of fugitivity orient me toward instances of escape from figurations of Indigenous youth forged according to normative conceptions of the human and linear temporalities. In the next chapter, I present the methodology guiding the work of this thesis.

Chapter Two - Unsettling methodologies: Tracing, contesting and imagining otherwise

> How are we or how do we become conscious subjects rather than objects of these discursive strategies that have grievous outcomes in our daily lives? It is, perhaps to be alive to the motion of it. It is to constantly ask, What are the politics of meaning making that we are always a part of?
>
> — Dian Million (2011), 'Intense dreaming: Theories, narratives, and our search for home'

Introduction

In the epigraph above, Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million (2011, p. 320) gestures to the privilege First Peoples possess working within the academy—the privilege of being "alive to the motion" of "the politics of meaning making." Million's statement orients us as Indigenous scholars toward those discursive strategies that cause harm and that imbricate our everyday lived realities and the lives of those we often labour with and for in our academic practice. This privilege, which also invokes obligation, is likewise considered by Māori sociologist Joanna Kidman who suggests that existing in the academy requires us as Indigenous scholars to raise questions about who our intellectual labour is for and whom it benefits. In referencing these complex entanglements we are forced to negotiate, including with the university in its role in producing knowledge about, or maintaining silence and absences in relation to Indigenous peoples, Kidman (2019, p. 248) notes that: "settler-colonial systems of knowledge production actively maintain and extend public silences about the colonial past and its material consequences in the present." I take heed of both Million and Kidman's identification of the importance of attending to how knowledge and power work discursively to produce material effects, or as Million puts it, grievous outcomes, in the everyday lived realities of First Peoples.

In response to Million (2011) and Kidman's (2020) invocations, this chapter outlines the bricolage of methodologies I used to guide this research project in my attempt to be "alive to the motion" of the politics of meaning-making that we are a part of. I do so as a Gumbaynggirr woman who was once a young person herself; as someone who has supported young First Peoples and their family members during and through violent experiences with state systems such as education; and as an Indigenous educator and researcher who has had first-hand experience of being interpellated by state-sanctioned representations of Indigenous young people which render them as objects of discursive strategies which have real and often harmful impacts.

The approach I take in this study draws on a combination of theoretical and methodological tools to address two related aims. Firstly, I trace the way young First Peoples have come to be known through normative conceptions of Indigenous youth, and secondly, I consider how these conceptions have been contested and moved beyond in imagining otherwise through an engagement with texts created by First Peoples. In essence, this study responds to a divergence between postcolonizing representations of Indigenous young people and how these representations have been resisted through story and creative production. It also emphasises the discursive production of conceptions of Indigenous youth and how this discursivity has material effects. As I outline in this section, my refusal to ask empirical and normative questions of Indigenous young people also complicates an examination of the material implications of the discursive production of Indigenous youth. I take this refusal stance, which is also a methodological decision, in light of a burgeoning body of empirical scholarship that seeks to account for the problem of Indigenous youth by describing who young First Peoples are and prescribing what action needs to be taken for them to become who they ought to be. These prescriptions, which rely on *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth as the problem, often include increased participation in education and training—as if systems of education and training are not fallible or foundational to the linear temporal and normative production of the human as Man and its exclusions. Having said this, one aspect of this study is the use of qualitative data from interviews with young First Peoples at university as part of the analytical approach of contextualising the text *Under Bunjil*. The inclusion of non-empirical qualitative data from interviews in the context of text-based analysis provokes

important methodological questions (addressed later in this chapter) about Indigenous 'voice' as context rather than data that might support empirical 'truth' claims to be made.

Study Overview

To achieve the aims stated above, I draw on two types of texts: the discursive practices of government and texts authored by First Peoples. An engagement with these texts, the contingencies that brought them into being, and the significance of their respective existences calls for very different methodological approaches. Regarding the discursive practices of government, I deploy a Foucauldian inspired poststructuralist approach that supports tracing the way conceptions of Indigenous youth have emerged over time through discourses of education and criminal justice. Much of French theorist Michel Foucault's work centres on the process of troubling taken-for-granted assumptions or what he termed modes of thought that circulate via effects of power as 'truth' and are accepted as such as 'normal'. In this way, his approach is an invocation to think differently. My first aim here is to trace the emergence of taken-for-granted conceptions of Indigenous youth and the way these conceptions are grounded in particular ideas of young First Peoples as deficient and damaged. A Foucauldian approach to discourse – which he termed interchangeably as "a history of the present" (Foucault, 1978) and genealogy—offers critical insight into the relationship between power and knowledge and the interplay between power and domination. While Foucault is useful in guiding my engagement with policy and political texts, his genealogical approach is limited in accounting for how conceptions of Indigenous youth, particularly as forms of postcolonizing governmentality, are resisted and, indeed, evaded.

In my analysis of texts authored by First Peoples which value the fugitivity of Indigenous young people—including a documentary film, a live-action television series, and a campus magazine published by young Indigenous people at university—I take a methodological approach informed by Eve Tuck's concept of desire. Desire—as both the possession of Indigenous people and a theoretical tool—is put forward by Tuck (2009, 2010) as the antidote to narratives of damage told about Indigenous people. The recognition of desire, as Tuck theorises it, requires that research attends to the tenacity,

hope, wisdom, and lived complexity of First Peoples, not in opposition to understanding the harm inflicted by settler colonialism, but as a way to cease anchoring the lives and experience of Indigenous peoples in damage. A theorisation of desire as it grounds the life worlds of Indigenous people and communities is an integral part of the work of imagining otherwise in this thesis. It provides a critical foundation for speaking back to the normalisation of deficiency and damage as inherent to Indigenous lifeworlds. It also works as a launching point from which to presence First Peoples in the now, thus securing our futurity. A desire-based approach to research requires that questions of value be attended to. Why is it that dispossessed communities are overwhelmingly hypervisible and valued as conquered and broken, or if not, then seen as exceptional? Where is the recognition of survival, wisdom, and hope? In this way, I use desire in this thesis as a theoretical tool that supports an analytical engagement with Indigenous young people's complex humanity as articulated in the texts under examination. It also guides the 'speaking back' to the normative and post-colonising conceptions of Indigenous youth emergent from a Foucauldian inspired discourse analysis of the discursive practices of government.

This chapter comprises three sections where I outline the bricolage of methodologies that have guided me in completing this research project. The methodologies introduced unsettle taken-for-granted conceptions of Indigenous youth—which have emerged historically to determine the present—while scaffolding the future-orientated work of imagining otherwise; of attending to the stories of First Peoples that project a present and future existence which troubles the postcolonizing foundations of Australian nationhood. In being "alive to the motion" as Million (2011, p. 320) stated, I begin in this chapter by introducing Indigenous standpoint theory as the ethical and methodological foundation of this research project. Indigenous standpoint theory provides a framework for valuing my partiality as a Gumbaynggirr woman doing research and guides my analysis to an interrogation of the discursive practices that continue to justify violence toward First Peoples and the way these practices are resisted. The second section outlines the methodological approaches taken in this study, namely the Foucauldian-inspired genealogy of conceptions of Indigenous youth and the desire-based approach to engaging with texts created by First Peoples which resist and escape the *a priori* conceptions emergent from the Foucauldian analysis undertaken in the substantive

chapters later in this thesis. In the third and final section of this chapter, I provide an overview of the study design, including the process of text selection, the methods of analysis for policy and political texts, and the conceptual framework I used as part of the desire-based approach to reading texts created by First Peoples as fugitive practices.

Indigenous standpoint theory: Methodological and ethical foundation

My family belongs to Gumbaynggirr country, where my father's mother was born, on the mid-north coast of what is now called New South Wales (NSW). I spent my early years on Whadjuk Noongar country and have worked and lived on the lands of the Wurundjeri peoples in Narrm (Melbourne, Victoria) for almost a decade. I introduce myself in this way to reveal a cultural location embedded within place, a blood connection to Country, a sovereign connection, which runs thousands of generations deep. This enunciation assists with establishing political, social, and above all, familial connections–which are important–particularly given the history of dislocation that has occurred within Australia with the ongoing process of colonisation. I also have strong cultural and familial connections with England and Scotland because I exist in a place invaded by Britain 230 years ago. I make these connections explicit because it allows me to signify several reference points that ground my ethical and intellectual standpoint in this study as a Gumbaynggirr woman.

My cultivation and statement of an ethical and intellectual standpoint have been integral to this research because actively situating or positioning myself has allowed me to be honest about my intentions and my research work. It has required that I attend to the questions: who and what is my work benefiting? What is my work challenging, and what does it serve to reinforce? These questions are significant in the contested space of the academy where reflexivity has often been left to the wayside and certain perspectives have been universalised, positioned as universally important, and then valued as so. As an Indigenous researcher and academic who works at the intersection of critical Indigenous studies and youth studies within a system of higher education that has been, and continues to be, a key producer of knowledge through research which takes the problem of Indigenous youth and thus young First Peoples as its focus, attending to these questions has been an important part of my research process and accountability

Early in this research project, as part of attending to these questions, I travelled from Wurundjeri Country in Victoria, where most of these ideas have been formed and reflected on, back up to Gumbaynggirr Country, my ancestral Country. I was sitting with one of my Aunts, Bea Ballangarry, who is also a healer, a poet, an intellectual, and an Elder in our community, and over a coffee, she asked me the question, "What kind of ancestor do you want to be?" This question, she said, guides her in her daily movements. It reminds her of where she has come from but also where she is going. This question arose during one of many conversations on that trip about this research, about what it means to be a Gumbaynggirr woman working and studying within a university, particularly in relation to young people. She told me again the story of when, as children, she and her brothers and sisters—my aunties and uncles—would hide in the wattle trees when the men in cars would come to take them away (Ballangarry, 1998). She told me again of the time her mother enrolled her in the local school, only for the other children's parents to petition to have her removed. We talked about the strong women who came before us, who enable us to be who we are in the present moment. On that trip, she also gently reminded me there is a certain way of going about things—ways of being and doing she often modelled; being patient, taking time, and going slowly. We talked about different modes of being and how difficult it may be to respond from a place of strength rather than react in opposition. Movement without reflection can cause harm and might lead you to being somewhere you shouldn't be.

As a Gumbaynggirr woman, my intellectual standpoint is integrally tied to and guided by my sovereign connection to Country. Thus, I share these reflections to make explicit my understanding of colonisation as it functions on the bodies of Indigenous children and young people as experienced by my family and beyond through control and exclusion, as evident in this anecdote. Yet, my precarious and determined embodiment as an Indigenous researcher within the academy is also reflective of an ancestral determination to access education on our terms, despite the rationale of education as either exclusory or often as the justification for the removal of Indigenous children from their land, families, and communities. This precarity also puts us in relation to other First Nations communities across the globe who have also had to protect their children from

removal and containment as sanctioned in colonial and normative contemporary policies explicitly, and implicitly, aimed at assimilation.

Secondly, the question, "What kind of ancestor do you want to be?" is a reminder of my being in the present through the actions of both my Indigenous and settler-invader ancestors. Still, it also requires actions in the present to be undertaken in terms of accountability for the future. As I undertake research, a sense of accountability is imperative, particularly given "the corpus of objectified knowledge", as Martin Nakata (2007a, p. 215) calls it, written about Indigenous people in the history of research. Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 230), in the influential work *Decolonizing Methodologies,* has observed, "[t]he word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary." Tuhiwai Smith continues: "When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. It is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research" (2012, p. 230). Thus, accountability lies in the production of knowledge through research and the process of production. It reminds me that this research's outcome is just as important as the way I go about it.

Lastly, the above anecdote shows, to a limited extent, my family's relationship to processes of colonisation, despite which we remain. However, due to the persistence of continuing postcolonizing relations, our lives, like *all* people Indigenous or otherwise, are always shaped by the ubiquity of what Aileen Moreton-Robinson has conceptualised as "patriarchal white sovereignty" (2004a, 2005, 2011b) as a regime of power which by its very nature seeks to deny Indigenous sovereignty. Thus, as Moreton-Robinson suggests, the production of knowledge is also "a site of constant struggle against normative dominant patriarchal conceptual frameworks" (2013, p. 331). Part of cultivating an ethical research practice requires responding to these conceptual frameworks as they have emerged from and functioned to justify settler colonialism. Such a standpoint requires attending to how postcolonizing logics and settler colonialism are not something of the past but rather an ongoing structure and process.

Indigenous standpoint theory opens up space for me to account for the significance and complexity of my situatedness as the place from which I know and as a requirement

for doing so, that I attend to the power relations that inscribe and work to limit the everyday lived realities of myself, my family and the young people I have worked and researched with over the years. In noting Indigenous standpoint theory as a particular form of investigation, Martin Nakata (2007) continues that it "is the explication and analysis of how the social organisation and practices of knowledge through its various apparatuses and technologies of…textual production organise and express themselves in that every day, as seen from within that experience" (p.11). In this way, an Indigenous standpoint theory as a methodological tool does not preclude an engagement with and use of disciplinary knowledge, particularly when drawing on, engaging with, and challenging knowledge that reinforces regimes of power that deny Indigenous sovereignty. In response to such regimes of power, this research project is "a site of constant struggle against normative dominant patriarchal conceptual frameworks" (Moreton-Robinson 2013, p. 331). These frameworks have produced damage-centred conceptions of Indigenous youth that function within the normative and temporal logics of settler colonialism. As a methodological approach, Indigenous standpoint theory not only invokes accountability to my situatedness as an Indigenous researcher and what that means for the way I come to know, knowledge production, and my overall research process but supports me to attend to these power relations, which continue to inscribe this process and my object of analysis and critique. Such an approach builds on an increasing body of work articulating the validity, rigour, and complexity of Indigenous research methodologies (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; L.-I. Rigney, 2001; L. T. Smith, 2012).

Methodological approach

The combination of methodological approaches I detail in this section extends on the ethical and methodological foundation of Indigenous standpoint theory. Indigenous standpoint theory foregrounds the importance of attending to relations of power in how they are constituted through knowledge, social organisation and the various "apparatuses and technologies of…textual production" (M. Nakata, 2007a, p. 215). It also provides a way for me to exercise my sovereignty as a Gumbaynggirr woman, which as Moreton-Robinson (2013, p. 344) notes, is an "integral part of our research methodologies." This section presents a combination of methodological tools that guided my engagement with the texts engaged with in this research project. I have designated my methodological

framework as unsettling primarily because this thesis aims to unsettle *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth by tracing their emergence and also to consider how these conceptions have been contested and imagined otherwise. Imagining otherwise is unsettling work because it requires thinking and theorising beyond Indigenous youth as objects of the normative project of settler colonialism, a project which since its inception has worked to erase an Indigenous presence and thus our future. In attending to the way young First Peoples have come to be knowable as a problem, I deploy a critique inspired by French theorist Michel Foucault's approach to discourse. A primary aim of this study is to examine how and why conceptions of Indigenous youth—which figure Indigenous young people as knowable in their damage and deficiency—emerged. This aim requires not an empirical focus on the experiences of young First Peoples in order to identify and find solutions to the issues they may face, but rather that I ask why and with what implications have Indigenous young people and their lives come into focus as a problem in the first place.

Foucault's most regarded works have been described as "histories of a sort" (Flynn, 2005, p. 29) in that they evade the linear temporality grounding of traditional histories and are concerned less with concrete events and truths and more with how relations of power and knowledge work discursively to constitute the subject. Foucault's work is useful here because this study's subject is Indigenous young people, but my critique focuses on the discursive formations that have brought Indigenous youth into being as a problematic category. Foucauldian scholar Thomas Flynn (2005, p. 29) likens Foucault's various methodological approaches and how they relate to each other as "successive waves breaking on the sand, each is discovered after the fact to have been an implicit interest of the earlier one, for which it served as the moving force." Foucault's primary body of work can be characterised by the development of three respective yet interrelated methodologies: archaeology, genealogy and problematization. This section outlines the utility of archaeology and genealogy to this project before introducing a desire-based research methodology. I attend to Foucault's third methodology—problematization, and specifically Carol Bacchi's (2010, 2012a, 2012b) uptake of it in policy analysis—later in the last section of this chapter where I outline the study design.

A Foucauldian critique

The *History of Madness in the Classical Age* (1961)*, The Order of Things* (1971) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) were formative in the development of Foucault's method of archaeology, which he detailed more fully in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). Through histories of madness, clinical medicine, and life sciences, Foucault (1972) articulated archaeology as a methodological approach for engaging with the archive. Archaeology, he states:

> does not imply the search for a beginning … It designates the general theme of a description that questions the already-said at the level of its existence: of the enunciative function that operates within it, of the discursive formation, and the general archive system to which it belongs. Archaeology describes discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive. (1972, p. 148)

In this statement, Foucault challenges two foundational concepts to the fields of history and linguistics—the archive and discourse, respectively. Firstly, he confronts conventional understandings of the archive, instating it not as a place where dusty records sit waiting to be rediscovered but instead as a system of enunciation, a system that governs "what can be said" and "the appearance of statements as unique events" (Foucault, 1972, p. 129) where discourses *as practices* can be found. This conception of the archive counters the traditional understanding of the archive in historical analyses as a collection of primary source documents and the purpose of historical analysis itself as the piecing together of events from *prima facie* archival texts. Thus, to archaeology as a method, a text becomes relevant for the contingencies that brought it into being, not only in and of itself for what it contains. This point is instructive in the context of this research, whereby I do not take 'Indigenous youth' or representations of young First Peoples as presumptive or as given. Instead, I consider these representations—or in this case, political texts as the discursive practices of government—in the contexts of their emergence. For example, I cannot read state-commissioned reports published in the early 1970s charged with accounting for statistical inequality revealed by the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the first population census as a justificatory means to include Indigenous young people in compulsory schooling if not done so alongside a contextual consideration of the use of schooling as an assimilatory mode of dispossession.

Secondly, Foucault re-defines the term discourse as it is understood in linguistics and, in doing so, reconfigures the methodological approach needed to study discourses (as practices) and their formation. A form of discourse analysis which examines the "lexical contents" (p. 54), such as lexical organisation or "the scansions of a semantic field" (p. 54) Foucault states, becomes irrelevant when "trying to discover, for example, how criminality could become the object of medical expertise, or sexual deviation a possible object of psychiatric discourse" (p. 54). He continues:

> The analysis of lexical contents defines either the elements of meaning at the disposal of speaking subjects in a given period, or the semantic structure that appears on the surface of a discourse that has already been spoken; it does not concern discursive practice as a place in which a tangled plurality – at once superposed and incomplete – of objects is formed and deformed, appears and disappears. (p. 54)

Here Foucault prompts not an examination of language as discourse but rather of *discourse as practice*. Through the analysis of discourses as practices, the focus turns away from language and toward the archive. As he states:

> my object is not language but the archive, that is to say the accumulated existence of discourse. Archaeology, as I intend it, is kin neither to geology (as analysis of the sub-soil), nor to genealogy (as descriptions of beginning and sequences); it's the analysis of discourse in its modality of archive. (quoted in Olssen, 1999, p. 10)

Foucault's conception of the archive and discourse as practice in his archaeological method offers valuable guidance in my aim to unsettle conceptions of Indigenous youth as a categorical given. The problem of Indigenous youth understood as a production of discursive practices can be attended to as it emerged from the 1970s in discourses of education and criminal justice. Further, as practices, these discourses can then be located within the postcolonizing context within which they are produced; a postcolonizing context enabled by linear conceptions of time and development and normative conceptions of the human, outlined in the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

As they are articulated in the political texts (and contexts) that constitute the archive about Indigenous youth, criminal justice and education's discursive practices can no

longer be taken as "manifest" or a given. Foucault's (1972, p. 27) archaeological method invokes that the given of something, of "manifest discourse," is that which requires attention. To take this given in its self-evidence is for Foucault (1972) akin to taking seriously:

> an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark. It is supposed therefore that everything that is formulated in discourse was already articulated in that semi-silence that precedes it, which continues to run obstinately beneath it, but which it covers and silences. (p. 27-28)

In essence, Foucault's archaeological method prompts suspicion and disregard of the inevitability of Indigenous youth as a problem for politics, for education, for research, for criminal justice, for child welfare. Foucault's definition of the archive calls for not the lexical examination of texts themselves but of the contingencies—political, economic, historical, moral, ethical and social—that brought them into being as practices. As Foucault (1972, p. 47) says, it urges a consideration of how a social problem gains "the status of object – and therefore of making it manifest, nameable, and describable."

In this moment, I think back to the crucible moments that inspired this research project. These crucible moments occurred in my professional experience working with Indigenous young people and those educators, policymakers, and philanthropists charged with the authority to address the problems ascribed to these young people. In these moments, I encountered conceptions of Indigenous youth that figured young First Peoples as intelligible only in their seemingly inherent damage and deficiency or if not, then exceptional. The dissonance emerged in my professional and personal relationships with and experience of young First Peoples as first and foremost brilliant, strategic and complex. Foucault's archaeological method renders the dissonance between conceptions of Indigenous youth and lived realities; and between my experience working with young people and with those who make representative claims on their behalf based on *a priori* conceptions of who these young people are and who they ought to be, a productive prompt for analysis. Foucault's work provides the formative ground to undertake an analysis inspired by this dissonance yet attentive to the relations of power and knowledge that inform and circumscribe it. The power-knowledge nexus brings me to Foucault's

genealogical work, which most clearly articulated the relationship between power, knowledge and discourse.

While Foucault's archaeologies are concerned with the archive and discourse as practice, his genealogical work seeks to illuminate the descent and emergence of discourse and how these contingent processes shape the present. In describing this work, he says, "I set out from a problem expressed in the terms current today, and I try to work out its genealogy. Genealogy means that I begin my analysis from a question posed in the present" (as quoted in Foucault, 1977a, p. 262). For me, the questions I pose in the present for a genealogical mode of enquiry are impelled by the seemingly intractable disadvantage and deficiency that mark Indigenous young people and justify postcolonizing interventions into their lifeworlds in response.

Existing literature makes apparent the endemic positioning of Indigenous people as problems to be remedied through policy and practice. The way First Peoples have been indelibly marked as deficient has been widely engaged since the announcement of the primary Indigenous Affairs policy platform Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage in 2008. In its initial iteration Closing the Gap received bipartisan support and the support of many Indigenous leaders. It aimed then and continues to create population parity through socio-economic equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in critical drivers such as employment, health, education and life expectancy and over a decade since its inception, it remains the central state response to Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless the gaps the targets were set to address also still exist. Drawing on neoliberal tenets of individual responsibility and autonomy, the initial iteration of the Close the Gap policy positioned Indigenous disadvantage as a "national responsibility" to be addressed through a partnership between the state and Indigenous peoples "based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility" (Rudd, 2008). In doing so, the state referenced a population binary emergent from the first decade after the 1967 referendum to represent the socio-economic deprivation of Indigenous peoples in a way that equated economic and social normalisation with equality. Harrison (2012, p. 26) argues that parity targets and outcomes that emphasise Indigenous people's personal and collective responsibility and autonomy are a staple of political decision-making in Australia. He suggests that within the context of re-colonising educational governance, equality through population parity

repositions Indigenous people as "enterprising individuals, as people who have a personal choice to make with regard to their own future. They are presented with a choice between who they are now (as disempowered people) and who they could be as 'successful' Indigenous people" (p. 26). Rendering Indigenous people as incapable of successfully existing in the present moment via racialised discourses of deficiency enables the state to make a possessive claim on the future. This claim functions to figure non-Indigenous people and governing institutions working on behalf of the state as more capable of conducting Indigenous-related affairs than First Peoples.

The solutions put forward over decades in response to the enduring 'Aboriginal problem', as evidenced by the benevolent knowledge of contemporary experts in Indigenous affairs, has a traceable history. In the context of twentieth-century education, for example, policy and practice impacted First Peoples, their families and communities in various ways. In returning to my Aunt's story of the jaaning (wattle) trees, for example, she later wrote: "We played for hours, using the trees as posts between gaminin houses, and gaminin streets, sometimes using twigs, broken glass and small pieces of pretty material to make houses, feeling totally secure in the knowledge that home was right next to this clump of wattle trees" (Ballangarry, 1998, p. 3). Thinking back to these moments my aunts and uncles spent in the 1940s hiding from the men who had come to take them away, I wonder: how were the practices of these men sanctioned, and why did the bodies of young First Peoples and children become the loci of power exercised in this way?

Practices of child removal from the 1930s onwards may be interpreted in relation to the discursive formation of Indigenous children and young people at the power-knowledge nexus where "knowledge and power directly imply one another" (Foucault, 1980, p. 27). For example, in an article published in the political science journal *The Quarterly*, titled 'Can our Aborigines be preserved?' the author and Queensland Chief Protector of Aborigines, J.W Bleakley (1930), asserted that one of the most pressing yet difficult problems facing the nation was the plight of the "half-caste aborigine" (p. 72). In proposing a solution to this problem, he suggested that certain Aboriginal children should be "rescued from the camps and given the benefit of education and training" (p. 73). Like many key administrators throughout the twentieth century who contributed to scholarly debates on Australian Aboriginal welfare, Bleakley theorised his practice and informed

others' practice by publishing disciplinary knowledge and participating in academic conferences (see also McLeod & Paisley, 2016). Through this brief account of Bleakley's (1930) theorised and seemingly informed practice, I bring attention to this example which indicates the relationship between the production of knowledge and the exercise of power—or as Foucault would say, there has been a strong relationship between thought and reality in the process whereby Indigenous people have come to be understood and responded to as a policy problem. In the context of this research project, the problem in the present is the way Indigenous young people are figured and responded to as knowable and intelligible in their deficiency and damage. However, while contemporary scholarship challenges the embedded nature of deficit discourse in policies and political practices, conceptions of Indigenous youth remain unquestioned, despite young First Peoples often being the subjects of deficit-based educational approaches. In the present moment, the scholarly parameters framing Indigenous young people's engagement with education and criminal justice systems maintain an extensive reference to risk (Schwab, 2012), gaps (Fisher et al., 2011; Ford, 2012; Warren, 2009; Wheldall et al., 2010), disadvantage (e.g., Carson & Koster, 2012; Keddie et al., 2013), underachievement (e.g., Beaulieu & Lewis, 2010; Klenowski, 2009) and disorder (Homel et al., 1999).

Genealogical work is useful here because it "is concerned with the processes, procedures and apparatuses by which truth and knowledge are produced" (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 208) and, in this case, the 'truth' of Indigenous damage and deficiency. Foucault notes that social categories emerge through the interplay of relations of power and domination. Indigenous youth as a social category thus may be viewed not only as a corporeal "substance" per se but rather as:

> … an element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power. (1977, p. 29)

Thus there is a distinction to be made and a connection to be made between the lived experience certain concepts represent and the *modus operandi* of these concepts in the way they constitute or come to inform the realities of which they speak. Māori scholar

Brendan Hokuwhitu (2021), in reference to the utility of Foucault's genealogies, makes this point in stating that the:

> conditioning of Indigenous bodies throughout colonisation has not only a symbolic genealogy but a material existence also. Here, the etiological importance of the word 'genealogy' should not be underestimated, for it does not merely mean a textual genealogy. Foucault's nomenclature is literally referring to the material and biological descent of corporeality, where the body is, "totally imprinted by history" (1984: 83). From a Foucauldian lens then, the production of a key identity (like Indigeneity) is not merely an ethereal concept, it is a co-creation of materialisation and discourse. (p. 140)

This study aims to re-focus attention away from Indigenous young people and, instead, to problematise the discursive practices that have come to represent and limit these young people and their experiences. Thus, as a method of critique and engagement a genealogical approach opens up the possibility to examine how institutional and discursive practices of the past constitute the present as embedded in the discourses that have produced conceptions of Indigenous youth across time, space and on the bodies of Indigenous young people. Here genealogy supports the "underlying forms of knowledge in which truth-claims are rooted" (Hook, 2001, p. 525), namely discursive figurations of Indigenous youth, to be attended to. In doing so, I propose an 'alternative diagnosis' via the naming of a problem in the present by shifting the point of analytic inquiry from Indigenous young people to how Indigenous youth has been figured and tracing the contingencies that brought this specific concept into being. This diagnostic forms a foundation for tracing how young First Peoples have come to be represented, understood and responded to as a problem. However, in attending to the second aim of this thesis: to contest and imagine these conceptions otherwise, we now depart from a Foucauldian critique to one which can account for young First Peoples as more than the object of circulating political discourses, and more than the product of postcolonizing discursive practices.

Foucault's work has been critiqued for his methodologies' inability to provide substantive points of escape to account for resistance to the imposition of discourse emergent from the power/knowledge nexus (Grosfoguel, 2007; Stoler, 1995; Weheliye, 2014). Critics of Foucault's approaches note that his tendency to privilege discursive formations, rather than non-discursive actions and human agency in the make-up of social

life, reinforces a notion of inescapable and totalising disciplinary power. Following on from this point, Fairclough (1992, p. 57) argues that "the dominant impression is one of people being helplessly subjected to immovable systems of power." Furthermore, colonialism and the discursive practices (e.g. mapping, colonial archives, explorers' journals, judiciary proceedings, the research and practices of colonial eugenics) that brought colonialism and imperialism into being as interrelated global and racialised processes are all but a "haunting presence" (Legg, 2007, p. 265) in Foucault's writings. Foucault's inattention to colonialism and its conditions of existence is a crucial to highlight in the context of this study particularly as the dehumanisation of non-white populations are central to the emergence of exclusionary conceptions of Man, as I have articulated in the Theory Framework section of this thesis. Foucault's work, like settler colonial theory, is productive in this study to a point. The closer I get to theorising the fugitivity and resistance of First Peoples, theorising which is prompted by my subjective and experiential position as a Gumbaynggirr woman, the clearer the limits of Foucault's methodologies become in accounting for lives lived beyond liberal humanist conceptions of Man.

Desire-based approach

This project also takes as a foundation the critical scholarship of many Indigenous theorists in Australia and elsewhere who, in seeking to imagine what could be, emphasise the important work of challenging what currently is or has been. This *is* or *has been* often includes taken-for-granted assumptions about who First Peoples are, what can and should be known, and how that knowing is to be done. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 7) says that this project of "researching back" involves "a 'knowing-ness of the coloniser' and a recovery of ourselves, an analysis of colonialism, and a struggle for self-determination." Drawing on and extending these imperatives, Eve Tuck also suggests that as Indigenous academics, "theorising back" (2009, p. 112) is necessary and requires "that we shift the language/narrative of theory and policy so that they do not speak against us and so that we in using them do not speak or act against ourselves" (p. 128). This brings me to the second question guiding this study: In what ways have conceptions of Indigenous youth been contested and imagined otherwise? In addressing this question, I re-searched for the

complexity, wisdom, resistance, and strategy of young First Peoples or what Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck terms ‘desire’ in First Peoples’ stories. Enacted methodologically, a desire-based approach informed how I arrived at the second question guiding this study; what texts I engaged with to answer this question; and, how I valued, recognised, and analysed these texts as instances of fugitivity and imagining otherwise.

Poststructuralist theorists such as Foucault and Deleuze have only recently theorised what First Peoples have always understood—the power of language in relation to the constitution of reality. The late Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkanew (2009, p. 10) emphasised this in her study of Indigenous literature as imperative to individual and collective recovery. She states: “Indigenous peoples have believed in the healing power of language and stories since time immemorial.” Waanyi author and scholar Alexis Wright likewise foregrounds the legacy and significance of storytelling for Indigenous peoples:

> … the story does not only come from colonisation or assimilation or having learnt to write English, or arguing whether people with an oral history should write books, but is sung just as strongly from those of our ancestors who wrote our stories on the walls of caves and on the surface of weathered rock. (2006, p. 13)

A desire-based methodology has been instrumental to this research project because it guides the re-search for and recognition and valuing of fugitivity as the escape from normative conceptions of what it means to be human in First Peoples’ stories. It also provides methodological entry points to challenge dehumanisation by forcing an analysis that recognises Indigenous peoples’ complex humanity. In this section, I outline my use of a desire-based methodology. I introduce Tuck’s theorisation of desire as it emerged in response to what she perceived was a fault in Gilles Deleuze’s conceptualisation of the term. In my use of desire-based research in the context of this study, here I outline why I deploy Tuck’s theorisation of desire. I consider the role of refusal in a desire-based research approach and, lastly, the methodological role of imagining otherwise in this study.

In departing from Foucault here, who theorised desire as a lack, as a wanting for something, Tuck’s theorisation of desire responds to another French philosopher, Gilles

Deleuze, who theorised desire as productive but stopped short of designating it as something conscious. He says:

> Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, instead, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 26)

For Deleuze, desire only emerges as visible through the internal contradictions of the social body or society. He posits desire as subject-less, he also denies any meaningful possession or the productive possibility of desire to the individual. He continues that desire, as the possibility of social change or what he terms "lines of flight":

> … consists of interruptions, letting certain flows through, making withdrawals from those flows, cutting the chains that become attached to the flows. This system of the unconscious, or desire that flows, interrupts, begins flowing again – it's totally literal … it is perfectly meaningless. Without any sense, there is nothing to interpret. Interpretation is meaningless here. (Deleuze, 2004, p. 232)

While attributing utility to the work of Deleuze, Tuck expressly transgresses his conception of desire by theorising it not us untethered and an unconscious social propellant but rather as grounded, as the result of an accumulation of experiences and as something that individuals and communities possess. She says, "[d]esire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future; it is integral to our humanness" (Tuck, 2009, p. 417). Lastly, where Tuck theorises contradiction and insynchronicity as central to desire, Deleuze denies that desire is contradictory.

Deleuze paraphrases Michel Foucault's assertion that "society doesn't contradict itself…it is strategised, it strategises…A social field is not defined by its contradictions. The notion of contradiction is a global and inadequate one that already implies a strong complicity among the 'contradictories' in dispositifs of power" (1997). Deleuze uses the Foucauldian sense of *dispositifs* here as an ensemble of elements—such as discourses, institutions, laws and judiciary bodies, scientific and social science research—that constitute and regulate society. His assertion that society does not contradict itself and that desire exists only as a strategy in maintaining power leaves no room for exit or escape. It begs the question who makes up the society of which both Deleuze and Foucault speak?

In the case of postcolonizing contexts like Australia and North America, where contradiction spurred the birth of nations and continues in the ongoing presence and active resistance of First Peoples, how can these inceptions and persistent fissures be accounted for?

The Deleuzian concept of desire is limited in its inability to recognise the embodied, strategic and agentic desires of Indigenous peoples and our ancestors. Although for Tuck (2010), who finds productive value in Deleuze for her work, this inability leaves her yearning, she says:

> We are at the edges of what Deleuze will say about desire, and I want him to say more. I want him to say that desire is smart – that it is purposeful, intentional, agentic; that it can teach itself, craft itself, inform itself; that it can make decisions, that it can strategise (p. 645).

Through this designation of desire as something that individuals and communities possess, and as something that can account for the contradiction in the lives of Indigenous people, Tuck opens up the space to imagine Indigenous people as not only or ever only bounded by and within the logics of the settler colonial state. A desire-based approach provided the tools to analyse and recognise instances of fugitivity where Indigenous young people escape the seemingly benevolent settler colonial gestures of inclusion, recognition, and betterment even if that overwhelmingly counters what policymakers and researchers say is good for them.

In its valuing of contradiction, a desire-based approach provides the methodological ground from which I contend with the tensions emergent in First Peoples' everyday lives and how these tensions are negotiated. For example, such an approach enables me to account for the critiques of higher education made by Indigenous young people in Chapter Five, who simultaneously recognise the value of a university education *and* the historical and ongoing role of the university in Indigenous dispossession. A desire-based approach that values contradiction enables me later in this thesis, for example, to account for the actions of Dujuan in the documentary *In My Blood It Runs* (2019). Dujuan is acutely aware of the repercussions of refusing to participate in compulsory schooling and the punitive state reaction to young First Peoples, particularly

boys, who are out after dark in the town where he lives. However, he refuses to go to school and continues to spend his evenings in the town centre's public spaces.

An approach which recognises the desire of Indigenous people and collectives, as it underpins the work of this study where I aim to contest and imagine conceptions of Indigenous youth as otherwise, seeks to recuperate the humanity of Indigenous young people, which is rendered absent in the hypervisibility of Indigenous youth as inherently deficient. This intention is further inspired by Tuck, who in 2009 published a piece in the Harvard Educational Review titled: *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*. Tuck's letter urges Indigenous communities, researchers and educators to "institute a moratorium on damage-centred research to reformulate the ways research is framed and conducted and to reimagine how findings might be used by, for, and with communities" (p. 409). Tuck invites her readers to re-vision research to document not only the effects of oppression but also "the long-term repercussions of *thinking of ourselves as broken"* (original emphasis, 2009, p. 409). This invocation is profound, given the extent of the harms Indigenous peoples have experienced and the damage this has caused. It is one of the primary tools Indigenous people use to call governments, institutions and individuals to account for and to witness the impacts of colonial violence. But also, authoritative discursive strategies have likewise deployed damage-centred narratives as a way of anchoring Indigenous people and Indigenous futures to this damage, and in this way, damage-centred narratives are also implicated in fantasies of the inevitability of settler colonial elimination.

Anthropologist and gender studies scholar Elizabeth Povinelli (1999, p. 29) indicates the binding nature of such discourses whereby she argues that:

> Producing a present-tense indigenousness in which some failure is not a qualifying condition is discursively and materially impossible. These scars are what [Indigenous people] are, what they have. They are their true difference; the 'active edge' where the national promise of remedial action is negotiated. Legal and popular questions coagulate there: Is the scar small or large, ancient or recent, bleeding or healed, breeded out or passed on? What institutional suturing was and is necessary to keep this lacerated body functional? For whom? For what?

The harm Indigenous people have experienced is one of the most visible legacies of colonial violence. Moreover, as Tuck notes, it makes sense to look "to historical exploitation, domination, and colonisation to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy" (2009, p. 411). Yet even though this orientation is often benevolent and underpinned by good intentions, a damage-centred approach "is a pathologising approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community" (p. 413). In this way, damage-centred research and narratives more broadly arrest Indigenous people as overdetermined or hypervisible *in our damage*.

In tracing and contesting the emergence of Indigenous youth as a concept, I have also been researching for the absences that indicate an entry point for desire and exit from postcolonizing narratives, which only enable the recognition of Indigeneity as deficient and damaged. In this way, desire as a methodological tool supports an analytical engagement with Indigenous young people's complex humanity. In doing so, it guides a relational dialectic within my analysis with the discursive strategies and normative and punitive institutions, which rationalise and perpetuate their dehumanisation. As an alternative to the way Indigenous peoples and communities have been positioned as damaged, Tuck and C. Ree theorise the importance of researching for the desires held by Indigenous people and communities. But they warn:

> Desire is a refusal to trade in damage; desire is an antidote, a medicine to damage narratives. Desire, however, is not just living in the looking glass; it isn't a trip to opposite world. Desire is not a light switch, not a nescient turn to focus on the positive. It is a recognition of suffering, the costs of settler colonialism and capitalism, and how we still thrive in the face of loss anyway. (2013, p. 47)

Conceptions of Indigenous youth that have been produced through normative notions of the 'human' and linear temporality are undermined through the recuperation and presencing of a complex humanity for Indigenous young people facilitated by a desire-based approach. Daniel Heath Justice (2018, p. 187) says that "absences tell stories of their own", so in tracing and contesting the emergence of Indigenous youth as a concept, I have also been researching for the absences that indicate an entry point for desire. My cognisance of these absences in the official record or archive is also writ large in the incongruities between this record—or accounting of damage and deficiency—and

my everyday experiences as a Gumbaynggirr woman who was once a young person and in my work with Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal young people. As an Indigenous researcher, desire enacted methodologically enabled me to recognise and value contradiction, complexity, and refusal in their absence from the official record, and thus to articulate this valuing and recognition through my engagement with texts authored by First Peoples. Desire, as it informed the research methodology and as it is what I was re-searching for, supported my deployment of refusal and enabled me to produce this thesis as an example of that refusal.

A desire-based approach to research also requires that questions of value be attended to. Why is it that dispossessed communities are overwhelmingly hypervisible and valued as conquered and broken? Where is the recognition of survival, wisdom and hope? This depathologising approach requires an epistemological shift that interrupts the binary distinction between resistance and reproduction. To quote Tuck (2009) extensively, she explains that desire is a "thirding of the dichotomised categories of reproduction and resistance":

> …It is neither/both/and reproduction and resistance. This is important because it more closely matches the experiences of people who, at different points in a single day, reproduce, resist, are complicit in, rage against, celebrate, throw up hands/fists/towels, and withdraw and participate in uneven social structures—that is, everybody. Desire fleshes out that which has been hidden or what happens behind our backs. Desire, because it is an assemblage of experiences, ideas, and ideologies, both subversive and dominant, necessarily complicates our understanding of human agency, complicity, and resistance. (p. 419)

Central to imagining Indigenous young people as otherwise is the requirement to think beyond and outside the limited and limiting conceptions of youth bound by racialised time and normative conceptions of Indigenous people that anchor an Indigenous presence in damage. To re-search for Indigenous people's desire is also to take seriously assertions of an Indigenous future where normative systems of education and criminal justice do not determine acceptable futures according to linear progress; a progress which correspondingly leads to the destruction of Indigenous lands.

The process of imagining otherwise—of imagining the possibility of outside or beyond—has provided a method of orientation and a framework for placing, valuing and recognising fugitivity. It has guided my engagement with the profundity of Indigenous texts. Imagining otherwise through this research project has been an antidote to the intended fatalism evoked by the settler colonial project. Throughout this thesis, I tackle how the discursive logic of settler colonial inevitability figures Indigenous young people via discourses of deficiency and criminality. In doing so, I have also been alive to how this logic enables and justifies practices of control, regulation, containment and, at times, the death of Indigenous young people. While researching and writing this thesis, I have also worked as an educator in a provisional entry program at a university with young First Peoples, often in their first year out of school.

I remember teaching a class in the days after the torture experienced by Dylan Voller in detention in the Northern Territory was exposed on national television. Only a few weeks later, Elijah Doughty was killed in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, by a white man who believed Elijah was riding a stolen motorbike. At these moments, I was required to respond to the distress of the young people I taught while they made sense of the violence experienced by other Indigenous young people, perhaps not so unlike themselves, while also working through my distress. Countless times throughout my candidature, I have experienced and been part of deep collective mourning while holding space to make meaning of the insensibility of the violence experienced by Indigenous young people. This meaning making has been ongoing not only in my relations with and responsibility to others, and particularly Indigenous young people, but in the quiet and solitary process of bringing this thesis into being.

Contending with and making meaning of these instances of violence have proved to be the biggest challenge of this research project. In response to these challenges, imagining a world otherwise, where Indigenous young people are not subject to settler colonial violence, has animated this project from the outset. And not only has it energised me, but it has also often brought me joy. As part of this thesis's unsettling methodology, imagining otherwise has been a grounding and imperative praxis foundational to this research project. Imagining otherwise has embedded an unexpected process of healing, providing a salve when I have been hurt by archival encounters or in mourning,

particularly for the many young people who have lost their lives since I started this research project; it has provided a method of orientation activating a framework for placing, valuing and recognising fugitivity; and lastly guided my engagement with the profundity of Indigenous texts.

In this way, imagining otherwise is a decolonising methodology that offers "a language of possibility, a way out of colonialism" (L. T. Smith, 2012, p. 204). In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) writes:

> The language of possibility, a language that can be controlled by those who have possession of it, allows us to make plans, to make strategic choices, to theorise solutions. Imagining a different world, or reimagining the world, is a way into theorising the reasons why the world we experience is unjust, and posing alternatives to such a world from within our own world views. (p. 204)

As a decolonising and desire-based research practice, I have realised that this imagining of other possible worlds through an engagement with First Peoples' stories has also been a crucial part of recuperating myself as part of this research process. Returning to Jo-Ann Episkinew (2009, p. 14), she recognised this in stating, "it is not only writing Indigenous literature but also reading it that has a healing quality." But more than my recovery, it is also a crucial part of recuperating the damage that has been done through the discursive practices which have produced grievous outcomes for Indigenous young people and Indigenous people more broadly.

Study methods and design

So far, I have introduced the theoretical frames of time, normativity and fugitivity. I have also outlined a methodological bricolage which includes Indigenous Standpoint theory as the ethical and methodological foundation of this thesis; a Foucauldian critique as useful for tracing the emergence of conceptions of Indigenous youth in the discursive practices of government; and lastly, a desire-based approach to research which supports the recognition of practices of fugitivity. Building on this theoretical and methodological framework, this research project is designed to trace the way conceptions of Indigenous youth figure Indigenous young people as a problem; and engage with the discursive

practices of First Peoples, which contest problematising conceptions of Indigenous youth and imagine Indigenous young people as otherwise. In this section, I outline the research design—the respective methods of textual analysis and the sources examined as part of the project—which supported me to address the two questions guiding this thesis:

1. Why and how have young First Peoples come to be known through *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth? and,
2. How have these conceptions been contested and imagined otherwise?

To address these two different but related questions, I draw on two types of texts: the discursive practices of government and texts authored by Indigenous people. Correspondingly, this section has two parts. The first part details the primary sources I examined in this study to trace the formation of Indigenous youth, followed by an outline of the Foucauldian-inspired method of problematization as the method of analysis. The second part introduces the Indigenous texts—or what I term fugitive practices—engaged with to understand how conceptions of Indigenous youth have been contested and reimagined. I also outline the process of reading and analysis underpinning this engagement.

Tracing conceptions of Indigenous youth

To discuss the texts examined to answer the first question guiding the study: 'why and in what ways have young First Peoples come to be known through *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth?' it is useful to return to what is constituted as archival in a Foucauldian critique. Foucault says, "I shall call an archive":

> …not the totality of texts that have been preserved by a civilization or the set of traces that could be salvaged from its downfall, but the series of rules which determine in a culture the appearance and disappearance of statements, their retention and their destruction, their paradoxical existence as *events* and *things*. (Foucault, 1968, pp. 309–310 original emphasis)

Foucault's statement orients historical analysis away from an understanding of primary sources as key to piecing together certain truths or facts (about events, moments in time) as they occurred in a linear trajectory, to texts as an indication of the production of power/knowledge. In this research project, I locate these events and things in the discursive practices of government that coalesce around and constitute the concept of Indigenous youth. To undertake the work of tracing conceptions of Indigenous youth in response to the first research question, this study followed three research stages, namely identification and collection of primary sources; secondly, a textual analysis of these sources from which emerged several themes; and lastly, the presentation of this analysis and the contextualization of emergent themes in resonance with my theorisation of time and normativity in the substantive chapters of this thesis.

To identify relevant source material in the first stage of this research, I embarked on an inductive approach to the archive using a Boolean search for the emergence of era-appropriate terms in publicly available parliamentary records, Ministerial speeches, government policy statements, reports and commission documents and government press releases. I used the prevalence of references—or what Foucault would call *dispositif* as the assemblage or convergence of discursive practices which signal the possibility of an emergence of a problematization—as an indication of the existence of a thread. For example, when the death of 16-year-old John Pat occurred at the hands of off-duty police and police aid in Roebourne in 1983, references to Indigenous young people entered into Parliamentary rhetoric in the House of Representatives as captured in the HANSARD records. As parliamentarians sought to make sense of this brutal death and the public's reaction to it in a new era of rights for First Peoples, the discursive practices of government coalesced at the nexus of Indigenous youth and criminal justice as the value of education was positioned as an imperative corrective strategy to stop Indigenous young people from being taken into and dying in custody. This coalescence produced formative ground to analyse the way discourses of education and criminal justice produced conceptions of Indigenous youth as inevitably criminal if not for state intervention. These discourses were particularly present in the report produced by the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1991) which is examined in Chapter Four: Criminalizing Conceptions of Indigenous Youth. In searching for and selecting the primary sources under examination, I began by tracing conceptions of Indigenous youth in their historical

emergence in relation to education and employment, following threads from these early figurations to the way they manifest in contemporary justifications for the hyper-surveillance of Indigenous young people in criminal justice.

The starting point for tracing conceptions of Indigenous youth was decided on with the recognition that the 1967 Referendum was a significant reference point for a transition in policy thinking about the 'Aboriginal problem.' The Referendum heralded a new policy era in Indigenous affairs, with a majority of Australians voting to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people counted in the national population census. The Referendum also enabled the Federal Government for the first time to make laws "for the benefit of" Indigenous people (Behrendt, 2007, p. 14). Before 1967, political discourse was underpinned by explicit ideological race-based assumptions, while the Referendum ushered in a social policy response to revelations of statistical inequality accounted for after 1971 when Indigenous people were for the first time included in the national population census. The gathering of documents as part of the archive here was an inductive process initially bound only by the 1967 Referendum as the temporal starting point. I began by searching for traces of Indigenous young people as represented in political primary sources such as HANSARD records; information tabled in parliament, Commonwealth government media statements and public addresses, state-sanctioned commissions and reviews, policy documents and publications by government representatives. Initial traces emerged in comments made in Federal Parliament about the young First Peoples who had established the Tent Embassy in 1972 on the lawns out the front of Parliament House in protest to the state's refusal to meet demands for land rights. References then soon turned from actual young people to the profound statistical inequality revealed in census data. With these revelations, a proliferation of government-commissioned reviews and committees were established tasked with providing detail, clarity and a policy direction in response to the statistical existence of Aboriginal youth unemployment and underrepresentation in education. In tracing the emergence of conceptions of Indigenous youth in education discourse, I examined ministerial statements and HANSARD records emergent from the House of Representatives and Senate in addition to the following sources:

- Coombs (1972) *The employment status of Aborigines*

- Karmel (1973) *Schools in Australia: Report of the interim committee for the Australian schools commission*
- Whitlam (1973) *Aboriginals and society: Press statement*
- Henderson (1975) *Poverty in Australia: First main report*
- Borrie (1975) *Population and Australia: A demographic analysis and projection.*
- Fitzgerald (1977) *Commission of inquiry into poverty*
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1977) *Australia: Transition from school to work or further study*
- Miller (1985) *Report of the committee of review into Aboriginal employment and training programs*
- Commonwealth Government (1986) *Aboriginal employment development policy*

From 1986 onwards, I noticed the problems of Aboriginal youth regarding education and employment became the problems of youth more generally instead as rising youth unemployment across Australia became a policy problem. Yet, in this same moment, conceptualizations of Indigenous youth began to emerge in political commentary around criminal justice, specifically in response to the brutal murder/killing of 16-year-old John Pat. At this juncture, the earlier problems of Indigenous youth in education and employment also emerge in the broader politic as a problem for criminal justice. The problem of Indigenous youth as a problem for criminal justice is the focus of Chapter Four. In addition to the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1991) report, the analysis I present concerns state parliamentary records and documents authored by the New South Wales police force alongside a report titled *Policing Young People in NSW: A Study of the Suspect Targeting Management Plan* published by the Youth Justice Coalition in 2017. The primary sources engaged with in Chapter Four: Criminalising Conceptions of Indigenous Youth include:

- Australian Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) *National report: Royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody*
- Keating (1992) *A national employment and training plan for young Australians*
- NSW Police Force. (2019b). *NSW police force statement of strategic intent*
- NSW Police Force. (2019a). *Individuals under 18 on a STMP*

- McMillan, J. (2016) *The consorting law: Report on the operation of Part 3A, division 7 of the crimes act 1900*
- NSW Legislative Assembly (2018) *First session of the fifty-sixth parliament: Question and answers no. 162*
- NSW Legislative Council (2017) *Report on proceedings before portfolio committee no. 4 – Legal Affairs budget estimates 2017- 2018*

In tracing the emergence of *a priori* conceptions that figure Indigenous young people as a problem, I undertook a Foucauldian inspired post-structural approach to analysis—drawing heavily on Carol Bacchi's (2010, 2012b, 2016) problematization of policy texts. Bacchi (2012b, p. 4) prompts policy readers to consider an approach that begins with the question, "what's the problem represented to be?" This approach "starts from the premise that what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic (needs to change)" (Bacchi, 2012a, p. 21). Following this logic enables a critical reading of the implicit representations of what is considered to be the problem. Drawing extensively on Bacchi, the aim is to probe:

> … the unexamined assumptions and deep-seated conceptual logics within implicit problem representations. This focus means paying attention to the forms of knowledge that underpin public policies, such as psychological or biomedical premises, producing a broad conception of governing that encompasses the place of experts and professionals. (2012, p. 22)

I took an approach inspired by Bacchi's prompts to critically read the primary sources and more contemporary material I engaged with in tracing conceptions of Indigenous youth in Chapters Three and Four. My initial analysis involved categorising the contents of sources according to broad themes, which became more definitive with each reading as I connected and traced particular themes as they changed across documents and over time. Via this iterative approach, I began to pick up threads which included:

1. Indigenous poverty and disadvantage as a marker of Indigenous deficiency;
2. Indigenous deficiency—which also emerged as an incapacity to self-determine the future—as a justification for enforcing Indigenous children and young

people's compliance with formal schooling as the precursor to employability and thus an antidote to disadvantage;

3. The subsequent figuring of Indigenous educational disadvantage as further testament to Indigenous parental and community incapacity to be self-determining, particularly concerning their child's future; and,
4. The criminalisation of Indigenous young people who refuse to comply with or invest in formal education as the precursor to economic and social participation.

From this identification of themes, two primary discursive formations emerged from discourses of education and criminal justice, specifically: inescapable deficiency and inevitable criminality. The term "discursive formation" refers to the systematic operation of several discourses or statements constituting a body of knowledge, which work together to construct a specific topic or object of analysis in a particular way and limit the other ways that object/topic may be constituted. Following the analysis of primary sources, I then contextualised these discursive formations in the production of conceptions of Indigenous youth in line with the theorisation of time and normativity outlined earlier in this thesis. The third and final research stage entailed an in-depth analysis and contextualisation of the discursive formations of inescapable deficiency presented in Chapter Three and inevitable criminality in Chapter Four.

Contesting and imagining otherwise

Tracing taken for granted conceptions of Indigenous youth is the first aim of this study. The work required to reach this aim has been temporally orientated toward the past, the present and the kinds of authoritative discursive strategies—for example, in policy, state-commissioned reviews, parliamentary debates—that have come into being over time as foundational to the figuration of *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth. As the second aim of this thesis, imagining otherwise has focused my analysis in the present as a moment of generative accumulation informed by the survival of Indigenous people and thus a stance from which to imagine the future. As a method of orientation and a mode of departure from the problematization, imagining otherwise visions a future where

Indigenous young people are understood and valued as the projection of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, rather than inescapable deficiency and inevitable criminality. This brings me back to the second primary question addressed in this study: How have conceptions of Indigenous youth—that problematise young First Peoples—have been contested and imagined otherwise? Guided by a desire-based approach in search of fugitive practices, as outlined previously, I turned toward texts created by First Peoples to answer these questions. This section outlines the process of text selection and how the particular texts I engage in this thesis's substantive chapters contest and imagine otherwise Indigenous young people. I then introduce the selected texts before concluding with an outline of the process of their analysis.

In their article *Living Texts: A Perspective on Published Sources, Indigenous Research Methodologies and Indigenous Worldviews*, Palkyu writers and scholars Ambelin Kwaymullina and Blaze Kwaymullina, alongside non-Indigenous legal theorist Laura Butterly, designate the purposeful creation and publication of First Peoples stories as "living texts" (2012, p. 4). Since the 1960s in Australia, there has been a revolution in the publication of Indigenous texts. In parallel, there has also been a growing number of Indigenous scholars foregrounding these texts as the recognisable assertion of Indigenous voices which speak to "Indigenous knowledges, communities, histories, experiences, logic, worldviews, laws, hopes, dreams, loves, grief, traumas and frustrations" (A. Kwaymullina et al., 2013, p. 1). As a whole:

> … these works provide a deep and complex base of source material of Aboriginal voices speaking about their knowledges and experiences. Aboriginal scholars are now in a position to draw upon the fruit of this knowledge discourse from Aboriginal peoples that Aboriginal communities have produced, and authorized to be in the public domain in the form of published texts. (p. 3)

For Kwaymullina et al. (2013), texts authorised by Indigenous peoples to be in the public domain—including poetry, literature, film, art, digital mediums and cultural artefacts—are important primary sources for Indigenous scholars to centre in their research in the active presencing of Indigenous voices and community desires. Like Kwaymullina et al., in the context of Turtle Island, Daniel Heath Justice (2011) foregrounds an essential tenant of Native literary criticism where it is taken for granted that:

> … Native literature is an expression of intellectual agency as well as aesthetic accomplishment and that it has a role to play in the struggle for sovereignty, decolonization, and the re-establishment of Indigenous values to the healing of this wounded world. (p. 336 – 37)

In asserting Indigenous texts' critical value as part of the archive that Indigenous researchers respond to and Indigenous research is guided by, I find Narunnga theorist and storyteller Natalie Harkin's (2014) archival-poetics useful in the way she actively re-maps the archive in her engagement with it. Harkin resonates with Waanyi writer Alexis Wright's search "for the corners of the soul where joy can be found . . . our words are weapons, our books are time bombs, already breaking down the many barriers on their way across the world'" (quoted in Harkin, 2014, p. 19). Re-mapping the archive in this way contests the barriers that contain its content, and the contingencies that brought it into being are refigured as contributing to it, to its re-mapping, as Harkin suggests. This re-mapping is significant in locating Indigenous writers, creative producers, theorists and scholars who work both within and outside of disciplinary knowledge. This re-mapping is an imperative response to "state acts of surveillance, recording and archiving" which had the "power to place our family stories in the public domain, or obliterate our stories within the broader histories of erasure filed away, silent and hidden, until bidden" (Harkin, 2014, p. 4). Thinking of the archive in this way provided an entry point for me to theorise both my role and intention as an Indigenous researcher researching within the Western academy while centring Indigenous stories and knowledge. This is a significant point of qualification. I enter into this research given the possibilities research presents in imagining otherwise. Yet, as I have emphasised, my starting point is to unsettle the way conceptions of Indigenous youth have come to figure, maintain and circulate as an *a priori*. In locating my research, and the work of other Indigenous theorists, academics and researchers, and storytellers in the archive alongside and in response to the discourses produced about us by non-Indigenous institutions and individuals, I am broadening the utility of the archive to account for the fissures, contradictions and incongruities while keeping open possibilities for its re-mapping. Via these possibilities, I ascribe those texts as fugitive practices that imagine otherwise the productive potential they deserve. With this in mind, four criteria guided the selection of Indigenous texts engaged with in this study. Texts selected were:

1. authored or co-authored by First Peoples;
2. published and thus authorised to be part of the public domain (A. Kwaymullina et al., 2013);
3. countered the *a priori* concept of Indigenous youth as damaged and deficient which figure young First Peoples as a problem; and,
4. are an example of fugitive praxis.

Framing the texts under examination as fugitive practice provides a possibility of escape to beyond normative conceptions of—and conditions of inclusion into and exclusion from—the category of 'human' and racialised conceptions of linear time and development. The archive responded to here includes:

- Select articles and creative pieces from the campus magazine *Under Bunjil* (2015 – 2019), edited by young Indigenous university students at the University of Melbourne. *Under Bunjil* is released bi-annually and as of June 2021 continues to be published. The magazine includes a range of poetry, art, fiction, and non-fiction pieces authored by Indigenous people covering topics from identity, racism, Country, gender, personal experience, economics, critiques of content and pedagogy at the university, and critical readings of Indigenous related policy. The existence of this text has been forged externally to institutional discourses of success, student support and achievement, and it has not been created necessarily as an explicit act of resistance or opposition on behalf of the students. Yet, as a primary source, it tells multiple, sanctioned narratives which are thoughtful, accessible, and visible to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and university staff. To read *Under Bunjil* in the complex context of the university establishes a view of this text as a fugitive practice that exists not in opposition but in relation to the contingencies that brought the problematization of Indigenous young people into being. This complexity foregrounds the university's role as the 'last stop' in a standard educational journey based on linear notions of progress and normative definitions of success (Wierenga & Wyn, 2014).

- The documentary film *In My Blood It Runs* (2019), co-created by non-Indigenous director Maya Newall in collaboration with the Arrernte and Garrwa families it represents, Dujuan Hoosan, Megan Hoosan, Carol Turner, Margaret Anderson and James Mawson. The film follows 10-year-old Dujuan Hoosan as he refuses to comply with a schooling system he experiences as problematic. As a result, he comes under threat from the criminal justice system. This film provides an example which demonstrates how the discursive production of Indigenous youth manifests corporeally in the harm experienced by Dujuan and his peers and broader community. This film is an important contribution to the archive I engage with as part of this thesis because in contesting taken-for-granted conceptions of Indigenous youth and the way these conceptions work on the bodies of young First Peoples. It also reveals the concerted desire of Dujuan and his family to imagine a different future. This future is demanded via the assertion of a sovereign and self-determined present despite these assertions being continually framed as non-compliance with the systems that seek to discipline Dujuan, his family and other young people in his community. This film mirrored both my desire to contest *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth and also the methodological stance I have taken in this research project: a refusal to pathologise Indigenous young people by producing consumable stories of damage and deficiency for the academy and other organizations and institutions who hunger so ravenously for them (Tuck, 2009; Tuck & Ree, 2013). When I first viewed this film, after I had researched and written most of Chapter Three and Four, I felt it triangulated what I had found in tracing the emergence of authoritative conceptions of Indigenous youth in criminal justice and discourses of deficiency in education and employment.

- Lastly, I respond to the five-part children's live-action series *Thalu* which first aired on the National Indigenous Television (NITV) network in April of 2020. Set in an indeterminate future, *Thalu* follows five Indigenous young people as they save our future world from an ominous dust cloud, The Takers. I chose to respond to this text as part of the archive informing this research project because it centres Indigenous young people as the saviours of our future world while positioning the insatiable greed underpinned by the linear development narrative as the problem. *Thalu* was produced by Ngarluma man Tyson Mowarin and features a cast of

> Indigenous people, including the first-time actors who play the colourfully clad motley crew of young people tasked by their Elders with saving the world. As a text, *Thalu* demands that I attend to it as an example where Indigenous young people are imagined otherwise. As that, this text is profound in its defiance of geographical and temporal bounds and the discursive strategies that, as I demonstrate elsewhere in this thesis, delimit how Indigenous young people are understood, responded to and figured in ways that produce harmful material effects.

My analysis of these texts entailed a close reading informed by the context within which each text was created, produced and published, and the context within which I read it. This focus on context follows Métis literary scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew, who states that "[c]ontemporary Indigenous literature cannot be divorced from its contextual framework" (2009, p. 186). Following this immersive engagement with each of these texts and their context of emergence, I read or viewed each multiple times gathering threads that aligned with my aim of contesting and imagining otherwise. This process was not inductive as I had actively chosen these texts because of their utility in challenging taken-for-granted conceptions of Indigenous youth. These threads were then analysed with the aid of conceptual frames, which aligned with a desire-based approach. These included Métis scholar Christ Andersen's concept of density for reading *Under Bunjil*; Avery Gordon's notion of complex personhood in my analysis *In My Blood It Runs*; and a conceptualisation of fugitive futures in my engagement with *Thalu.*

In contextualising *Under Bunjil*, I read it in the complex context of the university. In doing so, my reading was informed by interviews with four young First Peoples—Caleb, Sienna, Jaime, and Ellen—at the University of Melbourne and analysed against the institution's inclusion policies.[2] The young people I talked to in contextualising *Under Bunjil* ranged in age from late teens to mid-20s and were completing their undergraduate

[2] Interviews undertaken with young people as part of this research project were approved by Human Research Ethics at the University of Melbourne (Ethics ID: 1646181). On inviting students to participate in this study I emailed them a plain language statement outlining the research project and what was expected of them. I provided this plain language statement in hard copy prior to beginning interviews. Participants also signed a consent form which outlined that I would seek to protect their anonymity including using pseudonyms in place of their real name.

degrees in diverse areas such as criminology, psychology and Indigenous studies, commerce and engineering, and creative writing.

Interviews were undertaken at the Indigenous student centre on campus toward the end of 2015. Each young person who talked to me as part of this research was an active member of the on-campus Indigenous community. One student was Koori from Victoria, and the others had travelled from Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales to study at the University. I asked these particular students to contribute to this study because they asked me how my doctoral research was going and what it was about at various times throughout the second half of the year. As a fellow Indigenous student at a later stage in my educational journey, I was active in mentoring and connecting with students—often younger—who were just beginning on their academic journey. In response to their questions about my research, I had flagged with them that at some point, I would appreciate the opportunity to talk to them so they could share with me their perspectives on the significance of *Under Bunjil* and how they felt the University was doing regarding supporting an Indigenous presence on campus. This question was topical as the University had released its second Reconciliation Action Plan—which sets targets for the university to aspire and is monitored by an external organization, Reconciliation Australia—earlier that year. The students seemed aware of the university's growing desire to position itself as inclusive of Indigenous staff, students and knowledges.

Before beginning each conversation, I thought deeply about what assumptions I held in asking these young people to sit and talk with me in the context of my doctoral research. I reflected on the questions: What did I want to know, and why did I expect these young people to hold the knowledge I sought? How was I to negotiate this encounter I had initiated between triply marked bodies—they, as young people; as Indigenous; and, as students—me, as a researcher; as an Indigenous woman; and, as a student myself—in the fraught institutional space of the university? Was it possible to represent this encounter and the knowledge it produced in a way that would not reinforce the problem of Indigenous youth? I also profoundly considered my use of *Under Bunjil* as the anchor point for this chapter. In doing so, I asked: What does it look like to acknowledge discursive spaces like that which is asserted in *Under Bunjil*, spaces forged by Indigenous young people as an affirmation of Indigenous embodiment and worldviews—of an

Indigenous presence—in an institution of legitimized knowledge production like the university? Lastly, in making the methodological decision to centre the knowledge, from *Under Bunjil* and interviews, of these young people, I take seriously and acknowledge Tłaliłila'ogwa geographer Sarah Hunt's (2014, p. 30) assertion that:

> The potential for Indigenous ontologies to unsettle dominant ontologies can be easily neutralized as a triviality, a case study or a trinket, as powerful institutions work as self-legitimating systems that uphold broader dynamics of (neo)colonial power.

Taking the Indigenous young people seriously as valued knowledge holders within a space so stratified by legitimate knowledge, my engagement with *Under Bunjil* and the context emergent from interviews refuses the trivialization or dismissal of Indigenous ontologies. Hunt (2014, p. 28) reveals the tensions underpinning an assertion of Indigenous presence at the academy when she states: "the voice I raise is at once Indigenous and scholar, though it feels impossible to be heard as both at the same time."

My analysis of *In My Blood It Runs* entailed watching the film for moments of rupture between taken-for-granted conceptions of Indigenous youth emergent from education and criminal justice and the lived realities of Dujuan and his family. These ruptures also revealed how the interventions justified by *a priori* concepts of Indigenous youth were actively contested or undermined by Dujuan and his family's assertion of Indigenous self-determination and sovereign connection to their ancestral homelands. Through these moments of contestation, the problem of Indigenous youth shifts to the question of settler colonial institutions as the problem. In contextualising *In My Blood It Runs*; I also undertook a critical reading of the Northern Territory's government-funded population campaign *Boundless Possible*. In reading this campaign against *In My Blood It Runs* and the current hyper-surveillance, regulation and over-policing of Indigenous young people in the Northern Territory, and particularly in the town centre of Alice Springs where part of the film is set, stands in stark contrast to the Territory's desire to attract and grow a non-Indigenous (white) population. When juxtaposed, these two examples work with each other to reveal who is sanctioned in their belonging to place and how Indigenous young people are rendered out-of-place as a problem for education and criminal justice.

Lastly, similar to the process that informed my analysis of *In My Blood It Runs*, I watched *Thalu* (2020) for moments where representations of young First Peoples sat in tension with the way Indigenous youth figure Indigenous young people as a problem for education and criminal justice. *Thalu*, a live action series was filmed around the small town of Roebourne where 16-year-old John Pat was killed by police in 1983, heralding the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. This television series also aired only weeks before the mining giant Rio Tinto detonated the 45,000-year-old Juukan Gorge not far from where *Thalu* was filmed. On the same day as this destruction occurred, footage of African American man George Floyd's violent death at the hands of police circulated the globe inciting outrage from many white Australians. At the same time, Indigenous people across the country questioned the absence of similar responses to the deaths in custody of First Peoples here at home. As I watched and re-watched this series for this research project, I was continually drawn to, and making meaning of, the coverage and commentary relating to the destruction of Juukan Gorge and George Floyd's death and the response it prompted here in Australia. I kept thinking of how Floyd's death would have also intensified the remembering of John Pat's. I kept thinking of Tyson Mowarin, who produced *Thalu*, and the young people featured in the television series from Roebourne, who would have only just enjoyed the success of its premiere weeks prior, and how they would have been in mourning over the destruction of Juukan Gorge. Thus, despite *Thalu*'s playful transgression of markers of time and place, I could not undertake a critical reading of it as part of this research project without engaging with the historical, geographical and contemporary context of its emergence.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an invocation from Dian Million to be alive to the motion of the politics of meaning-making that we are part of. In resonance with Million's invocation and in returning to Foucault, he says:

> Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought (which animates everyday behaviour) and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as

> one believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such … as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible. (Foucault, 1977b, p. 154)

In my attempt to show that are not as self-evident as they seem, this study emerged as a response to how young First Peoples are marked via conceptions of Indigenous youth grounded in damage and deficiency. I have witnessed these conceptions being deployed by others in my personal and professional experience in ways which problematise young First Peoples while rendering harmful systems as infallible. This thesis attempts to understand why and how the problematization of young First Peoples, problematizations which are so deeply dissonant with my own experience, have emerged. Such an examination holds immense utility for me as a researcher and educator who works at the nexus of critical Indigenous and youth studies. In this chapter, I have presented the methodological and analytical tools used in this thesis to be alive to the politics of meaning-making which inform how young First Peoples are represented and responded to.

Grounded ethically and methodologically by Indigenous standpoint theory, I have introduced a bricolage of methodologies that have supported me to undertake the two-fold work of tracing the emergence of conceptions of Indigenous youth and contending with how these conceptions have been contested and imagined otherwise. In support of this two-fold work, this study design has brought the scholarship and insight of critical Indigenous scholars and other Indigenous theorists together with a Foucauldian approach to history to challenge the self-evidence of authoritative conceptions of Indigenous youth. However, this challenge exists not only through the examination of discourse in its constitutive relation to power, knowledge and domination but also in the fact that Indigenous young people have never been represented or understood as indelibly damaged and deficient by their own families and communities. In the substantive chapters of this thesis that follow, I bring the methodological bricolage and the theoretical framework outlined to bear on the texts of government and the stories published by Indigenous people. In the next chapter of this thesis, I begin this work by tracing conceptions of Indigenous youth as they emerged in the discursive formation of inescapable deficiency in discourses of education from the early 1970s.

Chapter Three - Emerging conceptions of Indigenous youth: Figuring the future as a white possession

> I love your difference (which I once wanted to kill), I will recognize and protect it (if it will not offend or kill me).
>
> — Audra Simpson (2016, p. 240), *Whither settler colonialism?*

Introduction

The 1970s heralded a new decade of policy reform in response to First Peoples in Australia after a visible shift occurred in the political agenda around the seminal reference point of the 1967 Referendum. Often explained as a watershed moment in Australian political history, the Referendum passed with an overwhelming majority of people across Australia voting to change the constitution to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the national census. The Referendum's success also enabled the federal government to legislate on behalf of Indigenous people, a power previously only accorded to individual states. From the mid-twentieth century in Australia, conceptions of youth were likewise significantly refigured in the national imaginary as young people became emblematic of the social and economic instability facing the post-war, post-industrial Western world (Bessant & Watts, 1998; Wyn & White, 1996). Through reform the political function of education was recast to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing labour market and rising youth unemployment. Young people were rendered within this social and political climate as a potential threat to be mitigated by prolonged compulsory schooling and mass higher education participation. Here a shift occurred, as growing levels of unemployment took precedence over the social utility of education, and young people's lives were increasingly understood through linear models of transition from school to work (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Wyn & Dwyer, 1999). Through this shift the purpose of education was refigured from preparation for participation in civic society to preparation for economic participation. Within this context that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth came into political focus as a population for the first time.

In this chapter I examine the discursive practices of government in tracing the emergence of conceptions of Indigenous youth from 1967 to 1986. The 1967 Referendum is an important starting point in the context of this chapter and in understanding how Indigenous young people have come to be understood because this is the moment Indigenous peoples, and by extension young people, enter the social and political imaginary as a population and as a possible site of progressive policy reform. I argue that discourses of education circulating during these decades were foundational to the discursive formation of Indigenous youth as inherently deficient. The period in question provides an important field of analysis as formative ground for the production of Indigenous youth as a problem for criminal justice and education, which I examine later in the thesis. Guiding this chapter is a question posed by the seminal theorist of race Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015b, p. xx), who asks: "How did Aboriginal people come to be known as racialized subjects, and is this 'knowing' implicated in a structure of white subjectivity that is tied ontologically to the possession of Aboriginal lands and Aboriginal people?" In attending to discursive practices that produce harmful material effects in the present, this chapter traces conceptions of Indigenous youth as they emerged in education discourse around the role of schooling and vocational education to mitigative the 'Aboriginal problem' of poverty and disadvantage in the first decades after the 1967 Referendum. In this chapter I suggest these conceptions of Indigenous youth, which emerged during the heyday of the self-determination policy era, actually worked to undermine First Peoples demands for self-determination and land rights. The education and employment of Indigenous young people were cast as the necessary pre-condition for self-determination while simultaneously being positioned as the antidote to poverty. By racialising Indigenous people as poverty-stricken and deficient in the present moment, we were also rendered as incapable of conducting our own affairs into the future. Indigenous youth were discursively constructed as the site through which this problem of deficiency was to be mitigated through education and employment. Drawing on earlier theorisations of time and normativity, this chapter illuminates how conceptions of Indigenous youth were produced through racialised discourses of education in the bureaucratic language of deficiency, which also worked to secure normative futures for Indigenous people. These racialised discourses functioned via explicit race-based ideological policies and assimilation practices for most of the 20th century. However, they were then recast as cultural difference and disadvantage post-1967 Referendum through social policies and

government commission reviews in response to census data. In this way, race functions through an often taken-for-granted concept of Indigenous youth, which works to render Indigenous people inherently deficient and damaged, thus casting the future as am exclusively white possession.

Disappearing young First Peoples in the population making of Indigenous youth

Late in the summer of 1972, on the 26th of January—which for many Australians commemorates the arrival of the British (referred to as Invasion Day by First Peoples)—former Australian Prime Minister McMahon released a statement rejecting mounting demands by Indigenous people for land rights. Referring to the decades-long battle for land waged at the township of Yirrkala in the north of Australia, McMahon proposed that the Yolŋu people, instead of substantive land rights, would be invited to apply for 50-year land leases. These leases were only to be granted on the condition applicants could demonstrate "reasonable economic and social use of the land" (W. McMahon, 1972, p. 13). Later that evening in protest, four young Koorie men were dispatched from the inner-city Sydney suburb of Redfern to erect a make-shift Embassy on the Federal Parliament House's lawn (Foley, 2014).

Drawing inspiration from the American Civil Rights Movement and Black Power in particular and reflective of the mobilisation occurring across the country, the Embassy was erected by young First Peoples in their late teens and early twenties (Foley, 2014). Inside Parliament House, the actions of these young activists and their growing contingent of supporters were later dismissed as "claiming a representative character" on behalf of Aboriginal people, while "many of them effect Afro hair-dos… wear dark glasses and go around with slogans of the New York Black Power Negroes" (Australia, House of Representatives 1972, p. 1891). These activists and their advocates graced the pages of national broadsheets throughout the 1970s as a vocal political movement often spearheaded by young people, which became cemented in urban centres like Fitzroy in Melbourne and Redfern in Sydney. The inception of the Tent Embassy is representative of the pivotal role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have played in political movements that have challenged the state's assertion of sovereignty over the

unceded lands of Indigenous people. And yet, in the official record from the decades following their protest, the young people who were visible, strategic, active and determined in making demands to ensure Aboriginal futurity are rendered all but invisible in the population-making of Indigenous youth after the 1967 Referendum.

The period in question has been marked within a as the decades heralding "neoliberalism's ascent to hegemony" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 9), or what Nikolas Rose (1996, p. 328) theorises as "the death of the social." In this thesis, I use Michel Foucault's definition of neoliberalism as "the exercise of political power modelled on principles of a market economy" (Foucault, 1979, p. 131). Considerations of neoliberalism often note a difficulty in defining its parameters, indicating the contested nature of the term—is it a process (Brenner & Theodore, 2005); an ideology (H. A. Giroux, 2005); or rationale for governing (N. Rose, 1996)? Campbell and Pederson (2001, p. 270) suggest it alludes definition as a "loose and malleable aggregation of concepts and practices." The neoliberal is also understood as the transition from a nation-state to a market-state; political power in the former sought to guarantee the welfare of the nation, while the latter promises instead to increase people's economic opportunity. In noting this ambiguity marking the term, the changing state-market relations from the 1970s pre-figured the 'neoliberal turn' in the 1980s and thus provides a significant reference point in an analysis of the emergence of state-sanctioned concepts Indigenous youth.

The refiguration of the relationship between the state and the market in the last decades of the twentieth century in the United Kingdom, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand, the United States and Australia shifted the prominence of youth as a social category in political discourse and corresponding policymaking. Conceptions of Australian childhood and youth, which emerged at the policy nexus of education and economic development from the mid-1970s, profoundly impacted contemporary understandings of and responses to young people in research, policy and educational practice. During this time, unemployment came to be understood as a "phenomenon to be governed" (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Jessop, 2003; N. Rose, 1996, p. 339). As an emergent category of risk by virtue of high youth unemployment, young people came to be governed on this premise through education. Through discourses of risk, youth were framed as "at-risk of jeopardising, through present behaviours and dispositions, desired futures" (Kelly, 2001, p. 30). At-risk

discourses justified education as a technology of economic development that aimed to govern youth according to "preferred or ideal adult futures and the present behaviours and dispositions of youth" (ibid.). Sociologist Phil Mizen suggest that the emerging prominence of youth as an age-related category at this time signified a capitalist state practice of managing social conflict, a practice of "actively consolidating, supporting and defending capitalist development by organising social relations into distinctions and categories that obscure their exploitative content" (2002, p. 13). During this time, as a population identifiable in census data, Aboriginal youth enter the broader politic simultaneously as a newly emergent social category and an enigmatic figure, particularly symbolising the determined existence and future of a people who had so long been the locus of erasure.

At first glance, self-determination as the primary policy response to Indigenous peoples post-1967 Referendum appears contradictory to mounting conceptions of youth that have been theorised as increasingly governmental during the same period. For Aboriginal people, the grass-roots demand for and exercise of self-determination had been (and continues to be) ongoing in response to the shifting Indigenous policy agenda since Federation. From the 1960s, this demand was strategically and increasingly framed by First Peoples and their advocates by appropriating rights-based claims to land, justice and equality. These rights-based claims keyed into the broader international development of supra-national bodies such as the United Nations (Lingard, 2011; Fazal Rizvi et al., 2006) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation of Development (OECD). From the early 1970s, self-determination policy and political discourse also emphasised the importance of collective community control and responsibility. However, a distinction can be made between the grass-roots demand for self-determination and self-determination as a political and policy response to First Peoples rights-based claims. Historian of Indigenous Affairs policy Tim Rowse (2013, p. 6) draws attention to this distinction in noting that "[a]n Indigenous population will be made up of rights-bearing individuals (citizens), but a 'population' is not a bearer of a collective right; a population is not even a collective agent, just an artefact of the administrative imagination." Rose (1996, p. 353) also questions discourses of 'community' suggesting that what is of interest are the problematizations "through which collective existence has come to offer itself to thought in the form of community, and the new representations, techniques, powers and ethical

relations that have been invented in the process." Self-determination worked bifold to demarcate a particular population through reference to available census data while reinforcing anthropological understandings of Indigenous social relations as collective.

Political and historical sociologist Mitchell Dean (1995, p. 570) warns that the "practical arts of government" through intelligent technologies such as census making "no matter how apparently mundane, routine or technical, always coexist with, or contain a dimension of thought." Likewise, in reference to the creation of statistical populations, Miller and Rose (1990) suggest that 'knowing' an object in such a way that it can be governed is more than a purely speculative activity; such a seeking out necessitates:

> … procedures of notation, ways of collecting and presenting statistics, the transportation of these to centres where calculations and judgements can be made and so forth. It is through such procedures of inscription that the diverse domains of 'governmentality' are made up, that 'objects' such as the economy, the enterprise, the social field and the family are rendered in a particular conceptual form and made amenable to intervention and regulation. (ibid 1990, p. 5)

While inclusion in the national census was part of the broader success of the 1967 Referendum and the fight for equality, implications remain for questions of governmentality. Sociologist and Palawa scholar Maggie Walter points out that while inclusion in the census revealed "stark discrimination" as "social and cultural artefacts that emerge from, and are translated into, meaning via the norms of their producing and using society", it does "little to remedy the underpinning racialised presumptions, or realities of resource access" (2010, p. 46). Likewise, Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014) complicates the banality of state concession to Indigenous peoples' rights-based claims to self-governance through an expression of anticolonial nationalism within the Canadian context. He notes that Indigenous rights-based movements throughout the 1960s and 70s:

> … forced colonial power to modify itself from a structure that was once primarily reinforced by policies, techniques, and ideologies explicitly oriented around the genocidal exclusion/assimilation double, to one that is now reproduced through a seemingly more conciliatory set of discourses and institutional practices that emphasize our recognition and accommodation. Regardless of this modification,

> however, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the state has remained colonial to its foundation. (p.7)

Still, Coulthard's important critique only accounts explicitly for the co-option of rights-based claims by the state, a state whose jurisdiction is seemingly diluted by neoliberal governmentality necessitated by the re-figuration of state-market relations. As the interplay of grass-roots demands for self-determination were responded to in policy and political discourse, the category of Aboriginal youth emerged at the nexus of Indigenous rights-based claims to equality; the economic rationale that legitimised governmental interventions into the lives of young people more broadly; and the particularities of an Australian nation-state built on the dispossession of First Peoples. Aboriginal youth became a site of mounting bureaucratic scrutiny as the dramatic difference in educational attainment and labour market participation invoked a state response. Existing frames of reference concerning youth-at-risk and youth unemployment enabled and legitimised this response but cannot fully account for it. Particularly as, unlike the generalisable youth population who signified economic instability via the national unemployment crisis, the nation's economic state was not considered directly contingent on young First Peoples participation in the labour market. In this way, while concern for the plight of Aboriginal young people was included in response to the education crisis, the justification for doing so was different.

Post-Referendum Aboriginal children and young people were no longer an anomaly in federal and state approaches aimed at solving the 'Aboriginal problem'. Instead, as the palliative response of 'smoothing the dying pillow' of the early twentieth century shifted with the realisation that populations were increasing, Indigenous children and young people became a promise of futurity and a concerted focus of social and political focus. So how does an understanding of the re-organisation of state-market relations and the rendering of young people as a new category of risk account for emergent racialised conceptions of Aboriginal youth during the same period? To more fully begin to comprehend the tensions and complexity of emerging racialised conceptions of Indigenous youth, a framework that considers the place of Indigenous young people as part of the formation and maintenance of the settler colonial nation-state at this moment is necessary. In addition to considering the explicit political discourses concerning youth, self-determination and the demands for land rights, extending the framework of analysis

to include questions of the implicit and symbolic place of Indigenous youth in the rapidly changing relations of government is important. Such an analysis enables a reading of the policy and political discourse, which goes beyond *only* justifying the emergence of Aboriginal youth as a social category within the economic rationale of government, to understanding the racialisation of Aboriginal young people through conceptions of Indigenous youth in the Australian context as another iteration of settler colonial power relations.

The inevitable erasure of Indigenous people is a foundational myth of settler colonialism animated by settler colonialism's "persistent drive to ultimately supersede the conditions of its operation", an aim which includes the extinguishment of "indigenous alterities" (Veracini, 2011a, p. 3). As I have argued so far in this thesis, the bodies of children and young people, have been an ongoing site through which this mythology attempts to unfold. This fatalism underpins and extends beyond the regulation, control and erasure of Indigenous children's and young people's bodies to the parallel belief that settler colonial expansion and its various manifestations, such as capitalist modernity, are inevitable. The linear progress narrative in postcolonizing contexts such as Australia gestures toward an imagined future where an Indigenous presence is no longer a threat to Australian nationhood. Aboriginal young people and children as a present location of intervention and erasure, are often the site through which this imagined future can actively be brought into being. Through this dynamic, conceptions of Indigenous youth are centred within the continuing logics of the Australian colonial nation-state.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2014) identifies counter rights claims, such as those asserted by the four young men and their supporters who established the Tent Embassy on the lawn of Parliament House in 1972, as posing "a threat to the possessiveness of patriarchal white sovereignty" (p. 77). In response to this threat, the state figured racialised conceptions of Indigenous youth through a "discourse of pathology" which circulated as a "strategic truth: if Indigenous people behaved properly as good citizens their poverty would disappear" (2014, p. 77). Through these pathologizing discourses, which figure Indigenous people as inherently deficient, conceptions of Indigenous youth produce Indigenous young people as educable and malleable—both to government intervention *and* the risk of negative influence. Thus they emerge as a primary site

through which a rhetoric of contingent self-determination worked to undermine self-determination as demanded by Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous youth and the rhetoric of continent self-determination

In 1973, the year after the Tent Embassy was erected, then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam circulated a statement to Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers at a conference concerned with Aboriginal Affairs. He made clear that his government aimed to "restore to the Aboriginal people of Australia their lost power of self-determination in economic, social and political affairs" (Whitlam, 1973, p. 2). Whitlam's statement represented a profound shift in Aboriginal affairs policy as a declaration of endorsement for Aboriginal self-determination. It also heralded a policy platform not explicitly informed by the coercive race-based ideological assumptions that had underpinned integration and assimilation policies of earlier decades. Rather, race-based policy justifications previously entrenched in the official language of policy reform were refigured as social in response to available data collected as part of the 1971 Census. Here dominant debates from previous decades of Aboriginal Affairs began to shift discursively beyond assimilation to remedy the Aboriginal problem to a focus on and response to demands for land rights, equality, and economic and social independence, as Whitlam noted.

Histories of Indigenous policy view this discursive shift from assimilation and integration to self-determination as indicative of this decade's significance as foundational to the development of progressive policy reform in Aboriginal Affairs (Altman, 2010; Anderson, 2007; Short, 2003; Sullivan, 2011). However, while the development of recognition discourse was well underway in response to the long-standing demands for self-determination by First Peoples, evidence of profound statistical inequality also began to emerge (see M. Walter, 2009). Thus in parallel to these demands First Peoples were simultaneously, yet paradoxically, positioned via corresponding political and policy rhetoric as inherently vulnerable and deprived. This tension—between the conferral of self-determination on the part of the state and the perceived unpreparedness of Indigenous people to receive it as an opportunity—is manifest throughout parliamentary debates,

ministerial statements and government-commissioned reviews. These discursive government practices increasingly focused on the role of education and employment in addressing the inequality faced by Aboriginal people from 1971 to 1986.

It is against this backdrop that I consider how the rhetoric of contingent self-determination was enabled through the pathologising of Indigenous people in response to reports of statistical inequality and poverty. This pathologising forged racialised conceptions of Aboriginal youth as foundational to normative economic futures for Indigenous people more broadly. Normative futures imagined and instigated education-for-employment in the present as the solution to the Aboriginal problem while simultaneously constructing Aboriginal youth as a category of risk. In this way, during the early 1970s, conceptions of Aboriginal youth emerged to undermine Aboriginal demands for self-determination while simultaneously forming the basis upon which, after 1977, subsequent neoliberal discourses of youth would intersect.

Prime Minister Whitlam's (1973) declaration of support for Aboriginal self-determination corresponded with an acknowledgment of entrenched economic and social deprivation. He continued:

> An opportunity for self-determination and independent action would serve little purpose if Aboriginals continued to be economically and socially deprived ... To this end programs of socially valuable special work projects, vocational training and grants and loans in support of enterprises, will be actively promoted. (p. 3)

The conferral of the "lost power of self-determination" may be read as a conditional prospect, an opportunity that was simultaneously privileged and premised on economic participation. In this excerpt, self-determination is considered within acceptable parameters as defined by what constitutes socially valuable work. Here a tension is revealed between the desire of government to award power over Aboriginal affairs to Aboriginal people and Whitlam's unwillingness to offer up the power of self-determination to individuals and communities who are perceived to have not yet demonstrated their capacity for meaningful engagement via labour market participation and enterprise. It is through employment that the problem of economic and social deprivation is to be remedied. Arguably, from this political and economic perspective,

labour participation and enterprise can be understood as either synonymous with self-determination or the necessary pre-condition to it.

Through these pathologising discourses, Indigenous peoples' future was discursively produced as *potentially* recuperable through the participation of young First Peoples in education and employment. Indigenous young people were thus figured as at-risk of inheriting a legacy of deficiency from previous generations if participation and success in employment and education were not prioritised by the state and valued by Indigenous peoples. Via these discourses, Indigenous young people became a primary site through which the rhetoric of contingent self-determination was operationalised.

Self-determination was situated by Whitlam as conditional on economic participation. Therefore as the successors of present action (or inaction), Aboriginal young people became an important focus of social and economic development in the first years of the 1970s. For example, in an address to the Economic Society of Australia and New Zealand earlier in 1972, H.C Coombs (1972), as the Chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, also emphasised work as a remedy to the "deplorable" (p.3) conditions experienced by Aboriginal populations. Coombs (1972, p.12) asserted with urgency that "now the magnitude of the problem is known, the pattern of policy clear, and the people are available to give effect to it, money can now be spent effectively." The object of effect, according to Coombs, was the Aboriginal child in-transition to maturity:

> Every Aboriginal child who reaches maturity unable to hold down a job because of ill health, lack of education or training, the effects of bad housing, unsuitable environment, the psychological effects of loneliness, prejudice and hostility, or for whatever reason, will be a continuing charge on the State. (p.12)

H.C Nugget Coombs has been celebrated as one of the most sympathetic and influential public servants in Aboriginal Affairs to emerge in the last half a century (Tim Rowse, 2002). In the decades after the 1967 referendum Coombs was engaged and active on issues to do with Indigenous people and is described by Tim Rowse (2002) as instrumental in directing the flourish of policy activity after the Whitlam Labor government was elected in 1972. Coombs' particular reference to the potential risk faced by the Aboriginal child who "reaches maturity unable to hold down a job" signifies the

discursive role the figure of the Aboriginal child played in debates on how best to support Aboriginal people in the political climate of self-determination. His reference to the unemployable mature Aboriginal child as "a continuing charge on the State" is made within the context of support for Aboriginal autonomy as a mounting and legitimate policy position. In the same address, Coombs (1972, p.18) later comments that Aboriginal people who remain on missions and settlements "must be given the opportunity, persuaded-even coerced a little—into accepting responsibility for their own affairs." Coombs alludes here to the same tension evident in Whitlam's assertion that "self-determination and independent action would serve little purpose if Aboriginals continued to be economically and socially deprived" (1973, p.3). Imbedded in both statements made by Whitlam and Coombs is a sentiment that Aboriginal people who are not yet integrated into the labour market lack the autonomy and responsibility to govern their affairs and are thus instead part of the problem of deprivation, contributing to the deplorable conditions faced by Aboriginal populations more generally. The Aboriginal problem was progressively being framed as a problem of poverty and inequality, the solution to which was education for the purpose of employment.

Depoliticising the Aboriginal problem of poverty and inequality

At a time when social welfare retrenchment was fast becoming a cornerstone of government policy, somewhat paradoxically, poverty was also increasingly a political focus of welfare reform. In 1975, the initial report from the *Commission of Enquiry into Poverty* (Henderson, 1975) was released, and not soon after the *National Population Inquiry titled Population and Australia: A Demographic Analysis and Projection* (Borrie, 1975) was also tabled in response to the government's earlier proclamation of "a major offensive against poverty" (Australia, House of Representatives 1973, p. 2735). Both reports highlighted the significant inequality experienced by Aboriginal populations across the country. In the *National Population Inquiry titled Population and Australia: A Demographic Analysis and Projection* (Borrie Report), for example, it was noted that in "every conceivable comparison, the Aborigines and Islanders":

> ... stand in stark contrast to the general Australian society, and also to the other 'ethnic' groups, whether defined on the basis of race, nationality, birthplace, language or religion. They probably have the highest growth rate, the highest birth rate, the highest death rate, the worst health and housing, and the lowest educational, occupational, economic, social and legal status of any identifiable section of the Australian population. (1975, p. 445)

In a political climate actively articulating equality as an aim of social policy, the "stark contrast" in every "conceivable comparison" between Indigenous people and "general Australian society" had implications for domestic politics and how Australia faired in mounting rights debates internationally. For example, this is reflected in Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's (1973, p. 2) recognition that Aboriginal inequality was a "matter of national concern" that represented "in the eyes of the world a test of the integrity and humanity of the whole people of Australia." The urgency to address revelations of grievous disadvantage across all social indicators, combined with an emphasis on the active role of First Peoples in advising government, lead to initiatives aimed at assisting the state in obtaining representative views on issues facing Aboriginal people. In education, the establishment of representative bodies first occurred through the Aboriginal Consultative Group's formation (Aboriginal Consultative Group, 1975) and the National Aboriginal Education Committee in 1977. The Aboriginal Consultative Group was charged with advising the Australian Schools Commission, an interim committee that had previously reported that "Aboriginal children undoubtedly constitute one of the most educationally disadvantaged groups in Australia" (Karmel, 1973, p. 104). In their first report to the Schools Commission, the Aboriginal Consultative Group (1975, p. 72) stated unequivocally:

> We see education as the most important strategy for achieving realistic self-determination for the Aboriginal people of Australia. We do not see education as a method of producing an anglicized Aborigine but rather as an instrument for creating informed human beings with intellectual and technological skills, in harmony with our own cultural values and identity. We wish to be the Aboriginal citizens in a changing Australia. Education should be a constructive process, building on what a child is and developing his or her natural potential, not destroying and denying his birth right.

According to the Aboriginal Consultative Group made up of First Peoples, this statement indicates the justification for educating First Peoples children was self-determination for self-determination's sake, rather than as a remedy to address disadvantage. However, this justification sits in tension with the broader Schools Commission emphasis on achieving parity in educational opportunity.

The Schools Commission aimed at improving equality of opportunity by systematising school-based funding. According to the Commission in the *Karmel Report* (1973), equality of opportunity was demonstrated through equality of outcomes as the acquisition of "basic skills necessary to participate in the society" (p. 23). The Commission believed that "without a minimum level of competence a person bears a lifelong disability, not only in the achievement of self-fulfilment but in relation to effective participation in society" (p. 23). In a later consideration of Aboriginal participation in education, the Commission (1975, p. 50) positioned the participation of Aboriginal children and young people in formal education as an exception where the cultural values of Aboriginal people were perhaps incompatible with "achievement of full participation in industrial society on terms which give equal access to its benefits." In the same report, the Commission noted the lack of skilled Aboriginal leaders with employment experience ready to be "competent spokesmen for their people" (p. 44). Moreover, the Report continued, "a far higher percentage of unemployment exists within Aboriginal communities than is general in Australia, with significant repercussions on health, living standards and educational attainment" (p. 44). In making explicit the tension manifest between the "values of Aboriginal culture" (p. 50) and Australian industrialisation in accounting for the inclusion of Aboriginal people in education as an exception, the Report concluded, "[t]here are certainly tensions between the two cultures, but Aboriginal people should be allowed to work through to their own resolution of those tensions" (p. 50). In this statement, and throughout the report, the Schools Commission clarifies that Aboriginal people, within the parameters of self-determination as a policy discourse, should have responsibility for Aboriginal education, particularly regarding reconciling 'cultural' tension.

The exceptionalism ascribed to Aboriginal people as expressed by the Commission in these various reports is done so in sympathy with conceptions of self-determination as

informed by sanctioned political and policy rhetoric. However, there is an implicit tension embedded in the Commission's response to the educational inequality ascribed to Aboriginal populations. This tension is evident in the irreconcilable dissonance between the broader role of education and employment in establishing "effective participation in society" (Karmel, 1973, p. 23) to ameliorate socio-economic disadvantage, and the extensive cultural and socio-economic deprivation faced by Aboriginal people due to their lack of access to education and employment. This deprivation is understood as extending beyond socio-economic indicators in population statistics to a lack of Aboriginal governance and leadership competence. The evidence of implicit and explicit tensions indicates an inconsistency that arguably undermines the "realistic self-determination" aspired to by the Aboriginal Consultative Committee (1975). Deprivation and inequality become terms of reference that limit the possibilities self-determination may present within an educational context. The purpose of self-determination is figured to address inequality. Yet self-determination is conditional on overcoming deprivation, if not for the collective, then for those "potential Aboriginal people" (Schools Commission, 1975, p. 44) who will become "competent spokesmen for their people" (p. 44).

In 1977 the fifth main report from the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty was released, titled: *Poverty and Education in Australia* (Fitzgerald, 1977). Where inconsistencies were noted, yet the complexities evaded by the Schools Commission, the *Commission of Inquiry into Poverty* (Fitzgerald Report) addressed head on conflicts emerging in political and policy discourses of inequality and self-determination. They note:

> The result of this educational inequality is to leave Aboriginals at a marked disadvantage not only in obtaining employment but also in negotiating with the major society for welfare rights, self-administration and the obtaining of a due share of political power. In addition, lack of adequate schooling takes away the choice of life style to which everyone should be entitled. (p. 190)

The Fitzgerald Report notes the existence of a "perpetual dilemma" (p. 218) in education policy between the "materialist, individualistic values of the major society"—the majority of which are assumed to aspire to a normative "choice of life style" that they suggest Aboriginal people are increasingly becoming part of—and Aboriginal people's

"proud adherence to a heritage of kinship and mutuality" (ibid.). The Report recommends that education policy should "seek to strike a balance" between vocational education for the purpose of employment with the simultaneous maintenance of a "separate identity and past roots" (p. 201). The Fitzgerald Report is significant in its awareness and unambiguous emphasis on the dissonance between demands for self-determination made by First Peoples, and the utility of self-determination in policy and political rhetoric, which privileges education, and particularly employment, as the solution to inequality. The Fitzgerald Report also heralds one of the first instances where Indigenous youth are explicitly the focus of educational intervention rather than the implied educable recipient.

Troubling transitions, ensuring normative futures

The Fitzgerald Report (1977) focused on the education and employment potential of youth more broadly, rather than children. The Report recommended that corresponding reforms need to be made in the field of education for the purpose of employment because for "adolescents who are poor the development of skills and opportunities for worthwhile employment stands out as a first priority" (p. 229). While providing a brief statistical picture of Aboriginal children and their parent's engagement with primary school, the Fitzgerald Report attends primarily to the absence of Aboriginal young people at the secondary and tertiary level and its employment implications. They note:

> The apparent reason why Aboriginals experience such low status employment or massive unemployment is that the proportion reaching upper secondary level is markedly lower than for white people. It is a fact that low educational level ensures low status employment or unemployment for Aboriginals. (p. 191)

In recommending ameliorative reform to address this inequality, the Report again draws on an extended principle of self-determination as part of the solution to poverty for *both* Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It notes:

> Because of the additional impact of the prejudice which operates in Australian society, Aboriginals emerge as the most cumulatively deprived group of all. In spite of, or perhaps because of, this, our recommendations relating to the Aboriginal people have much to say for all disadvantaged people. One aspect of

> this is the emphasis given to the principle of self-determination. The co-operative nature of Aboriginal society and the extreme powerlessness of Aboriginals in the face of the major society makes self-determination the prerequisite for the development of all policies which affect Aboriginals. (p. 230)

Self-determination becomes the convergence point where Aboriginal youth is aligned with deprivation and disadvantage. The principle of self-determination is then extended in its utility as a policy position to apply to *all* poor people. The Commission stresses:

> … self-determination as being essential for all poor people if they are to increase their competence to manage their affairs and to take some part in the management of society for the pursuit of a variety of ends. An important element of self-determination is the expansion of choice for the disadvantaged. (Fitzgerald, 1976, p. 230)

In alignment with mainstream educational discourse, the authors of the Report noted that in young person's engagement with education, "real choices" (p. 230) constitute the freedom to decide what school a child attends and the opportunity to develop "responsible relationships" (p. 231) between parents, teachers and pupils. However, the most important choice a young person can make in their education relates to their future employment. As the Commission emphasises: "career education should assist young people in making, perhaps, their most important choice: that of a career which is fulfilling and satisfying" (p.231*).* The various government-commissioned reviews and state rhetoric such as Whitlam's statement, the School's Commission Report and Fitzgerald Report expose the fraught and tenuous response to the shifting Aboriginal 'problem' in the first decade after the 1967 Referendum. This response is revealed in mounting discourses around labour market participation as the access pass to "the choice of life style to which everyone should be entitled" (Fitzgerald, 1977, p. 190) and the maintenance of Aboriginal cultural identity, which is figured as the antithesis to, or at least incompatible with, a modern and industrialised Australia.

As the 1970s progressed, conceptions of Aboriginal youth developed as a way of reconciling these tensions. Indigenous youth acted as a convergence point where the utilitarian purpose of education for employment and the solution to poverty and disadvantage collide to enable a depoliticised state version of self-determination.

Inequality was refigured as an economic problem rather than a social or historico-political one. Within this context, self-determination increasingly lost its resonance and utility in state rhetoric. This depoliticisation became increasingly evident as state-market relations were further re-formed with the consolidation of neoliberal discourse and rationale of governing.

The treatment of self-determination as the antidote to poverty and inequality, based on Aboriginal youth as the exemplar, does several things. Firstly, self-determination develops as a policy solution to individual inequality rather than a substantive response to land rights and the rights-based demands for recognition made by First Peoples. Secondly, self-determination becomes synonymous with employment. In other words, making the *right* 'choice' in normative terms in education and training for the purpose of employment is positioned explicitly as an assertion of self-determination. Within this dynamic, Aboriginal young people not taking up opportunities in education and training for the purpose of employment are figured as making the wrong choice. These 'wrong choices' then vindicate the state's limiting of the terms of self-determination, and also its refusal to respond to the demands for self-determination as defined by First Peoples, particularly in the context of education. Within these terms of reference delineating conceptions of Indigenous youth, the choices made by Indigenous young people in their educational journey and the transition from education to employment as the normative standard of individual linear progress, and development, are represented as ensuring (or compromising) Indigenous futures.

The problem of 'Aboriginal youth' becomes an economic problem

The late 1970s and early 80s heralded a change in the rationale of governing underpinned by an explicit shift toward an economic rather than social policy agenda. The impact of this shift on educational reform and the subsequent development of youth-specific policy in Australia has been examined widely (Connell, 2013; Harris, 2013; Kelly, 2001; Lingard, 1993; Woodman & Wyn, 2013). The economic issue of youth unemployment was formalised within policy across Western nation-states as a problem for education—a problem to be addressed by expanding technical and vocational education and attending to

the new demands of the global knowledge-based economy and international competition through higher education. The changing function of education as part of the emerging knowledge-based economy signified a pivotal moment in post-industrial nation-states' economic development. Education became recognised as "the driver of productivity and economic growth, leading to a new focus on the role of information, technology and learning in economic performance" (OECD, 1996, p. 3).

The depoliticisation of self-determination culminated in its absence in education debates after 1977. For example, in April of that year, the Fraser government, not unlike Whitlam five years prior, addressed the "increasing concern in the Australian community and internationally for the social and economic welfare of Aboriginals" (Cth Ministerial, 1977, p. 2). A policy proposal was announced promoting a "redirection of education programs" to prepare Aboriginal young people "for a work environment or for job training" (ibid. p.4). This announcement occurred in the wake of the release of the OECD report: *Australia: Transition from School to Work or Further Study (*1977) and amidst growing concern nationally about the rise of a "jobless class" (Cth. Ministerial, 1977, p. 2) due to increasing youth unemployment. The Department of Education had nominated "the transition from school to work" (Cth. Parliamentary Debates. Senate, 1976, p. 3009) as the education topic to be investigated by the OECD as it was believed to be "highly significant for Australia [and] equally in the view of the OECD it is a world-wide problem". As youth unemployment became a problem, the persistent problem of 'Aboriginal youth' could be subsumed into this broader rhetoric.

In October of 1977, the Senate debated the social and economic implications of youth unemployment as a "matter of urgency" (Cth. Parliamentary Debates. Senate, 1977, p. 1294). What emerged was a "critical situation" where senators feared for an "at risk" generation whose future was compromised if immediate action was not taken (Cth. Parliamentary Debates. Senate, 1977, p. 1302). They noted that the effects of unemployment included problems of "depression resulting from long periods of idleness" (p.1296) and "problems of alcoholism, drugs and eventually…suicide" (p.1296). The Chairman of the Tertiary Education Commission, Professor Karmel, was quoted as stating youth unemployment was "the greatest social problem which Australia has to face in the next 25 years" (p. 1297). Within this context, Victorian Senator Jean Melzer asked:

> When we talk about youngsters in our sort of society, knowing how bad it is for some of them in the areas in which we all move, imagine how bad it must be for Aboriginal children in society. Where are they going to find jobs? (p.1309)

Drawing heavily on the OECD (1977) report on transitions and the Fitzgerald Report (1976) on education and poverty, the discussion in the Senate noted the extent to which youth unemployment was "particularly concentrated" (Cth. Parliamentary Debates. Senate, 1977, p. 1302) on the disadvantaged: "early school leavers, migrants, Aboriginals, young people in rural areas and in inner city areas- the people who one might say are at risk". In the OECD (1977) report on transitions, Aboriginal youth were classified as a "special group" (p.21) whose preparation for work and compulsory education presented "a number of problems" (p. 68) due to the "obvious existence of specific social disadvantages resulting from cultural background and poverty" (p.69). A "long history of hostility" was recognised in the Report as a "product mainly of rivalry over land rights and the clash of two very different cultures" (p.68). The primary way of attempting to "make good two centuries of indifference and enmity", the Report suggested, was through "the school system" (p. 68). Specifically, the solution could be found in preventing the disproportionate number of Aboriginal young people "leaving school early," which the Report noted was "accompanied by high levels of unemployment and an inability to cope socially" (p.68). The OECD Report commended the Commonwealth government's awareness of "such problems" and stated that "its policies in recent years have been extremely generous in seeking to guarantee that a new generation of Aborigines (sic) may, if they wish, play a full role in Australian society" (p. 69).

The OECD Report was part of a broader flourishing of "school to work transition" rhetoric from the late-1970s, which dominated during the 1980s and bound the utilitarian value of schooling intrinsically to the problems of poverty and inequality. For example, the Fitzgerald Report (1977) on poverty and education, the OECD's (1977) work on transitions, and the Australian Education Council's examination of the role of secondary education in preparation for work were described by the Minister of Education as providing "a mosaic of the whole field of education" (Cth. Parliamentary Debates. Senate, 1976, p. 3010). Within this mosaic Aboriginal youth were figured comparatively as a severely disadvantaged special group. The redirection of education programs for

Aboriginal youth as a special group in alignment with broader state interventions to address youth unemployment further displaced the education of Indigenous children and young people outside any mandate for self-determination. This shift also further obscured the structural inequality experienced by young First Peoples as a continuing legacy of colonisation. Lastly, Aboriginal youth became increasingly implicated within rapid changing state-market relations as a category of risk within a linear model of development premised on the transition of young people into wage labour as the fundamental objective.

After the explicit shift or 'redirection' in 1977 to education programs as preparation for work for Aboriginal young people, things went quiet on the education policy front while the state bureaucratisation of self-determination took precedence. With rising youth unemployment, the early 1980s can be characterised by concern for *all* young people's welfare, a concern that often overcame debates relating to the specific circumstances of Aboriginal young people specifically. It was not until 1985, with the release of the *Report of the Committee of Review into Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs* (M. Miller, 1985), that Aboriginal youth, education, and education in relation to employment, re-entered the spotlight. The Committee of Review, headed by Mick Miller, a Murri man from Queensland, examined the Commonwealth Government's Aboriginal employment and training programs to assess whether a more effective labour market strategy was needed to increase employment. In doing so, the Committee suggested that the link between school, tertiary studies and employment needed to be strengthened. The Committee emphasised that:

> … an improved access to employment and a fulfilling of the potential for development in Aboriginal communities will not only rely on reforms to post-school education and training arrangements, but on the ability of schools to cater better for the needs of Aboriginal students. The Committee therefore believes that the government must give attention to the question of considerable reforms to the provision of primary and secondary education to Aboriginal youth as a matter of urgent priority. (M. Miller, 1985, p. 197)

The Committee's recommendation aligned with mounting national and international focus on the importance of the transition from school to work and was thus instrumental in further entrenching the primary and utilitarian purpose of education for Aboriginal youth as labour market participation rather than self-determination. The *Miller*

Report was a foundational blueprint for the subsequent development of policy relating to Aboriginal youth and training *and* education delivery. The human capital approach to education was further enforced when in 1986, it was announced that new priorities were being established by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to align with the Miller Committee's recommendations. A year later, in response to the *Miller Report*, Labor Prime Minster Hawke launched the *Aboriginal Employment Development Policy* (Australian Government, 1987). In doing so, Hawke announced that:

> The overall direction of this policy should immediately provide a stimulus, at the time of our Bicentenary, for a recognition of the disadvantaged position of Aboriginal Australians in today's society, and a shared commitment to begin tackling this negative legacy of the last 200 years. (Australian Government, 1987, p. iv)

The emphasis on recognising Aboriginal people's 'disadvantaged position' at such a momentous juncture reveals the foundational assumption underpinning the justification for economic development. Political acknowledgement of Aboriginal people was no longer about substantive recognition but rather a recognition of the disadvantaged position Aboriginal people held in relation to other Australians. The AEDP was based on the Hawke Government's commitment to "a shift away from the welfare dependency approach of the past towards measures to enhance Aboriginal economic independence" and the assertion that "education and training are the key elements in securing social and economic equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" (Australian Government, 1987, p. iii). The AEDP, comprising five policy papers, was unique in its broad statement of long-range objectives which focused on the linchpin of Labor social policy rhetoric in the later 1980s: equity.

Within this context, equity was defined as parity with mainstream benchmarks of acceptable employment levels existing within the broader Australian public. Thus, the overall normative objective of the AEDP was to "assist Aboriginal people to achieve broad equity with other Australians in terms of employment and economic status" (p. 3). Significantly, the AEDP also identified the role of Aboriginal youth as integral to the development of Aboriginal communities more explicitly than ever before. Within this context, it was emphasised that the underlying structure of Aboriginal unemployment "is

markedly different" (p. 1) from the nature of the national employment problem because: "a greater proportion of the Aboriginal population are in younger age groups that typically experience high unemployment, as two-thirds of Aboriginal people are under the age of 25 compared with only 40% of the non- Aboriginal population" (p. 2). In stating that "Aboriginal young people are the most disadvantaged of all young Australians," the AEDP committed to:

> … a policy of achieving broad equity between young Aboriginal people and other young people by the turn of the century. The major focus for young Aboriginal people within the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy, will be on policies to improve access to education and training, with particular emphasis on schooling opportunities for young Aboriginal people. The Government places the highest importance on access to appropriate education and quality training opportunities for young Aboriginal Australians, in recognition of the role they will play in the future development of the whole Aboriginal community. (p. 4)

Within the AEDP, Aboriginal youth were a targeted focus of development, and the successful trajectory of Aboriginal young people from school to tertiary education or training to employment was positioned as imperative for the future well-being and economic security of Aboriginal people. The emphasis on recognising Aboriginal people's disadvantaged position in the decades after the momentous juncture of the Referendum reveals a foundational assumption underpinning the justification for economic development. Political acknowledgement of Aboriginal people shifted from responding to demands for substantive recognition and land rights to a recognition of the disadvantaged position Aboriginal people held in relation to other Australians. This mounting equity rhetoric in discourses of education, which positioned Indigenous youth as a deficient population in comparison with non-Indigenous youth, implied that addressing the imbalance in statistical parity would lead to equality. Simultaneously, this discourse of deficiency marked Indigenous youth as a deviation from the norm and benchmarked the non-Indigenous youth population as the standard. Notably, the discursive formation of deficiency and deviation was and continues to be the linchpin of policy responding to the challenges facing First Peoples.

During the decades under review in this chapter, the primary marker of Aboriginality thus shifted discursively from a self-determining political collective in the

late 1960s to an impoverished and disadvantaged population, incapable of self-governance and deficient in comparison to the normative mainstream. I have argued that through this discursive shift to disadvantage and deficiency, limited and limiting conceptions of Indigenous youth emerged, forming the bedrock of subsequent educational policy and practice. The articulation of the binary dynamic between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people synonymised Aboriginality with disadvantage and, in doing so, marked Aboriginal people within the neoliberal order as what Barry Hindess (2001, p. 102) terms "subjects of improvement". As subjects of improvement, state intervention into the lifeworlds of Indigenous people, and particularly young people, was justified in the present in order to mitigate the risk of future deviance and vulnerability. Collective exclusion and disadvantage were thus recast as individual deficiency. Within this virtuous circle, Indigenous young people, their families and communities and what they are figured as lacking—based on the choices they have or have not made—are used to explain not only educational underachievement and unemployment but also the failure of self-determination. As the product of their families and community's failure to actively participate in education and the economy, Indigenous young people become the locus of policy efforts set to ameliorate this deficiency.

The rhetoric of contingent self-determination emerged in parallel with the emergence of an Indigenous population as an administrative artefact brought into being by inclusion in the national census. As First Peoples were asserting a political and legal agenda in negotiation with the state, the Australian government was busy making calculable Aboriginal populations in relation, or more specifically comparison, to non-Indigenous populations. Rendering Indigenous people as incapable of successfully existing in the present moment via racialised discourses of deficiency enables the state to make a possessive claim on the future. This claim not only discursively functions to figure Indigenous people as incapable of self-determination but renders non-Indigenous people and governing institutions working on behalf of the state as more capable of conducting the affairs of Aboriginal people than Aboriginal people themselves. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015, p. xxiii) identifies, this proclaimed and justifiable state of white virtue functions discursively to disavow Indigenous rights claims, dispossessing Indigenous peoples "from the ground of moral rectitude, thus enabling racism to be practiced with the best of intentions." By using these racialised discourses of deficiency to justify current

state intervention into the lives of Indigenous young people, these possessive claims are also able to be made on the future.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced conceptions of Indigenous youth as they were produced through the discursive formation of inherent Indigenous deficiency as it emerged in the first few decades after the success of the 1967 Referendum. During this time, as a population newly identifiable in census data, Indigenous youth enter the broader politic simultaneously as a social category and an enigmatic figure, particularly symbolising the future of a People that had so long been the locus of erasure. Here I have demonstrated how the discursive practices of government worked to position Indigenous youth as a tenuous and emerging social category within rapidly changing state-market relations from as early as the 1970s. Indigenous young people were figured within normative frameworks emergent in the latter half of the twentieth century. These frameworks re-defined individual success as achieving in education for the purpose of employment, and employment and economic development as the antidote to poverty and social exclusion through equality of opportunity. Via these discursive strategies mounting demands for a self-determined future for First Peoples were slowly co-opted within sanctioned political discourse through conceptions that positioned Indigenous young people as a malleable site to redress—through education and employment—the disadvantage facing Indigenous people. I have argued here that Indigenous young people were rendered intelligible and responded to as an implicit site of potential interruption to the cyclical nature of poverty experienced by Aboriginal families and communities as revealed in statistical data after the Referendum. In alignment with national education reform more broadly at the time, equality of educational opportunity and education for the purpose of employment were increasingly positioned as the solution to the problem of social inequality. In the specific context of Indigenous affairs policy, education-for-employment was cast as the solution to vulnerability, deprivation and disadvantage faced by Indigenous people *and* as the necessary pre-condition for self-determination. The policy rhetoric of education articulated by the state discursively rendered the solution to inequality to be the purpose of self-determination. Yet self-determination was likewise figured as conditional and only to

be conferred to Indigenous communities and individuals if the necessary and normative pre-conditions of economic participation were met.

From the mid-1980s, conceptions of Indigenous youth were extended and began circulating in relation to and across education *and* criminal justice. At this time, Indigenous youth began to emerge in political commentary around criminal justice, specifically in response to the brutal and violent death of 16-year-old John Pat in 1983 in the small coastal town of Roebourne at the hands of four off-duty policemen and a police aide. At this juncture, the earlier problems of Indigenous youth in education and employment also emerge in the broader politic as a problem for criminal justice. The problem of Indigenous youth as a problem for criminal justice is the focus of Chapter Four. I continue there to follow the threads that have emerged here, which reveal Indigenous youth as a problem for education via the discursive formation of inherent deficiency, and as a malleable site for determining and securing the settler colonial future. In doing so, it is revealed that the same discursive strategies deployed by the state in the figuration of and response to Indigenous young people in education can also be traced in the way Indigenous young people have come to be criminalised or viewed as a problem for criminal justice through the discursive formation of inevitable criminality.

Chapter Four - Criminalising conceptions: Presencing Indigenous youth as future risk

His spirit endures, our grieving hearts bled
We still long for the song of the young dancer who's dead
Our young dancer is dead, young warrior is dead

The flower of youth, cut down in the night
Dead in the police van and driven from the site
Another young warrior has been sacrificed

— Kev Carmody (1995), *The young dancer is dead*

… to be criminalized is to be prevented from being law-abiding.

— Lisa Marie Cacho (2012), *Social death: Racialized rightlessness and the criminalization of the unprotected*

Introduction

The year after I embarked on this doctoral journey marked 25 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody tabled their report. The Commission investigated 99 deaths; 27 were under the age of 24. Since 1991, not only have the incarceration rates of young First Peoples increased, but in the decade leading up to this milestone, 142 Indigenous people died in prison and police custody, 42 of whom were under the age of 25 (Deloitte, 2018). Also exposed in the same year as this 25th anniversary were revelations of the tortuous and inhumane treatment of Indigenous young people in youth detention in the Northern Territory (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). And not long after, fourteen-year-old Elijah Doughty was mowed down in his hometown of Kalgoorlie by a man who suspected Elijah was riding a stolen motorbike. Elijah died at the scene, and the white vigilante responsible for his death was acquitted by an all-white jury the following year. In June of 2018, statistics were released revealing that every young person detained in the Northern Territory at the time was Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and as I began to research and write this chapter, two Noongar teens aged 16 and 17 drowned

in the Swan River attempting to escape police. The two young men were labelled truants by the Western Australian media, their failure to attend school being attributed as the primary reason for their death (Taylor, 2018). In 2019 nineteen-year-old Kumanjayi Walker was shot dead in central Australia by a police officer, and, more recently, nineteen-year-old Stanley Miller died by suicide in Acacia Prison in Western Australia in July of 2020.

In 2017, Professor Megan Davis presented the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* to the National Constitutional Convention attended by First Peoples hailing from "all points of the southern sky" (Referendum Council, 2017, p. i). In outlining the structural nature of the problems facing Indigenous people, Davis lamented that:

> … [p]roportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

Calling for significant constitutional reform, *The Uluru Statement* made clear that "[w]hen we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country" (2017, p. i). The demand for an Indigenous futurity via a self-determined present, particularly regarding the care and education of Indigenous children and young people as the embodiment of the future, has been voiced by Indigenous people for generations. Yet, as I outlined in the previous chapter, conceptions of Indigenous youth were produced through the discursive practices of government from the 1970s not as foundational to the futurity of Indigenous peoples but rather to ensure, through compliance with normative systems of education, settler futurity. Extending this premise, in this chapter, I trace conceptions of Indigenous youth that figure the refusal of Indigenous young people to comply with normative systems of education and economic participation as a criminal justice problem. This tracing aligns with the broader aim of this thesis to contend with how young First Peoples have come to be known (and rendered knowable) through conceptions of Indigenous youth grounded in damage and a seemingly inescapable deficiency which, as I argue in this chapter, is

figured as a precursor to the discursive formation of inevitable criminality in discourses of criminal justice.

Drawing on the historical example of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* report (1991) and political rhetoric circulating the more contemporary example of the Suspect Target Management Plans (STMP) currently implemented by the police force across New South Wales (NSW), I ask: What futures are determined, and how are the deaths of Indigenous young people accounted for via criminalising conceptions of Indigenous youth? In attending to this question, I bring my earlier theorisation of time and normativity (as outlined in Chapter One) to consider how state-sanctioned violence is justified by discourses of criminal justice which normalise damage and risk as pre-conditions that inform the seemingly inescapable reality of Indigenous youth. These discourses also render the criminal justice system infallible and the internment in detention and death of Indigenous young people as inevitable. The discursive formation of inevitable criminality functions in criminal justice in the same way Indigenous deficiency is normalised in education as outlined in the previous chapter: by positioning an imagined Indigenous future both for individuals and Indigenous communities as contingent on settler colonial systems which often seek Indigenous erasure through compliance. I argue that the bodies of Indigenous children and young people are the corporeal sites where these discursive strategies attempt to unfold.

Racialised processes of criminal justice: Dehumanising Indigenous young people

Instances that render the death of Indigenous young people inevitable are deeply imbricated in the ongoing process of Australian state-making. Through this process, Indigenous bodies, and particularly the bodies of Indigenous young people as representative of Indigenous futurity and persistence of First Peoples claims to land become a contestable site where the limits of Australian justice are revealed through the deployment of state sovereignty. Michel Foucault (2003, p. 256) states that "in a normalizing society, race or racism is the pre-condition that makes killing acceptable." Foucault's statement is profoundly resonant in the context of the ongoing racialisation of

Indigenous people as foundational to the legitimation of the Australian nation-state—in parallel to the rate of incarceration and deaths in custody of Indigenous people. In the context of this chapter, which examines the discursive practices that render the death (or killing) of young First Peoples as acceptable, Foucault's statement orients me to the relationship between normativity and racialised time as articulated in the theoretical framework presented in Chapter Two of this thesis. In his treatise *Society Must Be Defended* (2003), Foucault outlines the power of sovereignty as the "power to take life or let live" through "the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion [or] rejection" (p. 256). While the deaths of Indigenous young people in custody are disproportionate by any means, so too are their incarceration rates (Blagg et al., 2017; R. White, 2014; Blagg & Anthony, 2019) in youth detention and experience of police surveillance (Cunneen, 2020). These facts demonstrate Foucault's point that in the absence of death or in relation to the living, the governing of populations in a normalising society is concerned with the administration of life rather than death. Biopower is concerned with the production of certain kinds of populations. An assertion that Smith and Vasudeven (2017, p. 211) reinforce in their statement that "futurity is at the heart of biopolitical practice." Through the language of race and racialised time as a pre-condition to the acceptability of death, futurity is centred "in the white subject and disqualifies non-white subjects from full humanity and thus from a forward-oriented agency or confines these subjects to zones of death and sacrifice in service to white futurity" (ibid., p. 211). This constant struggle over the future gestures toward the nation-state's need to discipline Indigenous peoples (to be liberal citizens) in order to justify Australia's sovereignty.

To discipline is to both render and respond to bare life and as a citation of state sovereignty as queer and Indigenous studies scholar Mark Rifkin (2009) terms it, it also signifies: "less a confident and self-assured indication of untroubled control than a restless performance in which the failure to find a normative foundation on which to rest the legitimacy of national jurisdiction remains a nagging source of anxiety" (2009, pp. 106–107). The dehumanisation of Indigenous people as lawless has been foundational to punitive processes of criminal justice and has assuaged settler anxiety in its manifestation as biopolitical practice in the settler colonial context of Australia. Processes of dehumanisation have been an inherent part of colonial relations between Indigenous

people and the state. In highlighting whiteness as the unnamed category of 'human', Aileen Moreton-Robinson notes, "the existence of those who can be defined as truly human requires the presence of others who are considered less human" (2004, p. 75). In Western democratic states like Australia, part of being a citizen is being protected by the law. This protection as a right is complicated for Indigenous peoples within settler colonial democratic states, whereby the dehumanisation rather than citizenship of Indigenous peoples forms the foundations of statehood. In Australian context, the criminal justice system and its agents have been instrumental in bringing this state into being and ensuring its continuance (Balint, Evans, McMillan 2014).

Australian criminologist Chris Cunneen (2008b, p. 2) writes that the characterisation of Indigenous peoples as "lawless" is not new and is part of the "legitimating foundation of Australian sovereignty." Asserting that the political dimension of Indigenous resistance is denied through its framing as lawlessness, Cunneen continues:

> Representing Indigenous resistance to colonial power as 'criminal; has a long history in Australia, and rests on particular racialized assumptions about Indigenous people as being without law and civilisation, and the nature of the Australian state being founded in discovery and settlement, rather than through invasion. (2018, p. 3)

The inevitable elimination of Indigenous people is a foundational myth of settler colonialism animated by its "persistent drive to ultimately supersede the conditions of its operation", an aim which includes the extinguishment of "indigenous alterities" (Veracini, 2011a, p. 3). As I argue throughout this study, children and young people's bodies are the ongoing sites through which this postcolonizing mythology attempts to unfold. This fatalism underpins and extends beyond the regulation, control and erasure of Indigenous child and young people's bodies to the parallel belief that settler colonial expansion and its various manifestations, such as capitalist modernity, are also inevitable. This inevitability as it extends and defines what is imaginable and desirable into the future, then becomes the justification for interventions into the lifeworlds of those that contravene or risk, or are perceived to be risking, this future imaginary in the present.

Mitigating untimely death through education and employment

As argued in the previous chapter, after the 1967 Referendum conceptions of Indigenous youth functioned to undermine Indigenous demands for self-determination. Self-determination was refigured in political rhetoric post-Referendum as contingent upon normative economic futures, which required Indigenous young people's present education as a precursor to economic participation. Economic participation was simultaneously the answer to the problem of disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people *and* the condition for self-determination to be conferred. Indigenous young people's education, or lack thereof, was represented as either ensuring or compromising Indigenous futures.

The report of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (RCIADIC) in 1991 focused both on Indigenous young people, and youth as a critical stage of entry into the criminal justice system, conceptions of Indigenous youth were represented as both the actual and symbolic future of Indigenous life and death. With this reconfiguration, the sanctioned political rhetoric of education for employment extended to education for employment to avoid the inevitable risk of incarceration. Furthermore, the profound inaction (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2017; Klippmark & Crawley, 2017; Satya & Barson, 2011) or the "stubborn unwillingness to implement steps to reduce deaths in custody" that has followed since the RCIADIC passed down their recommendations over two and a half decades ago, reveals what the United Kingdom-based criminologist Ian Loader (2020, p. 408) articulates as a "willingness to sacrifice those on society's margins who die" in police care "in order to preserve a policing system that serves – and serves to protect – the law-abiding majority." With this inaction in mind, the RCIADIC report is one of the earliest accounts conceptualising Indigenous youth in relation to criminal justice. Thus, it is an essential resource for understanding how Indigenous young people continue to be over-policed and hyper-incarcerated in the present moment.

Spurred by the death of sixteen-year-old John Pat in the Roebourne Lockup in Western Australia in 1983, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) was established in October of 1987 in response to "a growing public concern that deaths in custody of Aboriginal people were too common and public explanations

were too evasive to discount the possibility that foul play was a factor in many of them" (1991a, p. 17). The release of the Commission's report in 1991 signified a watershed moment in the development of a national sensibility around the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the criminal justice system. However, contrary to the initial assumption that "findings of foul play would be inevitable and frequent" (p.18), the Commission found that the deaths of the 99 Indigenous people investigated, a third of which were young people under the age of 25, were not "the product of deliberate violence or brutality by police or prison officers" (p. 18). Instead, the Commission stated that Indigenous people were more likely to die in custody because they were more likely to be taken into custody at "grossly disproportionate rates" (p. 6) compared to other Australians. In emphasising this, the Commission noted:

> … the more fundamental causes for the over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody are not to be found in the criminal justice system but in those factors, which bring Aboriginal people into conflict with the criminal justice system in the first place. The view propounded by this report is that the most significant contributing factor is the disadvantaged and unequal position in which Aboriginal people find themselves in the society-socially, economically and culturally. (p. 24)

The work of the Commission was unique and progressive in the way it located the "disadvantaged and unequal position" of Aboriginal people as a legacy "of the history of two centuries of European domination of Aboriginal people" (p. 20). Likewise, in acknowledging the "extraordinary number" of inquiries and studies Indigenous people had been subjected to, the Royal Commission was also sensitive to the level at which Indigenous people had been historically "ordered, controlled and monitored by the State" (p.19). Yet, the Royal Commission's foundations and conclusions re-locate it within a consistent pattern of state-sanctioned coronial inquiries and commissions that have focused on the dysfunction of Indigenous people and their incapacity to engage with the modern state, rather than "an interrogation of the violence against Indigenous people by state actors" (Razack, 2015, p. 4; see also Klippmark & Crawley, 2017; Murdocca, 2013; M. Gray, 2016).

Sherene Razack (2015), examining the role of coronial inquests and inquiries into Indigenous deaths in custody in the Canadian context, notes that as the disadvantage

experienced by Indigenous peoples is laid bare, the lives of those investigated are indelibly marked by dysfunction through the process. Even through the most progressive of inquiries, state accountability recedes, "the more that details about physically and emotionally ravaged Indigenous people came into view" (Razack, 2015, p. 4). These revelatory claims produce a narrative that renders the deaths of Indigenous people as timely, and through this we learn:

> … that when death comes to Indigenous people, no one is to blame and thus no one can be called to account. It is of course true that the bodies which inquests and inquiries examine with such care are (for the most part), in life, on the edge of death, bodies weakened by ill health, addiction, and disease as a result of colonialism. What the law establishes is there is no duty to care, either because it would be hard to know how to care for bodies at this stage of decay, or because care is superfluous. (Razack, 2015, p. 9)

Razack's proposition that state-sanctioned inquiries render the care of Indigenous bodies as incomprehensible, particularly given the decay of these bodies as a legacy of colonisation, is in alignment with the findings of the Royal Commission concerning structural disadvantage and inequality as the cause of death rather than any individual and institutional culpability. Yet this reference to decayed bodies "on the edge of death" (Razack, 2015, p. 9) and their superfluous care is also seemingly in misalignment with conceptions of childhood and youth as synonymous with futurity. This dissonance between conceptions of Indigenous youth and their symbolic and actual death is meaningful, given a significant proportion of the deaths examined by the Commission were young people.

Conceptions of Indigenous youth, and Indigenous youth-hood as an important life-stage of intervention in the mitigation of otherwise inevitable incarceration and death, emerged as necessary in the Royal Commission's work. In the Commission's report, they noted that the findings showed both the indirect and direct links between the inequality experienced by Aboriginal people and "how the assaults that have been made on Aboriginal society have affected particularly young Aboriginal men in a way which tends to bring them into contact with the criminal justice system" (1991, p. 24). The report, in mandating proposals to eliminate "the social, economic and cultural disadvantages which

Aboriginal people suffer" (p. 24), located Indigenous young people and Indigenous youth-hood as foundational sites of reform for "breaking the cycle" (p. 1149) of incarceration. The cases the Commission investigated:

> … highlighted the incidence of juvenile offending in a number of the deceased's lives. In the majority of cases those who died in custody had a recorded history of juvenile offending. Of the 99 cases, 63 were 17 or under and 53 were 16 or under when they were first dealt with for offences. The youngest age of first charge was 9 years and the median age of first charge was 16.0 years. (p. 303)

While Commissioner Elliott Johnston noted a difficulty in drawing statistical conclusions from the individual cases examined, they suggested the role of juvenile offending was significant "in the passage of an Aboriginal person from the juvenile justice system into the criminal justice system. Dying in custody is one final and tragic outcome of this passage" (p. 303). In tracing the patterns of this transition in the files of many of the lives investigated, the Commissioners talk of the journey from a tumultuous childhood to the dislocation from families and communities "due to dysfunction and encounters at school" (p.19), where individuals were:

> … probably to be described as truant, intractable and unteachable; to juvenile courts, magistrates' courts, possibly Supreme Court; through the dismissive entries in medical records ('drunk again'), and in the standard entries in the notebooks of police investigating death in a cell ('no suspicious circumstances'). (p.19).

The narrative is interspersed with moments defined by an individual's lack of access to fundamental institutions, such as school, which the Commission emphasised as crucial in preparing a young person to contribute to the broader social order. The Commission suggested that the failure of schooling to provide a "meaningful and useful experience" for Indigenous people translated to the failure of schools to support individuals to "achieve desired levels of participation in Australian society generally" (p. 356). Lack of educational opportunity, participation and success was viewed as limiting the potential of Indigenous people in employment but also limiting the opportunity for Indigenous people "to create fulfilling lives for themselves" (p. 357):

> Poor educational participation and achievement in turn limit the capacity of Aboriginal people to make real choices about their participation in the economy more generally. A diminished educational opportunity effectively denies Aboriginal people access to the full range of resources which could help them shape their lives and communities according to their own vision and aspirations.

The Commission here imagines an Indigenous futurity or future life, or even present-tense life itself, as contingent on Indigenous people's participation in normative systems of education for employment. This contingency is reinforced by the Commission's finding that:

> Aboriginal youths who are legally required to be at school, but who refuse to participate in the system—by way of non-attendance or poor performance resulting in their early leaving—are more likely to be subject to police surveillance and intervention by welfare and justice agencies. They are more likely to be perceived as a threat to the norms and property of non-Aboriginal people, and to be subject to a process of criminalisation as a result. (p. 358)

As a justification for enforcing school attendance, the observation shared by the Commission that Indigenous young people "who refuse to participate in the system" are perceived as a threat to the norms and property of non-Indigenous people here is profound. This statement throws into sharp relief the contradiction foundational to the arguments proposed by the Commission itself that participation in education for employment is key to breaking the cycle of incarceration, which would otherwise lead to inevitable death. Legal geographer Nicholas Blomley (2003, p. 121) states that "property, space, and corporeal violence … are closely entangled" whereby violence plays an integral role "in the legitimation, foundation, and operation of a regime of private property." This regime, in turn, determines "one's position within a social hierarchy, affecting class, race, and gender relations" (p. 122). In thinking through violent geographies of property, imprisonment is an obvious example which "works practically to the extent that it constrains movement through space" (Blomley, 2003, p. 123). The regime of private property, which functions in the Australian context is expressly contingent on the dispossession of First Peoples—a dispossession that the Royal Commission continually identified as the precursor to Aboriginal disadvantage and thus the primary reason for the incarceration of young First Peoples.

Neoliberal markers of civility

While the Commission examines the structural nature of inequality and disadvantage, the role of exclusionary, normative and assimilatory markers of civility and citizenship as signified through educational and economic participation—and the privileges associated with property ownership—are not. Indigenous people's death is rationalised by Indigenous people's inability to participate in education and the economy, either because of disadvantage or inequality or otherwise. The Commission's recourse to education and employment as the antidote to breaking the cycle of incarceration is done in light of First Peoples' demands for self-determination. Yet the assumption argued in the previous chapter—that self-determination is contingent on economic participation—is still evident. In this way, non-production as deviation from the norm "can be, and often is, coded as a racial characteristic, a way of marking necropolitical subjects as inherently wasteful and stagnant (surplus), in need of colonial (or neo-colonial) coercion to make them productive" (McIntyre & Nast, 2011, pp. 6–7). From the 1980s, young people's employment prospects came to signify both national and individual social risk (Bessant, 2002; P. Gray, 2009; Kelly, 2001; Muncie, 2005; Ossei-Owusu, 2012; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2014). These markers, particularly when the risk was one of death, worked to displace education and employment for the purpose rather than the condition of self-determination for Indigenous people.

In July of 1992, just over a year after the Commission tabled their report into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, then Prime Minister Keating released the statement: *A National Employment and Training Plan for Young Australians* (1992a). In this statement, Keating indicated the growing import of youth employment to national futurity:

> Unemployment destroys livelihoods and damages the basic fabric of our national life. It is damaging to individuals, families, communities and the nation. It is the most urgent problem of our time. Unemployment is the Australian Government's first priority and it will remain so until solutions are found and the present trend reversed. Because it is on their work and their skills, their hopes and ambitions, and their faith in Australia that the nation's future depends, unemployment among our young people is cause for special concern. (1992a, p. 1)

This statement also outlined the Keating Government's response to the Royal Commission's report by announcing special work programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people as a subgroup of youth who face "added difficulties" (p. 10). In presenting this statement to the Parliament, Keating celebrated these work programs as part of broader funding initiatives in response to the Commission's report to assist "Aboriginal young people in personal development, employment and sport and recreation" (Keating, 1992b, p. 12). The announcement sought to remedy the correlation identified by the Royal Commission that "unemployment, previous contact with the criminal justice system, and the boredom and insecurity associated with unemployment render many Aboriginal youth particularly vulnerable to the continuing cycle of unemployment and imprisonment" (1991, p. 380). Keating's earnest proclamation that the nation's future was dependent on improving youth employment, and the prospect that youth unemployment was potentially damaging to the fabric of society, signifies the extent to which individual economic participation was increasingly being framed as intrinsic to the well-being and social cohesion of Australia. National cohesion was likewise defined according to assumptions about equity and equality of opportunity as employment and employability. Employment and employability were in turn prioritised as markers if individual civic participation. The neoliberal rhetoric of individual responsibility and equality of opportunity while "promoting formal equality through citizenship" also inform what Aileen Moreton Robinson calls a "discourse of pathology" which works "as a means to subjugate and discipline Indigenous people to be extra good citizens" (2014, p. 63). This discourse of pathology enabled the government to further implement social and economic policies reinforcing structural inequalities for Indigenous peoples and to represent these inequalities as a product of "dysfunctional cultural traditions and individual bad behaviour" (ibid, p. 68). By the Commission's very existence, the justice system's homicidal intentions toward Indigenous people were made recognisable. Yet the disadvantage Indigenous people experience as a by-product of colonisation was deployed to displace systemic or individual culpability for the disproportionate death of Indigenous people in custody. Benevolence is deceptively produced alongside the recognition of homicidal intentions. Thus, the production of the inevitable criminality of Indigenous youth as a discursive formation in criminal justice discourse reveals the malleability or 'trickiness' of persistent governing logics of the postcolonizing nation-state.

The framing of employment as a marker of civic participation also aligns with a broader political and social move within liberal democracies to account for the retrenchment of the welfare state by positioning the penal system as the corrective for individual irresponsibility, as irresponsibility as a refusal to participate in the economy. Indigenous young people who are understood as not adhering to neoliberal markers of citizenship are worthy of death, or at most "bare life" (Agamben, 1998). This designation is enacted through a politics of death whereby the criminalisation of particular bodies considered superfluous renders those bodies' demise inevitable if not for state intervention. By marking Indigenous youth as a category of disadvantage and as representative of an Indigenous future, Indigenous futures became defined by limited and limiting parameters of pathology. Sherene Razack (as cited in Latty et al., 2016, p. 138) recognises this designation in her statement that:

> When the state declares, as it often does in inquests and inquiries, that Indigenous peoples are uniquely vulnerable (and on the path to extinction), its duty to care for such damaged beings, it renders Indigenous people as impossible to harm. They are dying anyway and all we can do is to be compassionate.

Thus, this unique vulnerability emerges as a discursive strategy that rationalises death as inevitable and naturalises rather than challenges the states' bringing about of that death. Through these discursive strategies, particularly in the way they emerge concerning Indigenous young people, death is extended from young people's actual corporeal death in the present moment to the symbolic future death of Indigeneity in settler futurity. Thus, the RCIADIC continued the damage-centred narrative identified in the previous chapter where-by the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous young people was announced as inescapable and yet disadvantage was also established as a condition of or risk factor for a young person's engagement with the criminal justice system and its representatives.

United States-based critical education theorists Leigh Patel and Alton Price (2016) argue that a racial justice that focuses on individual equity "may do more to reseat material structures of inequity than to unhouse them as it forestalls population-level analyses of material profit for some predicated on material risk and harm for others" (p. 76). This reseating is evident in the RCIADIC report when markers of individual inequity are also designated as markers of risk. French sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2010, p. 200), in

his consideration of penality as foundational to the neoliberal project, suggests that we need to theorise the prison "not as a technical implement for law enforcement, but as a core organ of the state whose selective and aggressive deployment in the lower regions of social space is constitutively injurious to the ideals of democratic citizenship." However, within the neoliberal state, and the postcolonizing Australian neoliberal state specifically, markers of democratic citizenship such as participation in education and employment become the means through which Indigenous populations are identified and targeted in the process of criminalisation. Against education and employment as precursors to a productive and good life, Indigenous young people are framed as incapable of escaping their inevitable criminality—and thus transcending inescapable deficiency—in their refusal to participate in and comply with the conditions of civility. Postcolonizing inevitability enables demands for self-determination to remain contingent while also figuring Indigenous young people as an indication of the incapacity of Indigenous people to care in the present for the future. Like the ongoing and historical representations of Indigenous peoples as 'lawless' more generally, the production of inevitable criminality in criminal justice discourse reinforces a denial of Indigenous sovereignty and can arguably be read as an extension of the settler colonial insistence that Australia was *terra nullius*—a land belonging to no one. In light of these arguments, next I move to consider how these discourses of inevitability continue to function on and through Indigenous young people's bodies through a more contemporary example.

Discourses of inevitability: Presencing Indigenous youth as future risk

Over two years between the 22nd of June 2017 and the 21st of June 2019, 392 children and young people under 18 were subject to the Suspect Target Management Plan by the New South Wales Police Department (NSW Police Force, 2019a). Almost half of these children and young people had been identified by police as Aboriginal, based on physical appearance. Yet across NSW, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people under 25 constitute 4% of the population. Of the targets on this list, 62 Aboriginal children were 14 years old or younger. The postcodes, or 'hotspots' (Legislative Assembly, 2018, p. 6) as they are termed, with the highest concentration of young people targeted are also, overwhelmingly, the suburbs where large populations of Aboriginal people call home. The

youngest child on the list was nine years old; the age of criminal responsibility in Australia is 10.

Since January of 2000, the New South Wales (NSW) Police Department has actively compiled a classified list of individuals they designate as "high risk and recidivist offenders" (J. McMillan, 2016, p. 118). This list, as part of the state's Suspect Target Management Plan (STMP), drives the NSW police department's strategy of "intelligence-driven" and "proactive policing" (NSW Police Force, 2019b, pp. 1–2). In January of 2018, the Minister for Police, in response to a question on how targets are selected for the STMP, answered: "Appropriate targets are selected via the use of a thorough risk management framework and the decision to manage a person under STMP is based on the risk of each person to the community" (Legislative Assembly, 2018, p. 6758). In a more detailed description of the selection process, drawing directly on the classified STMP policy, the New South Wales Ombudsman (J. McMillan, 2016, p. 118) noted that police "nominate individuals for consideration, with the risk of their involvement in ongoing offending assessed by an intelligence officer based on suspected and historical criminal activity." After this identification and assessment process, individuals are targeted as suspected repeat offenders or "responsible for emerging crime problems" (p. 118). In doing so, the STMP aims at "prevention and disruption" of crime through "predictive styles of policing" (NSW Legislative Council, 2017, p. 6). The STMP assists police to "identify those potential recidivist offenders and it puts in place some strategies in terms of trying to disrupt their activity to minimise opportunities for them to commit crimes" (ibid). Those strategies include increased stop and searches of STMP targets and police presence and surveillance of the places where these targets live. Ben Bowling and Estelle Marks (2015, p. 1) argue that stop and search, as often socially invisible, intrusive and among the first instances of encounter between police and those subjected to it, "is the widest and least circumscribed coercive power of government." Increasingly international scholarship is revealing stop and search as a coercive and intrusive power inflicted on minority populations according to racialised lines (Epp et al., 2014).

In November of 2017, NSW Greens senator Adam Shoebridge questioned the NSW Police Commissioner Mick Fuller in an exchange that revealed information on the STMP that had subsequently been shrouded in secrecy. In querying how it was possible a

nine-year-old could be a suspect on a targeted police watch list, Shoebridge (Legislative Council, 2017, p. 7) asked the Commissioner: "But a nine-year-old has been put onto a police database and identified as somebody who will be regularly stopped and searched by police. Is that the effect of becoming an STMP?" The Police Commissioner answered:

> It depends. The plan is indicative. In one of these cases the individual was a recidivist offender in terms of, I think it was, either stealing cars or breaking into houses … I guess from my perspective the other side to it is that we try to stop them before they commit a serious crime, which means that if they are in breach of bail or other conditions that have been put in place. (ibid)

At the suggestion that a nine-year-old could have breached bail, Shoebridge interjected, seeking clarification from the Police Commissioner that a nine-year-old was below the age of criminal responsibility, and thus could not legally be in breach of bail. To which the Police Commissioner confirmed: "I accept that, but the two 10-year-olds" (p. 7). He then reinforced the need for the STMP in the cases of these children because of the "recidivist type behaviour" they had demonstrated, which indicated to him "that we need to act, and STMP is only one strategy that we use" (ibid).

In October of 2017, the Youth Justice Coalition published a report titled *Policing Young People in NSW A Study of the Suspect Targeting Management Plan* examining the experiences of young people whom it believed had been subjected to the STMP (Sentas & Pandolfini, 2017). They revealed patterns of oppressive policing disproportionately targeting young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys and men under the age of 25 (Sentas & Pandolfini, 2017, p. 1). Drawing on qualitative data, they described unwarranted and excessive stop and search powers used on STMP targets and police attendance constituting trespass at young people's houses where demands were made for the target to present themselves.

From the age of 15, Dean, one of the young men targeted under the STMP, described being stopped and searched 23 times over a 10-month period (p. 21). Dean's offending was characterised by his lawyer as "minor and not extensive", relating primarily to graffiti (ibid., p. 21). When questioned about the significant level of resources deployed

by the NSW police department to target one individual who had only committed minor offences, the Police Commissioner Mick Fuller answered:

> I guess if your house had not been graffitied as a by-product of that, is it a good result? I guess from Dean's perspective, did we divert him from a life of crime through that plus other activities? I guess that is the key for me. (Legislative Council, 2017, p. 7)

Two brothers Greg, 12 and Travis, 14, were also excessively stopped and searched as justified in police reports by their "extensive history with the police" (Youth Justice Coalition, 2017, p. 24). Travis was described as "argumentative" in police records, asking, "Why am I always being stopped and searched?" He was recorded as stating, "leave me alone … you are just targeting black fellas" (p.24). The Youth Justice Coalition's report continues:

> Travis was stopped and searched up to three times a week for some months and was also routinely moved on from public places. Travis, Greg and their mother complain that the boys can no longer be in public places. The police constantly control and monitor the time that the brothers spend in public, whether it's at the basketball courts, the oval or the shopping centre. The boys are moved-on from public places on a regular basis. (p. 24)

In addition to identifying hotspots and hot-times, Police Commissioner Mick Fuller also talked about how individual young people are also targeted, enabling police to put "in place some strategies in terms of trying to disrupt their activity to minimise opportunities for them to commit crimes" (ibid). In this way, the policing Fuller describes attempts to forecast when and where crimes will occur in the future. This forecasting brings together a convergence of temporality, personhood and place in what is called predictive-style policing (Browning & Arrigo, 2020; Sheehey, 2019; Weber & Bowling, 2011). In their research on the ethics of emerging predictive techniques of law enforcement, United States-based philosopher Bonnie Sheehey (2019, p. 50) argues that algorithms that inform pre-emptive policing like the STMP work "through a paranoid logic that aims to pre-empt future possibilities of crime on the basis of a criminal past codified in historical crime data." This criminal past is figured as individual, but also the criminal past of particular collectives. Moreover, arguably pre-emption "produces the

future it purports to act against", as Dean Wilson and Jude McCulloch (2015, p. 2) note in making a distinction between pre-emption and prevention.

Predictive policing has been criticised for criminalising racialised minorities through claims of objectivity while simultaneously working to deny the racialised logics underpinning its deployment. Jefferson (2018, p. 2) points out "these racialized infrastructures embedded in official crime data sets shape predictive crime mapping and how the maps reciprocally legitimize those data sets through their ostensibly scientific presentation." Applying the notion of "problem populations" to policing in the Chicago context, Jefferson notes that predictive policing is an extension of population management whereby conformity within a normative political-economic system is enforced. Predictive-style policing justifies disciplining "economically superfluous groups that are unable or unwilling to generate value in primary labor markets" (Jefferson, p. 2) while legitimising the criminalisation of Black and Latinx people and communities. In this way, predicative-style policing both forecloses and produces the range of acceptable possibilities for living and being, signalling "actions in the present that work to contain and suppress perceived threats in an imagined future" (A. Miller, 2019, p. 86).

The hyper-surveillance described and experienced by Dean, Travis, Greg and other children and young people like them in the Australian context is not exceptional. Instead, the police and broader criminal justice system, not only in New South Wales but nationally, have depended on figuring Indigenous young people as at-risk and a risk to justify their hyper-surveillance. While the New South Wales police department deploys claims of objectivity to rationalise the actions of police as part of the STMP program, the ascribing of risk to Indigenous young people is integral to their racialised criminalisation. Furthermore, despite claims to objectivity, very little evidence exists attesting to the efficacy of predictive-style policing (Meijer & Wessels, 2019). In this way, predictive policing marks populations and places, criminalising people along racialised lines and encoding geographical space as criminal. This coding is evident in the list of STMP targets and corresponding postcodes, where high incidences of targeted individuals occur in primarily low socio-economic areas across NSW with high Indigenous populations. In this way, as a seemingly objective practice, predictive policing justifies disciplining "economically superfluous groups that are unable or unwilling to generate value in

primary labor markets" (Jefferson, p. 2) while rendering Indigenous young people out of place and legitimising the criminalisation of Indigenous people and communities.

Katharyne Mitchell (2010, p. 239) examines the contemporary production of surplus life in liberal democracies to suggest that it manifests in a new type of sovereign power which "operates through the capacity to exile individuals and populations who are defined—in advance—as risk failures." Risk failures, she continues, "are determined through historical and geographical processes of racial formation", whereby "certain kinds of bodies have become vessels for concepts of risk formed in anticipation of an inevitable future" (ibid). As a consequence of this 'pre-failure', "individuals and populations can be forcefully and, more importantly, 'justifiably' removed from commonly held spaces and resources in a contemporary liberal form of sovereign dispossession" (Mitchell, 2010, p. 239). These punitive responses to Indigenous young people as part of the STMP are arguably made possible by racialised representations emergent from the media and policy and deployed by police and the courts (Bacon, 2005; Cunneen, 2008a; Due, 2013; Sercombe, 1995). The production of racialised discourses in criminal justice and education have persisted in associating Aboriginality with inescapable damage, as I have argued previously, and, as I argue here, with inevitable criminality if not for the intervention of state actors such as the police.

Australian criminologist Chris Cunneen (2011, p. 319) usefully writes of how these markers, as risk characteristics, come to inform a risk paradigm whereby Indigenous demands for self-determination become secondary to "the membership of a risk-defined group" (see also Spivakovsky, 2016). Cunneen suggests that Indigenous lawlessness is framed as an economic problem whereby Indigenous people are firstly defined by "the risk characteristics they are said to possess, and risk is measured through factors such as the incidence of child abuse, domestic homicide, drug and alcohol problems, school absenteeism, juvenile offenses, and so on" (Cunneen, 2011, p. 319). In this way, the criminalisation of Indigenous people, and particularly young people, takes on another dimension when Indigenous resistance to the state is re-framed as criminal, thus positioning Indigenous demands for self-determination and sovereignty "as irrelevant to problems of community disorder and crime" (ibid., p. 318). Conceptions of Indigenous youth emerged in the discursive practices of government since the 1970s to both account

for the ‘problem’ of Indigenous youth and to direct material responses to young people. As instructive, these conceptions are often used to label Indigenous children who are refused inclusion into normative categories of the potentially productive and innocent (white) child. The designation of and response to Indigenous children as youth has important implications for how the criminalisation of Indigenous children is justified. A point also relevant to recent debates about raising the age of criminal responsibility in Australia from 10 to 14, which is the global median age (Trevitt, 2020; M. White, 2019).

Predictive policing is thus an extension of population management whereby conformity within a normative and political-economic system is enforced in Australia’s postcolonizing context. Through this re-framing, the criminalisation of Indigenous children and young people becomes the rationale for further denying Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination while underpinning the state’s deployment of sovereignty on the bodies of Indigenous people through sanctioned violence, policing and carceral control. As examples, the RCIADIC and STMP demonstrate how education and criminal justice discourses circulate in relation to young First Peoples to justify enforcing compliance in the present in ways that seek to ensure normative futures. In doing so, these discourses render the life of Indigenous young people as bare life in a political sense—as excluded from normalised categories of citizenship and of the human and its accompanying rights—and in a corporeal sense in the way that Indigenous young people and their bodies are subjected to state surveillance, regulation, control and even death.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on the *Australian Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1991) report and state-sanctioned rhetoric circulating the New South Wales police department’s Suspect Target Management Plans to trace the way Indigenous youth are figured by and through discourses of criminal justice. Drawing a link between discourses of education and criminal justice and how Indigenous youth are conceptualised as knowable through them, I have argued in this chapter that criminalising conceptions of Indigenous youth figure young First Peoples as unlikely—or incapable—of ever being

absorbed into the labour market in a meaningful way. Furthermore, while the discursive practices of government—e.g., the report produced by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the NSW Police Commissioner's comments in relation to the STMP—frame Indigenous young people as inevitably criminal. In the same moment, they also attempt to render the state benevolent in its relation to both young First Peoples and their incarceration and death. This dynamic reveals the persistence, malleability and 'trickiness' of the discursive practices of government. As I have outlined, in the Royal Commission's very existence, the state recognises the possibility of settler colonial violence. Yet it also delineates this recognition's limits so that reforms and policies arising from inquiries continue to maintain and reinforce normalising State interests in seemingly progressive, benevolent and non-discriminatory ways. Thus, in their non-compliance and as economically superfluous, Indigenous young people are a problem for and risk to the settler colonial neoliberal state while simultaneously being a condition of its existence. The focus on Indigenous young people and youth as a critical stage of entry into the criminal justice system by the Royal Commission in 1991 represented Indigenous young people as both the actual and symbolic future of Indigenous life, and arguably, death. Employment and education were framed as mitigating the cycle of incarceration, while unemployment became increasingly articulated as a factor of risk and signifier of inevitable carceral control.

In bringing this argument to bear on a contemporary case study of the New South Wales Police Department's Suspect Management Target Plan, in this chapter, I have argued that the discursive formation of inevitable criminality works in more contemporary times through notions of risk to cast the actual bodies of Indigenous young people as geopolitically and temporally out of place. An examination of criminalising conceptions of Indigenous youth forces a re-thinking of the penal system's utility in settler colonial contexts where mass incarceration equates to the hyperincarceration of Indigenous peoples. In doing so, criminal justice comes into view not only as a technology of, but foundational to, the ongoing colonial project. As Ware Ruzsa and Dias (2014, p. 164) (2014, p. 164) aptly point out, "these systems are not broken, they function as extensions of racist and genocidal policies and practices that seek to criminalize and imprison Indigenous and racialized people, and people with disabilities." In making this argument, this chapter contributes to mounting critiques which call in to question the purpose of the

criminal justice system and its institutions in the context of settler colonial statehood (Agozino, 2004; Baldry et al., 2015; Klippmark & Crawley, 2017; Tauri & Porou, 2014). This chapter also brings Indigenous young people into focus as an important site through which the state attempts to unfold its eliminatory aims.

Lisa Marie Cacho (2012, p. 4) suggests that "human value is made intelligible through racialized, sexualized, spatialized, and state-sanctioned violence." The state-sanctioned violence experienced by Indigenous young people as set out in the above examples can be understood as what Giorgio Agamben (1998) in his treatise *Homer Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* terms a state of exception. Indigenous young people exist as a challenge to the Australian nation-state—founded on the denial of Indigenous sovereignty—as the stubborn ongoing legacy of Indigenous past while also representing an Indigenous future. In their exclusion and liminal position as unproductive non-citizens whose existence is otherwise contingent on social and economic participation, they are an exception, or what Agamben terms "a kind of exclusion" (1998, p. 18). In this way:

> … the most proper characteristic of the exception is that what is excluded in it is not, on account of being excluded, absolutely without relation to the rule. On the contrary, what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule's suspension. The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it. The state of exception is thus not the chaos that precedes order but rather the situation that results from its suspension. (ibid)

Thus, as a focus of containment, regulation and erasure, Indigenous young people are illuminated in their presence. Indigenous young people become a point at the bifold where the Australian nation-state's sovereign power—and its instability—are revealed. In the violence some experience in the name of state sovereignty, Indigenous young people are an exception which further reveals "a zone of indistinction between law and nature, outside and inside, violence and law" (Agamben, 1998a, p. 19). This suspension, suspended as absent-yet-present, as anomalous, works through the state of exception to mark, through racialisation, Indigenous young people as deviant and criminal. As a collective, Indigenous youth are conceptualised as either not able or refusing to perform the conditions necessary to be worthy of state protection. Thus, as un-redemptive, they

become the locus of state violence. And more than this, As Cacho (2012, p. 5) argues, "people who occupy legally vulnerable and criminalised statuses are not just excluded from justice", rather criminalized populations such as Indigenous young people in "the places where they live *form the foundation"* of the Australian legal system and are thus "imagined to be the reason why a punitive (in)justice system exists." While Indigenous young people are often excluded from the law's protection, "they are not excluded from law's discipline, punishment, and regulation" (Cacho, 2012, p.5). Indigenous child bodies render the settler colonial future uncertain, and by their very presence, Indigenous young people 'break' the law—settler colonial law—and in the very least, they unsettle it, making something so foundational and resounding, tenuous.

So, what of those instances where young First Peoples are not easily ascribed deficiency or criminality? What of those instances where education policies and practices are celebrated as producing successful transitions, excellence and success? What of those individuals who are seen as transcending damage and deficiency as evidenced by their visible investment in individual educational achievements and participation in employment? How can those individuals who satisfy the conditions of –e.g., education and employment, into the category of 'human' be accounted for? Through the discursive production of Indigenous youth as inescapably deficient or inevitably criminal, those young First Peoples who are not easily ascribed deficiency or criminality are included as exceptional. This designation of inclusion based on exceptionalism is also a designation of difference. In the next chapter, I return to the discursive formation of inevitable deficiency as it has been produced in education discourse by attending to how young First Peoples are rendered knowable in higher education as the exception to the rule of Indigenous deficiency and criminality. Although in making this point the next chapter gives primacy not to conceptions of Indigenous youth but rather to how young First Peoples at university contest these conceptions.

Chapter Five – Contesting conceptions of Indigenous youth: Refusing a politics of inclusion in higher education

> … it cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can.
>
> — Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013), *The University and the Undercommons: Seven Theses*

Introduction

Starting at the southern-most end of Professors' Walk, with the John Medley Building at your back, you can journey up through the heart of the University of Melbourne's Parkville Campus. Passing the impressive sandstone Old Arts building on your right, in the summer months you walk under the shade of the European plane trees and eventually find yourself at the stoop of the members-only alumni and staff venue, University House. Before the university buildings were the primary markers of place in this landscape, a creek flowed in the direction you have just come from. People say eels used to travel upstream in the freshwater from the Birrarung, now known widely as the Yarra—the river that flows through Narrm, the city of Melbourne—in early spring to breed. The University of Melbourne's Parkville campus is located on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people.

When I first arrived at the University of Melbourne, Indigenous students told me that eels still migrate through the storm drains and end up on the oval at the campus's northern end. They also told me about the old river red gums that hold the stories of the place. These trees, they said, had been here well before the university. As you stand at the stoop facing University House, look just behind you to your right and one of those trees

towers, its trunk luminous. This tree is one of five; four others guide Indigenous students daily from the residential colleges, where they live during semester, to their classes on the main campus. Neerim Whurrong Calloupe (2018), a young Gkuthaarn and Kirrae Whurrung man, writing to other Indigenous students in the student-created magazine *Under Bunjil,* says of those trees: "In the times of loss, confusion and sadness that we blackfullas often feel when being away from country, think: if those trees could talk, what would they say?"

> Those trees might tell us: Look at me and remember the days gone by, the fights that were fought and those battles still being waged. Be patient and humble with your own growth, and those around you. You don't know everything and you never will, because the knowledge of this land is infinite. Be humbled by its knowledge rather than wield it to harm others. Never forget those who were buried by the settlers, like those gum trees buried beneath the colleges. Think of their stories and their struggles, as it gives strength to your narrative. (p. 60-61)

Together with the reminder of the university's relative impermanence in the context of Indigenous temporalities, this advice serves as a starting point to ground this chapter. This chapter contends with the complexity of the presence of young First Peoples in the academy. It works to contest discourses of education that have produced Indigenous youth as inescapably deficient, as I have outlined previously in this thesis. I begin by considering how Indigenous people have come to be included in higher education through the Janus-faced interplay of *a priori* conceptions of deficiency and exceptionalism. Indigenous young people are rationalised in their presence in higher education through a politics—and promise—of inclusion that figures them as the exception to the damage and deficiency posited in Indigenous communities yet still different from their non-Indigenous peers, further entrenching Indigenous people within comparative frameworks as deficient. In parallel to the hypervisibility of 'being included', the onto-epistemological presence of First Peoples—as researchers, educators and professionals in the academy, is not extended to the presence of young First Peoples as students. In arguing for a theorisation of the presence of young First Peoples beyond what is present in discursive formations of deficiency and exceptionalism and absent in critical Indigenous studies scholarship, I then introduce Métis scholar Chris Andersen's theorisation of density as an alternative to difference.

This articulation of density responds to the interplay of deficiency and exceptionalism as the rationale for inclusion by honouring, as Chris Andersen (2009a, p. 95) says, "our past complexity while accounting for its contemporary and future manifestations." This theorisation of density provides the formative context from which I then engage with Indigenous young people's textual practices in their production of the Indigenous student led magazine *Under Bunjil*. Building on the work undertaken in the previous two chapters of this thesis, which traced the production of Indigenous youth in the discursive practices of government, this chapter considers how these conceptions are troubled by the presence of Indigenous young people in educational institutions, and specifically here, the university. This chapter draws on, responds to and weaves together select articles and creative works featured from 2015 to 2019 across five issues of *Under Bunjil* with contextual conversations with four young First Peoples at the same institution. Excerpts from interviews with these young people are shared throughout this chapter as critical context for both guiding and informing my textual analysis.

Through an analytical focus on density rather than socio-economic difference, three main points emerged as important from this contextual reading of *Under Bunjil*. Firstly, young people held a keen awareness of how Indigeneity is represented as different through discourses of education that rationalise inclusion. This awareness reveals how the complexity of Indigenous young people's presence cannot be accounted for by these representations of difference. In this way, I suggest, an engagement with *Under Bunjil* reveals a collective resistance to 'being included' as exceptional alongside an assertion of presence which can be read as a politics of refusal. This politics of refusal in response to the exclusionary promise of inclusion, as Sandy Grande (2018, p. 59) reminds us, "offends institutional authorities offering 'the gift' of belonging, creating conditions of precarity for the refuser." This precarity is evident in the way students represented the harm they often experienced in classrooms and via institutional inclusion efforts. Secondly, a tension emerged between what it meant for young people to be First Peoples living and studying on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people while simultaneously moving through time and place as Indigenous students on the stolen lands of the University. And lastly, in contending with this tension and its implications for the way Indigenous difference is represented, part of the young people's practice as Indigenous university students entailed

an active presencing of what it means to be First Peoples, which includes negotiating with and resisting white normativity.

This chapter calls into question who is included by whom and into what by analysing Indigenous young people's density at university through an engagement with Indigenous texts alongside the institutional experience of 'being included'. It also reveals that sanctioned ways of being in this world are supported and promoted through the university as the endpoint of an educational rite of passage that facilitates employment as the desired outcome. I begin by examining the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley et al., 2008) as an example of how inclusion functions in neoliberal discourses of higher education to figure conceptions of Indigenous difference as socio-economic deficiency. Next, I read across the literature which articulates and acknowledges the tensions shaping Indigenous peoples relationship to the academy as a site, which Graham Hingangaroa Smith and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2019, p. 3) note, "has enormous potential to facilitate the positive transformation of Indigenous life and aspirations" yet also has a significant historical and ongoing role in processes of settler colonisation. This critical Indigenous studies scholarship, which takes decolonisation and centring the knowledge of First Peoples and experiences as its aim, also utilises a nuanced approach to articulating the tensions and complexities of the onto-epistemological position of Indigenous people as researchers, educators and professionals in higher education institutions. Yet as I point out, this understanding is not extended more broadly in the research on Indigenous student (under)representation to an analysis of young First Peoples' existence and their practice in the academy in the same way. After sharing the findings from interviews and a reading of *Under Bunjil*, I conclude by discussing the implications of these findings. I suggest that a theorisation of young people's presence as dense provides an escape route from the politics of inclusion which currently rationalises the existence of young First Peoples at university, not only in the context of the example I present in this chapter but for the higher education sector more broadly.

Difference as socio-economic: The interplay between deficiency and exceptionalism

The university presents a complex and useful site of analysis in its institutional claims—as a producer of knowledge through research which legitimises practice (Gibbons et al., 1994; Godin & Gingras, 2000); as an educator of the professions (Anderson, 2014; Gunasekara, 2004; Trede et al., 2012); as one of the last 'stops' for students in the educational journey as a rite of passage to gainful employment (Wierenga & Wyn, 2014; see also Collin, 2015, p. 2 for a more general discussion); as an institution that responds to, is informed by and in turn informs the changing economic, social and political landscape (Ball, 2000; Marginson, 2002); and, as an increasingly proclaimed diverse, equitable and inclusive space (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007; Gidley et al., 2010; Patel, 2015). In turn, these claims, which speak to higher education's civic and social role, are complicated by the university's conduct as a neoliberal institution competing in the global knowledge economy (H. Giroux, 2002; Faval Rizvi, 2006; Shore, 2010).

The tensions emanating from a focus on inclusion and broader questions of higher education's role in the prosperity of the nation has been highlighted in the *Bradley Review of Higher Education* (2008), where concern was expressed about Australia's capacity to "meet the demands of a rapidly moving global economy" (p. xi). In suggesting a more targeted approach to increasing university participation of groups "under-represented within the system, that is, those disadvantaged by the circumstances of their birth" (p. xi), the Review identified Indigenous people as an important focus for social inclusion, alongside people from low socio-economic and regional and remote areas. In doing so, it set national equity benchmarks for these underrepresented groups: people from low-socio-economic backgrounds were benchmarked against students from wealthy post-codes; people from regional and remote areas were benchmarked against students from metropolitan areas; and Indigenous people were benchmarked against the access, success, retention and completion rates of non-Indigenous students. I reference the *Bradley Review* here as it signals a critical moment in Australia in the history of the university and higher education policy-making for how Indigenous young people have been figured as students and rationalised in their inclusion in universities.

The *Bradley Review* was foundational to subsequent national equity and social inclusion strategies devised to increase the participation of historically marginalised populations. However, it also emphasised the need to develop a higher education system

that would place Australia in a competitive position within the global knowledge economy. Emphasising this point, the *Bradley Review* (2008, p. xi) concluded that "Australia faces a critical moment in the history of higher education", where "the reach, quality and performance of a nation's higher education system will be key determinants of its economic and social progress." In its framing of higher education in this way, the Bradley Review is a useful example that reveals tensions emanant from the sector in its attempt to reconcile equitable access and outcomes with university's economic and international role as part of the nation-building project in a neoliberal context. The inclusion and increased participation of Australian young people in higher education—including those from historically underrepresented groups—is positioned as essential for the nation to compete in this context.

Emphasising the importance of improving equity in higher education, the Bradley Review stated, "An effective higher education sector which makes greater use of Australia's human capital enhances national productivity and global competitiveness" (p. 27). Pointing to these tensions, between education framed in its utility to render its beneficiaries competitive in market-terms and as a site of equity reform, education theorists Fazal Rizvi and Bob Lingard (2009) critique the university sectors' focus on a technical and limited conception of social inclusion through a "policy as numbers approach" (p. 16). This approach, they argue, signals neoliberal governance at work and figures equity as "de-politicised, representing a kind of 'end of ideology' perspective on political struggles" relating to educational attainment (p.17). In this way, the *Bradley Review* is part of a broader reconceptualisation of education in what Rizvi (2017, p. 6) terms the "neoliberal imaginary" whereby the problem of equity became an economic one requiring a technical solution, rather than a response informed by "moral and political deliberations." Through the neoliberal imaginary, the purpose of higher education is restructured as:

> … a form of capital, exchanged in the market place largely for personal benefit. It is considered necessary not as a way of creating an informed and self-reflexive community, but as an investment with which individuals, corporations and nations can maximise their social and economic advantage. (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009, p.86)

Underpinning this restructure is what Australian educational theorists Savage, Sellar and Gorur (2013, p. 162) describe as a "deep, normative and largely implicit set of neoliberal ideals which shaped 'common-sense' ways of imagining and practising everyday life." Part of this common-sense imagining is the idea that there are normal or standard transitions from education to employment and that higher education or a university degree—as the precursor to employment and civic participation—is the pinnacle of educational success.

As I have outlined earlier in this thesis, the spatial metaphors of transition used to make meaning of and set out standard trajectories from school to work are tied intimately to and made possible by notions of racialised time and linear development. Standard trajectories also assume equal access to and participation in—and indeed desire to access, comply with, and participate in—normative education systems. Johanna Wyn (2015, p. 51; see also Cuervo & Wyn, 2011; Furlong et al., 2011) critiques the dominance of transition metaphors in youth-related policy and research as reinforcing linear trajectories through a language that "constructs deficits and inadequacies in young people that derive not from the young people themselves, but from increasingly unresponsive educational systems and insecure labour markets." Through spatial metaphors of transition, individuals (and their successes and failures) are rendered visible against linear and age-related stages while other important aspects of their lifeworlds are rendered invisible. In their provocation piece, Ani Wierenga and Wyn (2014, p. 3) point out the implications of this language in the specific context of higher education in the recognition that universities are "not a series of railway stations on the way to a pre-determined destination." They note that while engagement in education is of value for broader social processes, the increasing preoccupation with "economic and vocational outcomes, success and failure" means it "has ironically become one of the single most significant mechanisms of social exclusion" (p. 2). This transition logic also establishes what Wyn (2015, p.54) calls an "epidemiological fallacy" through the impression that "because some groups of young people do gain eventual labour market security from educational credentials, therefore all young people would achieve such security and prosperity if they were able to be coerced or coaxed into completing post-secondary education." Thus the promise of inclusion is not one of safe intellectual and educational spaces but rather the opportunity to participate and be recognised and valued in the economy. While social inclusion is deployed as the

corrective to social exclusion, these equity strategies are not designed to be redistributive or to address why First Peoples have been historically excluded from higher education in the first place. The politics of inclusion enabled by transition metaphors as part of the "epidemiological fallacy" thus figures Indigenous success as individual (and exceptional) while reinforcing Indigenous people's deficiency.

Through transition metaphors and the promise of inclusion, the history of colonial and racial exclusion in the context of Indigenous underrepresentation in higher education is both invisibilised and naturalised. This depoliticisation of Indigenous educational exclusion is evident in the pluralism underpinning efforts to address underrepresentation where Indigenous people are subsumed under an umbrella category of "disadvantaged groups" (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 40). Unique markers of Indigeneity such as sovereignty, connection to Country and experiences of settler colonialism are simultaneously unrecognisable within this pluralist approach where Indigeneity is categorised singularly alongside other markers that are also defined in terms of deficiency—in the example of the *Bradley Review*, poverty and geographical isolation. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) notes these markers of Indigeneity, which serve to contain and legitimise certain aspects of Aboriginality over others, implicates the university alongside the nation in the sectors insistence:

> … on producing cultural difference in order to manage the existence and claims of Indigenous people. In this way the production of knowledge about cultural specificity is complicit with state requirements for manageable forms of difference that are racially configured through whiteness. (p. xvii)

Here some forms of difference are highlighted as acceptable, and many other elements of Indigeneity are ignored or pathologised. This framing is revealed in how a university education has also been represented as the pinnacle of success and integral to a well-trained professional Indigenous workforce (Anderson, 2014).

The discursive production of inescapable deficiency is reinforced through the idea that Indigenous young people who 'succeed' in higher education are an exception to the rule of Indigenous deficiency, albeit still disadvantaged due to their "special group" status compared to their non-Indigenous peers. In this way, Indigenous people and populations

are normalised in their deficiency and disadvantage against the settler collective's superiority. But within this binary dynamic—which also lends to assimilatory logics—to recuperate deficiency is to forgo Indigeneity, as Indigeneity is positioned as synonymous with disadvantage and exclusion. To become valuable rather than disposable is to become the exception. And to become the exceptional individual is to devalue, within this dynamic, the collective. This paradox works to further marginalise Indigenous people under the guise of equality. As Cherokee literary scholar Daniel Heath Justice (2018, p. 3) says, it "is seen as evidence of innate deficiency, while any success is read as proof of Indigenous diminishment. In a particularly cruel twist, even our strengths are presented as evidence of our inadequacy." Through these articulations of normativity, particularly in relation to the category of human, Indigenous people are perpetually excluded. The signs of this exclusion —poverty and disadvantage, criminality, exceptionalism—then become its rationalisation in the way it attests to Indigenous deficiency and Indigenous people's inability to participate in society fully.

Indigenous young people completing post-secondary study at university thus inhabit a curious liminal space within theory, research, education practice and policy. They are an exception in that they have almost made it, but not quite yet; they are perhaps not disadvantaged (or young) enough for representative claims to be comfortably made on their behalf and are difficult to recognise within the limited and limiting frameworks of deficiency and criminality used to know and make sense of the experience of Indigenous young people (see S. Nakata, 2015b; Tuck, 2009). Furthermore, they are not defined or responded to in higher education discourses of inclusion as young people or 'youth' but rather are constructed as students (Kelly, 2000b), a designation that also accounts for mature-age Indigenous people in higher education. In this way, it makes sense that in much of the complex theorisation of an Indigenous presence within the academy, particularly relating to epistemological questions of knowledge production, that the existence (and significance) of young First Peoples has received little attention beyond an examination of Indigenous student success and difference as cultural and socio-economic. This is despite a growing field of literature which considers the complex contradictions, imbrications and tensions between what is often positioned within Indigenous research and professional practice as Indigenous ways of knowing and being within the academy,

and how these tensions are negotiated by First Peoples, particularly staff, within universities.

Difference as onto-epistemological

Here I urge critical Indigenous studies scholars to reframe the existence of young First Peoples as students in the context of higher education using the same onto-epistemological complexity afforded to other First Peoples in the same context. I do this as a precursor to the introduction of density in the next section. Density is used in this chapter as an analytical frame to theorise the existence of Indigenous young people in the academy as a contest to the way Indigenous youth is figured through the discursive formation of inescapable deficiency. This contestation is not evident within current frameworks deployed within educational policy, research and even the current scholarship of critical Indigenous studies.

In contemporary colonial contexts, universities are critiqued as sites heavily implicated in historical and ongoing Indigenous dispossession. Simultaneously universities are understood as institutions that can positively affect social and economic change for Indigenous communities through research and individual participation. Māori scholars Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Graham Smith (2019), acknowledging these tensions that shape relations between Indigenous peoples and the academy, note that:

> … the Academy and the institutions through which the Academy exists is a contradictory site in that it has enormous potential to facilitate the positive transformation of Indigenous life and aspirations, equally it can also be a major influence in the continued colonization and oppression of Indigenous Peoples, their knowledge, language, and culture. (p. 3)

The academy is undeniably predicated on Western epistemic traditions. These traditions were also and continue to be instrumental in the ongoing process of colonisation. Furthermore, universities as self-legitimating and hegemonic sites of knowledge production have been historically implicated in the devaluation of Indigenous knowledges and knowledge systems through the creation of what Torres Strait Islander

Martin Nakata (2007b, p. 12) terms the "corpus of objectified knowledge" about Indigenous people. However, as Smith and Smith (2019) and Nakata point out, Indigenous people actively and strategically engage with universities in their utility as institutions of social, economic, and cultural capital and as sites of transformational change that can effect positive outcomes for individuals and communities. This tension is widely acknowledged by Australian First Nations scholars (Bunda et al., 2012; Hogarth, 2017; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; L. Rigney, 1999) who articulate a distinct onto-epistemological position alongside a demand for access to higher education which refuses simplification while also complicating the Western/Indigenous binary. This position is informed by the many places First Peoples come from, our different experiences of colonisation and relationships to Country and family, and the desires informing engagement with universities as academic, administrative and support staff. This onto-epistemological position also informs the many ways First Peoples navigate and negotiate with and exist within universities.

In reading across the literature, a central concern expressed by Indigenous scholars has been the primacy of validating Indigenous methodologies in research with Indigenous peoples and communities. In this research context, Moreton-Robinson and Palawa sociologist Maggie Walter (2009, p. 1) draw a distinction between Indigenous research methodologies and "dominant research practice" informed by Western traditions, which has positioned the "Indigenous subject" (p. 1) as the object of research. They argue that Indigenous knowledge systems are predicated on "social relations to country" (p. 4), and thus knowledge is:

> … experiential, holistic and evolving, and Indigenous knowledge systems are an integral part of living in the world. Epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies are interwoven into this knowledge system. While European colonisation of certain countries and peoples disrupted Indigenous ways of life and ways of living, Indigenous knowledge systems remain intact and continue to develop as living, relational schemas. (p. 3)

Elsewhere, Moreton-Robinson (2009, 2013) also highlights the utility of bringing Indigenous methodologies in relation to the traditional disciplines in order to undertake a nuanced and rigorous critique of the power relations shaping the lives of Indigenous

people. This articulation of the university as a site circumscribed by these power relations reveals that the relationship between Indigenous and dominant Western-informed ways of being, doing and knowing is not only evident in scholarship on research methodologies but also in studies of the non-research practice of academic and professional Indigenous staff (Fredericks, 2009; Mukandi & Bond, 2019; M. Walter & Aitken, 2019). Bunda et al. (2012, p. 942) argue that equity initiatives in higher education have been compensatory in seeking to note Indigenous people as "historic victims of racism and poverty", which in turn has become the primary institutional justification for the increased employment of Indigenous staff. Yet these initiatives, Bunda et al. (2012, p. 942) argue, do little to trouble the "the structural selectivity of cultural and epistemological codes embedded in 'mainstream' – or, from Indigenous standpoints, 'whitestream' (Andersen, 2009) – curricula and pedagogies." Despite the increased propensity of universities to develop statements of Indigenous and non-Indigenous reconciliation, Bunda et al. note a lack of "recognition of Indigenous sovereignty – as First Peoples of Australian lands; and as peoples with distinctive ways of seeing and being' which they suggest 'underscores all the other absences" (p. 944). Indigenous university staff who participated in the Bunda et al. (2012) study experienced an institutional refusal to recognise and meaningfully embed Indigenous cultures and values.

Like the Bunda et al. (2012) argument, much of the scholarship which contends with the complexity of 'being' an Indigenous researcher, academic or staff member works to call into question the normative processes which inform the institutional inclusion of Indigenous people in universities. This critical scholarship base highlights the importance and challenges of "doing Indigenous work", or as Smith and Smith (2018, p. 1076) put it in inviting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars to take up the baton, "the challenges and responsibilities of decolonizing and transforming the academy." It is important to highlight here that within this scholarship, the university is neither positioned nor understood as a neutral space. This scholarship's aim is not to 'include' Indigenous knowledge or knowledge about Indigenous people into the curriculum or administrative processes, or Indigenous people as staff in the hegemonic system of the academy, which already exists as if it is not fallible. This is an important point to make, as a continuity between settler colonialism and contemporary forms of neoliberalism is increasingly highlighted in diversity and inclusion rhetoric (Kidman, 2019; Lloyd & Wolfe, 2016;

Stein, 2018). Instead, the articulation of Indigenous onto-epistemological realties and analysis in this scholarship is done to decentre the settle colonial academy and assert the long-standing intellectual traditions of First Peoples. What is more, this onto-epistemological position, as it informs research and institutional relatedness, is asserted as rigorous and best practice. As informed by this onto-epistemology, Indigeneity in the academy is not positioned within the literature as *the reason* Indigenous scholars, academics and staff might face difficulties in their presence in and work at universities. Through articulating this onto-epistemological position, higher education institutions are overwhelmingly cast as complex and contradictory sites that struggle to meaningfully engage with, recognise and value the existence, complexity and importance of Indigenous presence.

This onto-epistemological frame is not extended in the same way to the presence of Indigenous young people or Indigenous students at universities. This is despite the utility of this frame in accounting for the presence of Indigenous people in research, administration and teaching and how this presence troubles the institutional hegemony of the contemporary colonial academy. Rather, Indigenous university student 'difference' is primarily framed in research and broader education discourses as *the reason* Indigenous young people fail to access university or achieve academic success on par with their non-Indigenous peers. These assertions are repeated even though First Peoples have successfully negotiated the middle ground between the diverse positionalities of 'being' Indigenous and actively existing within and shaping institutions, like universities, for decades. Next, I introduce the concept of density as useful in making visible the complexity of articulations of an Indigenous presence such as *Under Bunjil* for theorising the existence of young First peoples in higher education,

Theorising density as an alternative to difference

Through an engagement with the Indigenous student-led magazine *Under Bunjil*, this chapter takes an analytical focus informed by Chris Andersen's (2009) concept of density as an alternative to the focus on Indigenous difference as deficiency or as exceptional in broader narratives of Indigenous success. Andersen's theorisation of Indigenous density draws inspiration from African American studies scholar Robert Kelley who talks about

Black struggle not only as "political struggle but the struggles of everyday life" (as cited in Andersen 2009, p. 92). Kelley says that these struggles:

> range across the gamut: fighting, dancing, begging, cajoling, teaching, thinking, loving. And these are the human gestures that tend to lie beneath the surface of our dense black being, the sources of our creativity and desire that the Western gaze rarely acknowledges. (ibid).

In reference to the above statement, Andersen says that Kelley's conception of density allows a stepping *outside* of discourses which circumscribe and comprise "the desire that the Western gaze rarely acknowledges." Density, Andersen (2009, p. 92) continues:

> is constituted through the numerous subject positions which blackness occupies in its modernity. It harkens to a blackness which eclipses staid tropes to come to terms with a more serious and infinitely less schematic livedness which defies easy (academic) description … Like blackness, Indigeneity is far more complex than revealed through a discussion of our difference.

The seemingly objective parameters of difference which currently account for the presence of Indigenous young people as university students are further challenged by Andersen (2009, p. 81) who emphasises the significance of "counter hegemonic representations of Indigeneity which marginalise or altogether ignore our density." Through these hegemonic representations:

> Indigeneity is often (still) positioned in opposition to white/colonial identity along a series of binary oppositions which labour to reaffirm the supposed superiority of the latter over the apparent primitiveness of the former … Indigenous complexity has been reductively fixed in time and space through apparently objective, logical markers used to bear the discursive weight of our authenticity and legitimacy.

These hegemonic representations circumscribe what forms of Indigeneity are included, acceptable and indeed recognisable within institutions of higher education. Moreton-Robinson (2004b) destabilises the Indigenous/colonial identity binary referenced by Andersen in her assertion that Indigenous peoples can be highly accomplished in systems of white or Western education and they can still *be* Indigenous. She says that:

> Indigenous educational empowerment is reduced to the maintenance of a traditional identity because to be educated, according to the coloniser, means that we can no longer maintain it. Buried within this assumption is the idea that we are incapable of change or developing strategies for survival that enable us to extend on the multiple subject positions we have created through kinship and community politics (p. 87).

A focus on density challenges the fixation of Indigenous peoples as incapable of change or the deployment of strategies for survival by starting with "the assumption that Indigenous communities are epistemologically dense (rather than just different)" (Andersen, 2009, 97). Thus density allows me to contend with *Under Bunjil* as a counter representation which foregrounds "Indigenous complexity." Density, as a concept which facilitates desire-based re-search beyond damage and deficiency supports me to make meaning of the significance of the existence of Indigenous young people beyond the seemingly objective and logical markers which rationalise their presence in institutions of education, such as universities. An engagement with density rather than difference in this chapter provides an exit point for my analysis to go beyond understanding the presence of Indigenous young people as included in higher education, to an understanding of *Under Bunjil* as a counter-representation which asserts the nuanced, complex, strategic and at times contradictory livedness and struggle of young First Peoples existing in a settler colonial institution.

In this way, density like Smith and Smith's (2019, p.84) acknowledgement of the utility of the academy in decolonizing work, allows a movement beyond a repressive understanding of power to one where discursive power is understood as shaping "the formation of subjectivities which, in turn, shape the conditions under which subjects 'enter into history'" (p. 84). When extended to the experiences and existence of Indigenous young people in the academy, a theorisation of density refuses the positioning of Indigeneity as always external to non-Indigenous structures and institutions. It also enables an analysis whereby young First Peoples can be understood as active, strategic and more than the markers—such as inescapable deficiency—often deployed to justify and make meaning of their experience and existence within education contexts. These markers render Indigenous young people within the academy through the rhetoric of

success and excellence as exceptional or through gap discourses as disadvantaged compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Andersen's theorisation of density allows Indigenous young peoples' participation in higher education to be understood as potentially strategic—they embody and represent the knowledge, histories and experiences of their families and communities in the present moment, including a diversity of relationships to colonial processes. But importantly, a focus on density also works to centre a critique of educational institutions such as the university that function according to linear development narratives in the production of normative futures. Whiteness thus becomes recognisable—and significantly contestable—as a structural force perpetuated through the neoliberal promise of inclusion. This promise is circumscribed by and resisted through a complex set of relations as the "dominant representational source through which Western societies produce and consume Indigeneity" (p. 81). Such relations include an interpolation of whiteness by the Indigenous young people I spoke to and the pieces I engage with from *Under Bunjil.* This recognition of interruption and escape is foundational to my use of density as an important mode of re-humanising young First Peoples and contesting Indigenous youth's hypervisibility. This stance also forces a recognition of the complexity embodied and critical knowledge held by Indigenous young people in their presence in normative education systems, of which the university is part. A recognition of this complexity also includes centring the critical knowledge of whiteness revealed through an analysis of *Under Bunjil*, a critique asserted in various magazine pieces and reinforced in my conversations with young First Peoples as part of this study.

This analytical focus on density revealed three critical points from the contextual reading of *Under Bunjil,* which I extend on in the remainder of this chapter. Firstly, the young people who participated in this study and contributed to *Under Bunjil* articulated their practice as Indigenous students as troubling the University's promise of inclusion, which was often experienced as being out of place or unbelonging. This troubling occurred in relation to the university and higher education sector's claim to be an increasingly equitable and inclusive space. Understood in parallel to the articulation of the young First Peoples' university experience, these claims reveal the university as white property. The university is a space that symbolises the 'last stop' in a successful

educational transition and a place of precarity for Indigenous young people who are 'included' as exceptional and deficient yet excluded in their complexity. As an institution that symbolises and confers success as the exclusive end point of the education journey, whiteness is thus inscribed as normative. Secondly, and counter to the university as a white possession, the university also emerges as a place understood and experienced by young First Peoples as *both* unceded Wurundjeri land and stolen land. Lastly, my reading of *Under Bunjil* and conversations with young people on campus revealed that part of the young people's practice as Indigenous university students entailed an active presencing of what it meant to be First Peoples, which included negotiating with, and contesting, white normativity.

Enacting a politics of refusal: Refusing inclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have emphasised Indigenous young people's hypervisibility as damaged in policy, discourses of criminality and education. Through a politics of inclusion, Indigenous youth are figured and visible in higher education as an indication of neoliberal success and as a statistical indicator in equity benchmarks that signal simultaneously socio-economic difference and Indigenous exceptionalism. In theorising density rather than difference to account for the complexity of an Indigenous presence at university, which includes the publication of *Under Bunjil,* it becomes clear that the Indigenous young people continually refused these designated markers of hypervisibility. Those I interviewed to contextualise the production and existence of the on-campus magazine were keenly aware of how their Indigeneity was represented through inclusion rhetoric and how the complexity of their worldviews and experiences could not be accounted for by these representations of difference. For example, in an interview with Jaime I asked how the university understands Indigeneity. She felt that the university is mostly concerned with the need to tick boxes. In response to the question, she started telling a story of how she'd found out the week before that she had been placed on the Faculty of Arts Dean's honour list. While she was proud to be recognised for her academic achievement, the award was for Indigenous students who had participated in a program with a tiny cohort, so she questioned whether the recognition was genuine:

> I got emails asking for a quote and if I would get a photo with the Dean and stuff, and I was like: do you really want my story about how and why I'm doing well at the university or do you just want me to be this token blackfulla talking about how lucky I am to come to this great university because of a program you have started up? I'm grateful I came to the program, but very much I felt at the time like a token blackfulla, 'get a picture with our Dean' so we can put it up somewhere and then we can go and tick the diversity-and-inclusion-of-some-Indigenous-students box.

I later came back to her story and asked her to expand on what she meant by diversity and inclusion. Why I asked, were those the words that came into your head? She said that diversity is how the university represents that "we are a harmonious university that is open to everyone" and "inclusion: we've ticked this box because we've got a blackfulla in a photo with the Dean and she's clearly doing well because she's on the honours list, so we're going to use that to promote what a good job we're doing." Diversity and inclusion language, she said, were part of a cover which the university used so they could "tick an inclusion box and fill that quota."

Like Jaime, the other young people I talked to also felt like the university often used them to promote its success in supporting diversity and inclusion. Their experience of "being included", as one young person said, was often alienating, particularly in the classroom. Sienna, for example, was excelling in her studies, and her family was extremely proud, supportive and had high expectations. She was proud of herself for doing so well while also being someone in the on-campus Indigenous community who was active and supportive of her peers. Yet in terms of this success, she said:

> … it's still frustrating though that as an Indigenous student I'm still seen as a token in that sense; the expectation is that Indigenous students are token. More frustrating is that if I'm the only Indigenous student in the classroom that I am representative of all Indigenous students and people, that's a big weight to take on. I don't shy away from the responsibility, but it's hard to not get overwhelmed.

Sienna identified her position at the university as precarious, and like the other students I talked to, was hyper-aware of her embodiment on campus as an Indigenous person. When I asked her what she thought I meant when I said that she holds a critical and knowledgeable position in relation to the university, she said:

> … it brings to mind like my positionality in the university, as an Indigenous woman in a very historically white and male-centric space. And in some way this place fails me in the way, that it's that. Like I am very aware of my otherness.

Sienna aptly noted that the university's failure to follow through with its promise of inclusion within the classroom and curriculum lead to "messing up" her learning or an "underwhelming learning experience." Michelle Kerrin (2018, p. 32), an Arrernte and Luritja woman from Darwin, likewise pointed to the work of being included in her *Under Bunjil* open letter 'Why I am angry: Am I offending you?' In the opening section, she writes:

> Your essay that talks about the 'othering' and subjugation of Aboriginal people, it's me
> You feel as though you have the right to call me 'them' or 'they', but don't understand that these words are not just history, they are your neatly wrapped present to fixing our 'problem'
> Where in the middle of the class your mind wanders and you can switch the tune of my oppression off, but I sit there trying to fix the sound you broke, in a cell you keep putting us in
> That the stories to which you cry white guilt, I cry over our dead bodies
> Where you "have never met an Aboriginal person" but I sit next to you every day
> AM I OFFENDING YOU?

Like Michelle and Sienna, Gunditjmara and Yorta Yorta woman Emily Kayte James (2015) detailed her experience of encounters with Indigenous related content in lecture theatres and tutorial discussions, leading to her feeling like she did not belong. In *Under Bunjil,* she wrote:

> It makes you sit up a little straighter, and we prepare ourselves to cringe, raise our hands or roll our eyes. I would compare the sensation to when you're at parent-teacher interviews in high school and your teachers are telling your parents how you're going at school. Regardless of whether the feedback is good or bad, you still feel like you shouldn't be there. Parent-teacher interviews are the perfect example of being spoken about but not spoken to, even though you're in the room. (p. 17)

James's description of her experience in the context of *Under Bunjil* (2015) signifies a moment where the presence and critical observation of an Indigenous young person are asserted despite the inscription of absence within formal learning spaces, like lecture

theatres and classrooms. which the author occupies. Similarly, Alexandra Hohoi (2015) in 'Come in Black Girl' included in Volume 2 of *Under Bunjil* signals the precarity or tension that accompanies the strategic decision made by these young people traversing the boundaries regulating these institutions. Hohoi is acutely aware of the discursive formation of deficiency which functions to simultaneously rationalise her existence at the university while erasing other aspects of her identity. Illuminating the irony of existing in this institutional space, she writes:

> Come on black girl.
> Give a speech.
> Take a photo.
> You have made it so far.
> Now tell the story everyone wants to hear.
> (Hohoi, 2015, p.63)

Students also talked of their unidentifiable Indigeneity as unsettling or unrecognisable within classroom settings. Jaime, for example, noted that "being fair skinned" could at times be challenging in classrooms because often other non-Indigenous students assumed a lack of Indigenous presence, which Jaime felt further marginalised her position in the classroom. She noted:

> … there has been times where there is the assumption that there is only non-Indigenous people in the rooms, so they're making statements like 'we as a whole' or 'we feel this way' – and I feel like saying, 'no not really, I'm not part of your "we" in this situation'…it's very difficult because you think do I say something or where do I sit in this?

Coming back to the interview with Sienna, I asked her at one point where across the University Indigeneity is present. She powerfully stated that it is present wherever First Peoples are, of course, but for us as First Peoples our presence is not enough:

> My Indigeneity is present all the time. It's always present when I go into a classroom. But I'm very aware that my actual being there is definitely not enough. The idea of absorbing someone, if we go back to the idea of assimilation—which was essentially encouraging Indigenous people to be part of the mainstream, but often that's to the detriment of cultural ties and family ties and all sorts of traditional knowledges. So I'm very aware of the whiteness of the information and the actual

> history behind what I'm often being told, and sometimes the irony of it being told to me here, in this place, I suppose.

Sienna described her presence at the university and in classrooms as the "historical weight of my being", which she said unsettled the non-Indigenous, particularly white, people she encountered in various places across the university. The weight she carried with her as she moved through place and time, her Indigeneity that was "present all the time", was not framed by Sienna or other students as a burden, Instead, it could be understood as the weight of refusal.

In theorising the academy as "an arm of the settler state" where the "logics of elimination, capital accumulation, and dispossession are reconstituted", Sandy Grande (2018) notes that "Indigenous refusal both negatively rejects the (false) promise of inclusion and other inducements of the settler state and positively asserts Indigenous sovereignty and peoplehood" (p. 59). Thus a politics of refusal compels thinking beyond the limits of recognition and inclusion while "rejecting settler colonial logics" and fostering "possibilities of co-resistance" (p. 58). This refusal is revealed in the editorial of Volume 6 (Thompson et al., 2018) of *Under Bunjil*, when the editorial team write, as First Peoples students:

> … we are aware of the oppressive, white institution that is the university, and acknowledge our privilege in having access to such a vast array of resources. But we are still Blak; we still experience racism, the discrimination and the colonial violence and we will never shy away or refuse to take part in giving Black voices amplification. Our community is our priority; you are our priority. (p. 6)

Although contributors to *Under Bunjil* did not frame their entanglement with the university through refusal per se, refusal is visible, as I demonstrate next—in their acknowledgement of the possibilities presented by the university as evidenced by their presence there; the continual assertion of this presence amidst the knowledge of colonial violence, and the commitment to figuring spaces of connection and resistance like *Under Bunjil* while figuring white property through sovereign relations as unceded Country.

Unceded land, stolen land: The importance of place

A cache of skeletal remains of 400 people was found in a storeroom in a building at the University of Melbourne in 2003. These bones belong to First Peoples and were collected by Richard Berry between 1906 and 1929 as an anatomy professor (Foley, 2012). Berry (1921) measured the skulls and weighed the brains of Aboriginal people as the "evolutionary controls" (p. 31) in his studies on the intelligence of the "normal individual" as compared to those afflicted with "some form of idiocy imbecility moronity, or feeble-mindedness" (p. 47). Berry argued that an adult Aboriginal man's average intelligence peaked comparably at the level of a 13-year-old privately educated Victorian schoolboy. When considering the history of eugenics at the University of Melbourne and how many of its most prominent figures of the early twentieth century contributed to the dehumanisation and attempted elimination of First Peoples, it is profound that almost a century after Berry presented his findings, 21-year-old Njamal man Tyson Holloway-Clarke stands out front of the university building which is Berry's namesake. As a representative of the Indigenous student body who want the name of the building changed, he is there to have his photo taken by a Fairfax media photographer. In the subsequent article titled *Heart of darkness: Melbourne University's racist professors* (Dobbin, 2015), Tyson is quoted as saying that "the university has a deep and toxic history that it has failed to accept responsibility for…it is a confronting and alienating situation for Indigenous students, especially when our scheduled classes are in these buildings."

Arguably, Indigenous people in the academy are what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2004, p. 105), writing of the neoliberal university, term maroons: "They are the condition of possibility of production of knowledge in the [Australian] university…" The presence of Indigenous young people at universities across the country necessarily stems from initial colonial dispossession—the taking of Indigenous lands to create university space; the amassing of Indigenous knowledges, experience and bodies for scientific study or academic promotion; the dehumanising of Indigenous peoples to justify the theft of land and bodies and the exclusion of Indigenous knowledges held by living, breathing Indigenous peoples (Dodson, 1994; Macoun et al., 2019); the production of knowledge to augment policies of segregation and assimilation as a future absence; the production of knowledges of deficiency, pathology and disadvantage to justify continued colonialism;

and, as I have already outlined, the valuing of formal education for the purpose of employment as a precursor to normative social and economic participation.

For many students, the violence of colonisation animated their contribution to the magazine *Under Bunjil* as "an ever-present aspect of our lives as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" (Thompson et al., 2018, p. 4). Yet, the Indigenous young people at university I talked to and the *Under Bunjil* pieces I engage with as part of this research project also orient toward another story. This story is one of ongoing presence rather than absence or inclusion; relationality rather than individuality; and complexity and desire rather than deficiency and damage. The storying of this presence includes a deep recognition of the university as an institution located on stolen land and also as the unceded land of First Peoples. For the young people I interviewed; Tyson, who advocated for changing the name of the Richard Berry Building and is also the founding editor of *Under Bunjil*; and the other students who contribute to the magazine, their recognition of the lands on which the university is located as Wurundjeri Country is a profound re-mapping of colonial space.

In early 2015 the first issue of the *Under Bunjil* (Holloway-Clarke et al., 2015) was released. The editor's note stated:

> *Under Bunjil* is the first of its kind. Named for the Creator Spirit of the Kulin Nations, this publication serves as a tool for the empowerment of Indigenous voices here at the University of Melbourne. Written and published by an Indigenous student body hailing from dozens of different nations, we all now live under the watchful gaze of the great eagle Bunjil. United in our place under Bunjil there is no greater place or way to share our stories.

In writing about how *Under Bunjil* and its title came into being, Tyson (2018, p. 48) emphasises:

> What bound us as a community here in metropolitan Melbourne, was our place on Wurundjeri country, under the wings of Bunjil. So as a publication, *Under Bunjil* would catalogue the events, ideas and works of our community as we would exist *Under Bunjil*.

Young people like Tyson have been active in re-mapping colonial space through tangible demands like changing the names of buildings and landmarks across campus. A refusal of colonial spatialities is also enacted by the assertion and practice of Indigenous sovereign relations, consistently referred to as a responsibility and obligation to Wurundjeri Country for the *Under Bunjil* contributors as guests. This responsibility extended to an understanding of their relationship to place as First Peoples on the unceded lands of other Indigenous peoples.

Each semester many of the young people who contribute to *Under Bunjil*, like the students I interviewed, travel from their homelands or the places they call home—whether in metropolitan Melbourne or further afield—to attend the University of Melbourne. This complexity of identification and relationships to place extended to guiding them in relation to their presence as guests on Wurundjeri Country. Caleb, for example, talked of how when he first moved from Western Australia, he had to be welcomed by Wurundjeri Elders, to belong and feel comfortable on campus. Likewise, Jaime, who is Koorie from regional Victoria, talked of how a Welcome to Country was important for her because "you are on Indigenous land. It's a very white university which has taken over this land, and the country here is Wurundjeri Country, that should always be present." She emphasised that after Wurundjeri Elders had welcomed her, she felt calm and "even though you're at a white university, and it can feel a bit awkward at times, once you've been welcomed—that leaf—I'm here, I'm allowed to be here." As a welcome guest Ellen also emphasised the importance of her presence, as a Wiradjuri woman, being legitimised by Elders from the Country on which the university is located:

> It's even about making Indigenous people feel comfortable on this place. Like this isn't my Country and having a Welcome to Country makes me feel comfortable being here. To be welcome means I'm not further contributing to the colonial impacts, like the dispossession of Wurundjeri people. They're welcoming me to their land and its ok for me to be here; I can live safely on this place and know that I'm welcomed here.

Tyson, writing in *Under Bunjil*, articulates the importance of the Wurundjeri people's acknowledgement of his presence on their lands. He says of Wurundjeri Elder Aunty Di Kerr:

> She helped me understand the Country I was arriving on, the manner in which she expected us to behave and exist on her Country, and thus the community we were being invited to. We were expected to protect the Country, and in turn let the Country protect and provide for us. We were on Aunty Di's country; we were on Bunjil's country. (Holloway-Clarke, 2018, p. 48)

Legal scholar and Wiradjuri jurist Mark McMillan (2014, p. 117) uses the legal term jurisdiction to encapsulate his Wiradjuri "experiences, existences, ontologies and epistemologies." In doing so, he talks of the significance of enacting lawful relations between nations or jurisdictions as the creation of a meeting place. In this way, the articulation of the University as Wurundjeri land by the young people here signifies it as more than a geographical location marked by the University's institutional claims. Instead, the University is re-figured and re-membered as unceded Wurundjeri land, as welcoming and protective, and as a meeting place that enables these young people to orient themselves to place and one another. In doing so, it becomes a meeting place where, as McMillan notes, Indigenous young people hailing from their respective nations can "assert what we know and live every day – that our jurisdictions exist outside of and have been practised long before being exposed to the Anglo-Australian jurisdiction" (p. 118). This assertion was not only made by students in their respective relations to Country but also through the active presencing of a complex Indigeneity on campus.

Presencing Indigeneity - countering hypervisibility

These young people actively haunt and unsettle the standardising and historically universalising agenda of higher education and research in articulating the complexity of their presence at the University through a collective publication like *Under Bunjil,* which is distributed widely and for free around the university campus. They articulate an understanding of their positioning within higher education as bodies that are out of place, as simultaneously present-yet-absent—rendered hypervisible through their difference which justifies their inclusion. The existence of *Under Bunjil* serves to intervene in this hypervisibility by providing an avenue for these young people to express the nuance and complexity of their experience not only as Indigenous students but as young First Peoples.

In this way, *Under Bunjil* is a fugitive practice; it is an intervention into young First Peoples' hypervisibility as representatives of both Indigenous success and comparative deficiency. *Under Bunjil* provides an escape route for writers and readers to collectively imagine and practice their presence in the academy in contest and beyond the seemingly inescapable double-bind of deficiency and exceptionalism.

In the interview with Jaime, she described *Under Bunjil* as an "incredible thing. It is for us. It's where we get a space to have the opportunity to recognise one another." Even though Ellen had not submitted a contribution to the magazine, she talked of how it represented her at the university, and she often shared it with her family:

> Pop loves hearing stories about what I'm doing at uni. I love giving him an *Under Bunjil* to read. I think for him, me being here is really important because he never had that chance. Not just to go to university, but to be proud in his culture. It was such a shameful thing for him so, he's like, it's your birth right to be able to do this and celebrate who you are.

The complexity of representation and mutual recognition that *Under Bunjil* provided for students was also reflected in how the young people I interviewed identified themselves. Ellen said, for example, of the label "Indigenous" that:

> Indigenous is a collective term which is not really our own, whereas Wiradjuri is a much more personal statement of identity. I think wherever possible I define myself as Wiradjuri. I rarely say about myself, 'I am an Indigenous person'… Using Wiradjuri is a kind of resistance to that Indigenous label. We have our own sovereign lands and knowledges and regardless of what you say, I'm always going to be Wiradjuri. And sure, you can call me Indigenous, but I'm not going to call myself that.

While the young people I talked to recognised the strategic import of the "generic term Indigenous", as one student put it, to account for them 'being included' they all identified as belonging to their respective nations – or ancestral homelands, whether they grew up "on Country" or not. This complexity extends to the innumerable subject positions occupied by you First Peoples on campus, which Neerim Whurrong Callope (2018, p. 61) describes in his *Under Bunjil* piece 'If These Trees Could Talk':

> At the University of Melbourne we have many kinds of blackfullas; bush ones, city ones, dark fellas, light fellas, heterosexual blackfullas, and those a part of the LGBTQI+ community. We have aspiring engineers, lawyers, scientists, artists, entrepreneurs, writers - the list and the potential are endless … we have those who know and those who are learning what it means to be Aboriginal. Those who know their mob and those who are still on their journey of discovery.

What emerges from Whurrung Callope's piece and the complexity of identity articulated in *Under Bunjil* and interviews with young people is the prioritisation of the presence of Indigeneity on campus. The Indigeneity represented escapes prescription or what Yawuru scholar Patrick Dodson (1994, p. 3) described in relation to a history of research on Aboriginal people, the "preoccupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling." Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011, p. 96) theorises presencing as "Indigenous thought [meaning]… created and communicated through the movement of body and sound, testimony and witnessing, remembering, protest and insurrection, by creating a space of storied presencing, alternative imaginings, transformation, reclamation-resurgence." The production of *Under Bunjil* could be considered a space for the storied presencing of the experiences, knowledge, worldviews and things that matter to young First Peoples as they move through space and time, from their homes and home communities, across campus and throughout their degrees. As stated in the editorial for Volume Six of *Under Bunjil* (Thompson et al., 2018, p. i):

> Reclaiming our story and the voices that our communities have had for tens of thousands of years is only the first step on the way to decolonizing our minds, reconnecting with Culture and exercising our powers as true Sovereign Owners. *Under Bunjil* is a means to achieving this first step.

The existence of *Under Bunjil* has been forged externally to institutional discourses of success, exceptionalism and deficiency. The stories, poetry and artworks featured in *Under Bunjil* are treasured by students and by the magazine editorial team and are understood as powerful in their potentiality for affecting Indigenous young people and others who might engage with them. This value is evident in the Content Warning for Volume 6 (2018, p.6), where they ask readers to: "Please practice self-care while engaging with *Under Bunjil*; our experiences are not to be taken lightly and neither are these stories. This publication is a testament to our ongoing battles, unwavering strength and dedication

to healing." The magazine is further described by the editorial team of Volume 6 (p. i) as a "tool to connect us" while acknowledging it as a medium to reclaim "our story and the voices that our communities have had for tens of thousands of years." This publication has been created not necessarily as an explicit act of resistance or opposition on behalf of the students. Yet via a reading of *Under Bunjil* as a fugitive practice, the university is troubled, indeed unsettled, as a complex and useful site of analysis in its institutional claims.

Conclusion

The creative works included in *Under Bunjil* and the interviews with young people that guided and informed my textual analysis show they are not lost in the throes of higher education. Instead, the texts under examination and the young people who participated in this study demonstrate a critical cognisance of how they are represented in university inclusion efforts. In response, these young people are strategic in the way they negotiate this positioning. In sharing these critiques as part of this chapter, it was revealed that the promise of inclusion often has material counter-effects in classrooms, curriculum and across campus that are exclusionary rather than inclusive. In theorising the density of Indigenous young people's experiences as they exist in, and importantly inform the critique of, the liminal under-acknowledged spaces of the university, this promise is unsettled. An Indigenous presence as an unsettling presence was also evident in various pieces in *Under Bunjil* as students mostly considered themselves not recognisably Indigenous. Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd talks of bearing witness to the way the structure of whiteness, including its insecurities and hostilities, manifests in academic spaces. This "whole spectacle of whiteness" Todd (2016, p. 12) suggests is revealed in:

> … the under-acknowledged spaces where official academic discourse and promises of decolonial ethos mingles with the real practice, and prejudice, of our disciplines. Where racism and whiteness are reinforced and reproduced (but also where they can be challenged and dismantled).

Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2012, p. 65) calls the promise of inclusion to account when she states that it can be "both attached to those bodies that 'look different' and

detached from those bodies as a sign of inclusion…The promise of diversity could then be described as a problem: the sign of inclusion makes the signs of exclusion disappear." Returning to the benchmarks set by the *Bradley Review* (2008) referenced earlier in this chapter, not only were certain bodies marked as excluded—poor, geographically distant and Indigenous, privilege bodies—primarily white and wealthy bodies were designated as the norm. These benchmarks also discursively produced the university as a space where these privileged bodies are designated, as Sara Ahmed (2012, p. 3) notes, as "at home." By extension, the bodies of regional, remote, poor and Indigenous students were rendered as out-of-place or as guests. Ahmed continues that this "very structural position of being the guest, or the stranger, the one who receives hospitality, allows an act of inclusion to maintain the form of exclusion" (p. 43). Thus arguably, social inclusion as a catchall in education policy can be understood as a technology of power which maintains and normalises institutional practices rather than demands fundamental change in response to social, cultural and epistemological difference.

Furthermore, this inclusion process produces institutional otherness whereby Indigenous people are only conditionally and partially included as the exception to Indigenous deficiency. It is this dynamic of simultaneously expelling and welcoming that renders visible the marginality or difference of those who are to be included while also working to "conceal and normalize the practices, social relations, and policy formations that invest in privileged ontologies and epistemologies at the expense of others" (Bourassa, 2019, p. 2) Through the promise of inclusion, as is figured in the neoliberal imaginary, the impossibility of 'being' included is revealed: discourses of education as they function through the discursive formation of deficiency—the flipside of which is exceptionalism, works to prohibit Indigenous young people from ever inhabiting or embodying the norm in universities.

Existing amidst the promise of inclusion was identified by the students as a precarious position to be in; it took effort to exist in a place where they felt they were actively included and yet did not belong. However, also strongly emerging were the myriad ways in which these young people were animated as university students in their relations to each other, to their own ancestral Countries and community responsibilities, to place and the colonial history of the university. These sentiments—of the complexity of

existing in an institution underpinned by a deep history of violence that continued to play out in Indigenous young people's daily realities—were reflected throughout the pieces published in *Under Bunjil*. Theorising the density of Indigenous being in this chapter, rather than the implications of Indigenous difference—as damage, as exceptionalism, as disadvantage or as cultural incompatibility—enabled recognition of the multitudinous subject positions that Indigenous young people occupy, particularly in educational institutions such as universities. This desire-based recognition values the complex humanity and strategic negotiations of young First Peoples in their engagement with settler colonial institutions. Theorising their density opens up the possibility to recognise young First Peoples as more than passive recipients of knowledge or examples of 'normal' educational transitions and representatives of 'Indigenous success' and 'excellence.' Importantly, such a recognition also forces a problematization of the historical and ongoing role of the education system—of which universities are part—and education policy more broadly, in deploying what Andersen (p. 92) terms "logical markers" of difference to justify inclusion. British-based feminist scholar Sara Ahmed writes in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012, p. 182) that "attending to the restrictions in the apparently open spaces of a social world brings us into closer proximity to an actual and material world." This chapter has attended to the in-between spaces. I have considered how Indigenous youth have been figured in an attempt to ameliorate, and arguably reinforce—through the rhetoric of exceptionalism—the seemingly inescapable deficiency of Indigenous people and the way this aim is contested by the actual presence of young First Peoples in educational institutions.

The next chapter continues to trace contestations of how young First Peoples are figured through the discursive formation of inescapable deficiency and inevitable criminality by introducing the story of Dujuan's as told in the documentary film *In My Blood It Runs* (2019). Dujuan, like the young First Peoples who have shared their stories in this chapter, also holds and asserts a critical awareness of the way he is framed and understood through the production of *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth. This critical awareness and its authorisation in story form in the public domain likewise unsettles the normative and postcolonizing demands of the education and criminal justice systems.

Chapter Six - Countering conceptions of Indigenous youth: Resisting normative futures

> Whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the whole body, which means nothing else than that he shall be forced to be free.
>
> — Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1994, p. 58), *The Social Contract*

Introduction

At 12 years old, Dujuan Hoosan travelled from his ancestral homeland on Garrwa Country to Geneva, where he addressed the United Nations Human's Right Council. As he sat by his father's side, he stated the purpose of his visit: "I come here to speak with you because the Australian government is not listening. Adults never listen to kids like me, but we have important things to say" (Hoosan, 2019). Dujuan, in identifying himself as a 'kid like me', is signifying to the world his disempowerment as an Aboriginal child by the Australian settler-colonial state. Dujuan is exceptional; as one of the youngest people to address the UN, as a powerful child healer in his community and as the subject of the documentary film *In My Blood It Runs* (2019) set in Mparntwe (Alice Springs, Northern Territory). But as an Aboriginal child much loved by his family, alienated from the school system, and, by extension, under the purview of child welfare and Northern Territory youth justice—Dujuan's story is all too common. In 2018, nearly three in five young people in detention were Indigenous (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018, p. 11). This figure is despite young First Peoples constituting only 5% of the national population under 25. In May of 2019, in the Northern Territory where the documentary featuring Dujuan was made, all young people in detention were Indigenous.

This chapter engages with this documentary *In My Blood It Runs* (Newell, 2019), which records 10-year-old Dujuan's journey to a crossroads where schooling is failing him, and he is increasingly choosing to disengage rather than comply with an education system he experiences as inherently problematic. Directed by non-Indigenous film-maker

Maya Newell in collaboration with the Arrernte and Garrwa families it represents, *In My Blood It Runs* confirms the mounting premise made so far in this study—the education and criminal justice systems are built on the investment in a normative future for Indigenous young people. This future is wedded to a very particular version of the 'human' and freedom, and anything outside of that is superfluous to a system contingent on capital accumulation and economic progress. In the previous chapters, I have traced the discursive formation of inescapable deficiency as it has been produced through education discourses that coalesce around conceptions of Indigenous youth. I have also argued that the criminalisation of particular bodies considered superfluous renders those bodies' demise inevitable if not for state intervention. The designation of this present superfluity also gestures toward what futures are, and are not, considered valued and valuable.

In the context of this film, superfluous futures are seen to be aided by families who desire their children to speak their languages other than English or envision for their children a homeland future. Superfluous futures are also seen to be aided by collective stories remembered across generations about colonisation, child stealing, and the fallacy of Captain Cook. These desires and these stories are responded to by state institutions as abetting young people in their refusal to comply. Young people, and by extension, their families, are disciplined for their non-compliance. Aboriginal families are disciplined through the suspension of their welfare payments and threatened with the removal of their children into child protection if their kids do not go to school; they are told that if their kids do not go to school, their children will inevitably end up in prison. Importantly, this film challenges conceptions of Indigenous youth that render Indigenous young people hypervisible—present in their deficiency and criminality and absent as the presence of self-determined futures desired by Indigenous people. Instead, *In My Blood It Runs* represents Dujuan and his family members' lives as layered and contradictory. Through this representation of complexity, the film offers a prism through which to see for a second the working of various settler colonial systems as they continue to function in the everyday realities of young First Peoples and how every day, these young people navigate through, refuse and negotiate with these systems in response. Thus, I read *In My Blood It Runs* as desire-based text and a fugitive practice that counters the deficiency and criminality evident in education and criminal justice discourses as central to *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth. This intention also extends the work of the previous

chapter, which deployed the analytic frame of density to re-humanise young First Peoples in their engagement with education—or specifically the university—and to contest the discursive formation of inescapable deficiency through inclusion rhetoric in higher education.

In the same way, this chapter begins by drawing on Avery Gordon's analytic frame of complex personhood to examine the nuanced representation of Dujuan in the film *In My Blood It Runs*. I suggest that in capturing a fragment of the complexity and contradiction that exists in Dujuan's lived reality, the film simultaneously counters representations of Indigenous youth as hypervisible. In witnessing Dujuan's resistance to schooling—with the knowledge of the stories and experiences of his family that inform this resistance—and the school's response to his non-compliance, we see the interplay of power and resistance unfold to reveal education, criminal justice and child welfare systems intent on disciplining Indigenous children, parents and families in their desire for First Peoples' or non-normative futures.

Countering hypervisibility through complex personhood

In My Blood It Runs (2019) begins with Dujuan interviewing his mother with a hand-held camera in the gentle orange light of sunset on the curb side out front of their house. After she lists the names of her three kids, Dujuan, laughing, asks Mum Megan, "Which one do you love?" (Newell, 2019, 00:37). When she refuses to answer, cheekily he prompts, "Which one do you hate a little bit?" (00:01:09). She answers: "Panda!"—their dog who barks all night. As Dujuan leans into Megan, his back against her front, the shot goes wide, and we see Mum Megan and Dujuan, in his underwear, sitting in the street against the backdrop of Hidden Valley Aboriginal Town Camp on the outskirts of the central Australian town of Alice Springs. Quietly, Mum Megan asks Dujuan, "Stop running away, yeah? Because you make not only me worried, nana Carol" (00:01:30). In response Dujuan pulls away and, tilting his head up to the sky, says: "I want to have a look for the stars. That's the first star" (00:01:40) This interview, and others like it conducted by Dujuan with his family members throughout the film, are tender, candid and often blurry. They range from representing profound interactions where, for example, Dujuan guides a

discussion with his Aunty about her experiences in youth detention, to footage of a mundane interaction between Dujuan and his father, laughing at the camera as his son persuades him to go fishing and to let him drive the car on the way out to the waterhole. These interviews signify complexity and the issues pertinent to Dujuan, whether that be going out bush with his family or evading the seeming inevitability of his encounters with juvenile justice.

In *The Alchemy of Race and Rights,* Patricia William's (1991, p. 10) writes: "That life is complicated is a fact of great analytic importance." Throughout the history of coloniality, and as I have argued through this thesis, the dehumanisation of people subject to colonial rule has been a central justification for dispossession. Within the Australian context, the concerted dehumanisation of First peoples—or the denial of our right to live and be recognised as living nuanced, complex and meaningful lives—has worked through the legal fiction of terra nullius (Behrendt, 2012, p. 168), racialised discourses, and the sociological imagination, in policy and research, where Indigenous people and Indigenous lived realities are re-produced as knowable and intelligible. In responding to Williams, Avery Gordon points out the seemingly banal expression that life is complicated is a profound theoretical statement that counters the fallacy of knowability, a fallacy that has animated this thesis's work. To be guided by this idea is to engage with what Gordon (1997, pp. 4–5) calls complex personhood and to assume fundamentally that:

> … all people (albeit in specific forms whose specificity is someone's everything) remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others … people suffer graciously and selfishly too, get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles, and also transform themselves. Complex personhood means that even those called "Other" are never never that.

Eve Tuck extends Gordon's concept in her desire-based approach to research to position complex personhood within Indigenous understandings of collectivity and the interdependence of the collective and those that constitute it. Tuck (2009, p. 420) argues that within "collectivity, recognizing complex personhood involves making room for the contradictions, for the mis/re/cognitions, usually in an effort to sustain a sense of collective balance." In re-forming complex personhood in this way, Tuck demonstrates that it works to depathologise "the experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised

communities so that people are seen as more than broken and conquered" (p. 416). The work of depathologising is imperative as knowledge of Indigenous pathology has been deployed as a weapon, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2014) argues, to rationalise subjugation. Thus, this knowledge circulates as the strategic truth: "if Indigenous people behaved properly as good citizens their poverty would disappear" (2014, p. 77). As I have outlined in previous chapters, Young First Peoples are made hypervisible through conceptions of Indigenous youth produced in education and criminal justice discourses which work to pathologise.

Indigenous young people are present, visible and rendered reducible to their disadvantage, vulnerability and risk and, if not, are present only as an exception. I use hypervisibility in this chapter as an analytic frame that reveals the concerted misrecognition of young First Peoples and their complexity, particularly as the embodiment of their family's desires for the future. Drawing on Avery Gordon (1997) again, in the present moment where technologies of hypervisibility and population-making rule, there are seemingly "no shadows, no ghosts." She continues:

> … we are led to believe that neither repression nor the return of the repressed, in the form of either improperly buried bodies or counter-veiling systems of value or indifference, occurs with any meaningful result. The representations of value or difference is indispensable for understanding the cleavages that power's divisive work accomplishes. (Gordon, 1997, pp. 113-114)

Representing the desire of Dujuan and his family in relation to the mechanisms that seek to discipline his presence and refusal, *In My Blood It Runs* reveals the dialectics of visibility and invisibility and how this dialectic impacts on the everyday lives of the film's subjects.

The film becomes a mediation, or what Gordon describes conceptually as a "process that links an institution and an individual, a social structure and a subject, and history and a biography" (p. 19). The filmic representation of Dujuan and his family is a prism through which to see the everyday working of various institutions and systems within the lives of young First Peoples and how young people like Dujuan struggle and strategise in their engagement with the impacts of these systems, consciously and

sometimes unknowingly. In doing so, the representation of Dujuan's complex personhood counters the hypervisibility of Indigenous young people. *In My Blood It Runs* captures the multifaceted interplay of forces that orbit and threaten Dujuan, such as the education system, child welfare and youth justice, but also the things that tether and ground him, like the love of his family and particularly the women who support him, their language and homelands.

In our encounter with Dujuan's complex personhood, we hold our breath when he does not come home from school. When he is out late at night, I remember the tender image of him embracing his mother; softly touching his Nana's face with his healing hands; and, collecting bush medicine as the sun is setting, as he talks about how he smashed a school window in anger and took his teacher's car keys and threw them on the school roof. These scenes do not exist in the film in opposition but rather work to attest to the intricate web of social structures and institutions that restrict Indigenous young people within the conceptual confines of a hypervisible Indigenous youth. Importantly, these scenes also reveal the myriad ways in which young people cope with, respond to, are caught up in, resist and can be unwittingly complicit in their refusal to comply with the system's rule.

Resisting normative futures

More than any other state or territory across Australia, in the Northern Territory Indigenous young people constitute a significant proportion—almost half—of the general youth population. The Northern Territory is thus, to an extent, dependent on the inclusion and participation of young First Peoples in its imagined future. Yet, in every way, statistics reveal that Indigenous young people are refusing, or unable, to participate in the Territorian vision in which an educated Indigenous population contributes to "society socially and economically" (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2016, p. 4). This vision of inclusion and productive contribution conflicts with present socio-economic indicators such as educational attainment, school attendance and youth employment, revealing a story of ongoing governmental failure. However, there is still a concerted attempt by the government to address the non-participation of Indigenous young people,

particularly in education. In doing so, the Northern Territory takes a whole-of-government approach to issues such as school non-attendance.

In the school attendance strategy *Every Day Counts* (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2016), the Northern Territory Government emphasises that school attendance is "inextricably linked" (p.7) to "improving the social and economic circumstances" (ibid.) of its people, particularly in remote communities. School attendance is asserted as paramount to "building a strong society with a robust economy and prosperous outlook" (ibid.). The Northern Territory Government thus aims to ensure this robust society through a range of initiatives which have increasingly included linking a family's welfare payments to their child's school attendance; limiting instruction in any language other than English to half an hour a day; criminalising school non-attendance as child neglect; and, entrenching a police presence across schools through school-based community policing programs. As Fogarty, Riddle, Lovell and Wilson (2017, p. 4) have examined, these initiatives reveal that Indigenous education in this context works to "structure the values and habits of the next generation of Indigenous people and has become a space that is highly symbolic of the possibilities for the state's reform of Indigenous people's behaviour." Arguably then, these measures, and what they are working toward mitigating, began to signal investment in a very particular future for First Peoples in the Northern Territory.

Watching *In My Blood It Runs*, the viewer is forced to witness an impossible dynamic—the constitutive interplay of resistance and domination where the former justifies the latter. In Dujuan we see a cultured, knowledgeable and discerning Garrwa and Arrernte child actively navigating his interpellation by political institutions founded on genocidal intentions. This active navigation is done so with the support of his grandmothers, who recognise the strategic import of Western education, and simultaneously hold the knowledge of the destruction schooling has historically wrought on their communities alongside the desire to live on their home Countries, speak their languages and practice their culture. This tension is compounded by the use of archival footage throughout the film, promoting Western education as a tool of assimilation. At one point in the film, a man's voice overlays images of Aboriginal children dressed in formal school clothing in the mid-twentieth century:

> … from the bonds of tribal compulsions which hold their parents is a major task of the administration. The children are being gently led toward our culture, so that, in time, they will take their place in the Australian community thinking as we do. (00:15:40)

In referencing the continued survival of First Peoples, Dujuan states: "My Nana has survived because when she was a little kid, she used to live at this one place named Sandy Bore" (00:16:37). Early on in the film, Nana Carol mourns her homeland of Sandy Bore, wishing she could grow up her grandchildren on their ancestral Country: "But education is long way from them. We don't have a school in our homeland. That's the reason why I live in town because I want my grandchildren to be educated so they know the system when they grow up" (00:12:47). During a trip to Sandy Bore with Dujuan to check that his healing power is still strong, Nana Carol is saddened by the lack of Arrernte language taught in schools:

> White people educate our kids in the way they want them to be educated. But I need them to speak their language so they can carry on their language. We want our kids to grow up learning in both ways. (00:22:02)

Later in the film, Dujuan's Nana Margie reiterates Nana Carol's sentiment regarding the utility of Western education: "Learn both ways, so that when you do get your land back, you know what to do with it." Throughout the film, there exists a heavy tension between Dujuan's desire, like his grandmothers', to return to his homelands and the recognition of how systems—education and criminal justice particularly—work to discipline Indigenous people. In various ways, he acknowledges that a paradox exists—to be free of the system, there must be at least the appearance of conforming to the systems' rules. He says:

> The only way we are going to get white people off our land is to listen to them and then learn how to do their stuff, and then after we learn how to do their stuff, then we can force them to get off our land. We will use their tools to smash down all the stuff and then turn them back into rocks. Then we will get our land back.

And yet despite Dujuan's historical consciousness, over and over again we witness as he responds to the system's rule with non-compliance. At one point in the film, for example, his teacher begins to read Eve Pownall's *The Australia Book* (1953). Holding up the cover of the book to her mostly Indigenous students, which features illustrations of men and women garbed in 18th-century clothing, imperial soldiers and a naked Aboriginal man and child, the teacher says:

> Listen carefully. Now this one isn't a story. It's information, or non-fiction. It's fact. *The Australia Book*. It's about the history of our country. At Botany Bay, Cook landed for the first time in the new country … On an island in Cape York, he raised the English flag, and he claimed for the English country the whole of this new land. There's the English flag on top, which is still on our flag. (00:13:27)

In the writing exercise after, Dujuan drums on his desk with a pen, poking his tongue out at a teacher when they come by to ask him to behave. There are scenes of Dujuan on the floor of the classroom refusing to get up and participate in the activity.

Throughout the film, we witness the disjuncture between Dujuan's sense of self as a strong Aboriginal child; his family's desire to have him educated "both ways"; the school's consistent disregard for this desire; and Dujuan's mounting disillusion with school and struggle to maintain any strategic engagement. This disillusionment occurs when teachers talk condescendingly to students about their belief systems and when Dujuan's school only allocates half an hour each day for students to learn in Arrernte language. Reflecting on the way history is taught to him, Dujuan says later:

> The history that we're told at home is in language and it's about the Aborigines. But the ones back at school that was for white people not for Aboriginals. The white people teached the Aboriginals to act like them. To be like them … This man came on the ship, and he was the first man on Australia. He was the first white man. The Aboriginal told them to go and find another land because this was their land. But the people didn't listen to them. Aboriginals have still survived here. (00:16:00)

After sharing these astute reflections, Dujuan receives his report card for the term. For every class he is graded an 'E': very limited achievement. Dujuan shows his report card to his mother and then takes it to his room, curls up on the bed with tears in his eyes

and asks: “Is there something wrong with me or something?” (00:27:25). In the days following, Dujuan is hard to rouse in the mornings for school; he doesn’t want to go. Then one afternoon, he is sent home early:

> Mum Megan asking Dujuan: ‘What happened at school?”
> Dujuan: I got silly
> Mum Megan: You wasn’t listening to the teacher? Why?
> Dujuan: Because sometimes I get bored in class. The teacher told the other teacher to take me up the front, and then I got mad, and then I went around the corner, and I smashed the window.
> (00:28:24)

When Mum Megan is talking to Dujuan about going back to school after the suspension is lifted, she warns: “You know that your little age is the right age to go to juvenile centre?” (00:31:46). Dujuan is ten years old, and the seemingly inevitable alternative to school inclusion is youth detention. This inevitability is not only evident farther afield in the broader Indigenous community but within their own family experience.

Navigating the discursive formation of inevitable criminality

In My Blood It Runs was made in the wake of a Four Corners investigative report, *Australia’s Shame* (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016), that aired on the 25th of July 2016. *Australia’s Shame* revealed the heinous treatment of children and young people in the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre in the Northern Territory. In witnessing the harrowing images of young Dylan Voller being hooded and strapped to a chair, Dujaun comments: “The coppers tortured him. Everybody’s treating them like the same way they treat their enemies. I know lots of kids that got cruelled in juvenile. Even my Aunty got cruelled in there” (00:33:00). Sitting on his Aunt’s bed with a hand-held camera, Dujaun asks her: “Aunty Alexis, what did you feel like when your nephew got silly at school?” (00:33:41). Alexis says to Dujuan, “Well when my nephews get silly at school they get in trouble and it’s not a nice place going to jail. Did you know that Dujuan?” (00:33:47). Reflecting on her own experience in juvenile detention, she describes being denied food for extended periods and finishes the interview with her nephew with a warning: “Trust me, juvenile is

not a good place to be. Cause you're only going to end up in two places. A jail cell or a coffin" (00:34:25). Dujuan responds by saying: "That's what you call cruelling kids"

In response to the Four Corner's episode, a *Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory* was appointed, which found violence within Northern Territory detention facilities was not exceptional and could not be dismissed as the result of poorly trained staff responding to a small group of "challenging detainees" (White & Gooda, 2017, p. 11). Rather footage aired by the Four Corners investigation—of primarily Indigenous boys and young men hooded and strapped to chairs and subjected to excessive physical force while naked—was followed by revelations of "systemic and shocking failures" (p. 9) later found by the Royal Commission. They described a system where:

> Children and young people have been subjected to regular, repeated and distressing mistreatment and the community has also failed to be protected. The systemic failures occurred over many years and were ignored at the highest levels. (p 9)

There were instances of young First Peoples being denied water and access to a toilet; confined for long periods in places with no natural light; denied access to schooling; detained in facilities that were unclean, unkempt, dire, rundown and "stank of urine" (p.13); and, interned in isolation cells in adult prisons. The Royal Commission examined detention facilities; the conduct of youth justice workers; whether there existed management and cultural issues with the detention system; if there was a breach of the law and human rights of the young people detained; and if the Northern Territory government put in appropriate measures to prevent the mistreatment of the young people in detention. In doing so, the aim of the Royal Commission was reform in light of individual harms.

While the shocking images of this direct violence toward individual children and young people evoked a nationwide response prompting "fundamental questions about why and how children could possibly be treated in this way" (p. 10), the indirect violence of the Northern Territory youth justice system calls into question why youth incarceration, and more specifically the incarceration of Indigenous young people, is needed in the first place. However, what the Royal Commission did not examine was the foundational

overrepresentation of young First Peoples in detention or the carceral system's role, including education and child protection, in disciplining Aboriginal young people and their families for non-compliance across education and employment.

For Dujuan, the disciplinary relationship between education, child welfare and criminal justice was revealed several times throughout *In My Blood It Runs*. For example, when Dujuan is sent home from school for a second time for "incidences of poor behaviour", including absconding from the teacher, leaving class and refusing to follow instructions, he is elated to receive a three-day suspension. When the suspension is lifted, Nana Carol takes a defiant Dujuan to talk to the school principal. Admonishing Dujuan for his grades which she states demonstrates that he has "spent a lot of time … not being a learner", (01:02:10) the Principal continues:

> And you've run away nearly every day. Okay? Then we hear all sorts of stories then about people getting locked up and the police going around to different houses in the morning looking for kids … Do you want to get locked up with those other kids for stealing cars? No! Nobody wants that. You've got family who care about you. Now, this is your last chance at Yipirinya. Okay? Your very last chance.

The relationship between the school, welfare and police is not incidental or only limited to a seemingly anecdotal warning issued by Dujuan's school principal. Instead, these systems are enmeshed and work together to regulate young people and their families. At one point in the film, Mum Megan is standing in her kitchen eating a carrot while she reads a request to attend a meeting with a representative of Territory Families, the child protection department, at Dujuan's school. Sharing her despair, Mum Megan says:

> Don't know what's going to happen after that. Welfare they don't treat your kids the right way. They don't know their culture. They don't teach them their culture. So, it's all right for them to take kids off the mother, you know? (00:46:12)

Megan's helplessness is compounded when she gets a phone call from the school staff alerting her that Dujuan and some other children have "run away" because they "just don't want to be in the classrooms" (00:56:19). Shortly after, we see Mum Megan pacing up the

main street of Alice Springs looking for her son. Later she reflects on Dujuan and his brother's non-attendance:

> When Colin and Dujuan doesn't attend school, I get a warning that my payments going to get suspended because they haven't been attending school. And that's my whole money for the food and what they need. A warning has come through. Makes me feel shame. Make me feel like I'm a bad mother. (00:46:53)

Megan is caught in a paradoxical situation in which she attempts to enforce her child's attendance at school despite the damage it is causing him. If he does not go to school, she will have her income suspended, further entrenching the poverty she is experiencing, which puts her more at risk of being marked a neglectful parent. The Royal Commission, in contextualising the mistreatment of young First Peoples in detention and the entanglement of youth justice and child welfare, noted that:

> Youth justice and child protection systems come into play when community safeguards, parental responsibility, government services and other protective factors fail to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people or to prevent them from committing crimes.

A lack of education, alongside "poor parenting", was described by the Commission as the "two biggest triggers for children and young people ending up in the youth justice or child protection systems" (White & Gooda, 2017, p. 125). In contrast, employment—despite the lack of jobs for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory because of an influx of "fly in, fly out" (p. 133) primarily white, workforce—was described by the Commission as an "important tool" (p.132) for reducing a young person's engagement with the justice system. According to the Commission, employment promotes for young people "pro-social interactions" and routine, without which the Commission warned children and young people would continue to find themselves "without stimulation and opportunities for the future…[which] will inevitably continue to influence their interaction with the youth justice system" (ibid). Throughout the Commission's report, there is a consistent connection made between employment and living a good productive life, and unemployment (as a result of lack of education) as a condition of inevitable contact with criminal justice.

What is not made explicit in the deployment of the discursive formation of inevitable criminality that functions in relation to Indigenous young people is the historico-political and socio-economic conditions which have brought into being both the poverty that Aboriginal people experience and the reasons why young people and their families disengage with formal education in the first place. These comments resonate profoundly and extend the discursive formation of inevitable criminality as was produced in the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1991), as examined in Chapter Four in this thesis. What is more, sentiments of inevitability were not only revealed in references made to unemployment but also as a by-product of entering the child protection system. The Commission shared stories of young people who had entered into state care at an early age where the "next step" is "contact with the criminal justice system and ultimately detention" (p.10). Yet one of the primary reasons Indigenous children and young people are removed from their families in the Northern Territory, and indeed across Australia, is neglect (White & Gooda, 2017).

The Northern Territory Government defines neglect as "the repeated failure to meet a child's basic physical and emotional necessities of life" (Territory Families, 2018, p. 3). These necessities include shelter, nutrition, personal hygiene, medical care, supervision and notably, education and school attendance. The significant connection between neglect as incidental to poverty in both the historical and contemporary removal of First Peoples' children globally has been widely engaged with (Blackstock, 2009; de Leeuw, 2013a; Tilbury, 2009; S. Young, 2008). Social work scholar Jan Mason (2019, p. 112; see also N. Watson, 2011) suggests that the concept of neglect is foundational to contemporary child protection policies for "state auspices, or condoned, intervention in families" in English-speaking countries such as Britain, USA, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. In the current economic and social climate, which Mason describes as a moment of ontological insecurity across the Western world, there is renewed discourse of surveillance which renders the children of women experiencing poverty "as both 'at risk' and 'risky' within the economic parameters of the era" (p. 117). In asking why critical geography is "strangely silent about geographies of Indigenous families, geographies often headed by Indigenous women", Canadian critical geographer Sarah de Leeuw (2013, p. 60) notes that:

> Child welfare is inextricably attached to particular bodies, homes, and communities; these cannot be generically conceptualized but, instead, must be realized as always constructed within specific geographies and histories of power.

This attachment is nothing new for Indigenous families and communities where neglect was deployed throughout much of the twentieth century as a tool of racialisation in attempts at assimilation to recast difference and experiences of poverty as deficiency, particularly regarding mothering.

In theorising the school-to-prison pipeline in the United States, Chin, Brayboy and Bustamante (2019) note that the interrelationship between these systems, which function for Native American young people as systems of discipline, both reinforce and underscore normative ways of being in the world associated with "ideal (white supremacist) citizenship" (p.33). This reinforcement is evident in discourse that circulates rationalising the existence of a theoretically restorative justice system that is inherently violent and punitive in practice. This punitive system is one where inescapable acts of violence and abuse are committed against Indigenous children and young people by those entrusted with their care.

In the context of the Northern Territory, the trope of the good citizen and the productive and worthy life is drawn on by police in their attempts to put children and young people "on the right path" and by the Royal Commission who note:

> A significant aim of a youth justice system must be the prevention of crime. If achieved, this will keep communities safer, reduce the burden of crime and put children on a path to living a fulfilling and productive life.

This aim was also reinforced by the Northern Territory Government which announced in 2018 a bid to "reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in Alice Springs" through an inter-agency "collaborative approach" to address youth crime. In announcing the initiative, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory Michael Gunner stated: "We need to get young people on the right path and away from the cycle of crime, and to become productive members of our community – not life-long criminals" (Gunner & Wakefield, 2018). Echoing this point, the Commission outlined the aim of detention as rehabilitation—to

prevent further offending "for the benefit of the youth and safety of the community as a whole" (White & Gooda, 2017, p. 12). In emphasising this point, the Commission quoted former Queensland Corrective Services Director-General Keith Hamburger AM, who said:

> … in a civilised society we don't incarcerate people for punishment and treat them brutally. Sadly, it does happen though. But that's not the mission. The mission is, as we've talked about, is to stabilise those people, understand them as individuals, and get some individual personal pathway plans in place to support those people back to a law-abiding society in some way. (ibid)

In this way, within the Australian context, education, child welfare and criminal justice work together as a "filtration system for capitalism, sorting out those who may participate or those subject to the warehousing, labor, and disenfranchisement of people through mass incarceration" (Chin et al., 2019, p. 33). As I have argued throughout this thesis, educational failure is framed as the fault of individual young people and their families and seen as a signification of familial neglect and inevitable criminality. Young First Peoples, in their refusal to engage in economic progress as signified by high rates of unemployment, become subjects of improvement as justified by their relative disadvantage. Thus, development exists as a "liberal alternative to modernity's other solutions to the problem of surplus life: extermination or eugenics" (Duffield, 2007, p. 10). Through the discursive formation of inevitable criminality, that circulates about Indigenous youth incarceration and child protection, poverty conditions and school disengagement are depoliticised as parental failure resulting from individual and family irresponsibility. Furthermore, through the criminal justice discourse that produces this inevitability, Indigenous young people's disengagement from school and engagement with the welfare and criminal justice systems are naturalised.

The framing of poverty's socio-political and racialised conditions as a product of inescapable deficiency masks the deep colonial roots of inequality. Furthermore, this framing ensures a self-perpetuating logic that both legitimises and justifies state intervention. The post-colonising state has set the rules, and in doing so, has determined the parameters by which a young person and a family can be seen to be acting accordingly. These parameters include ensuring school attendance and compliance by linking school attendance to welfare payments despite a contemporary school environment that

Indigenous young people find alienating (Brown, 2019) and a historical relationship between schooling and assimilation. School non-attendance and symptoms of poverty are framed as neglect, and neglect is designated a criminal offence that justifies the removal of children. This removal is despite the evidence that children in care have a higher engagement with criminal justice, and the state-sanctioned removal of children—primarily for reasons of neglect—continues unabated. These parameters severely undermine Indigenous parents and carers and the desires they might harbour for their children—which in the case of Dujuan, include a relevant school curriculum and the opportunity to live on his ancestral Country. Lastly, Indigenous young people's engagement with criminal justice is positioned as an unemployment and education issue; again, in the case of Dujuan, his non-attendance at school is framed as a by-product of parental neglect and behavioural problems. For many young First Peoples, their first encounter with the criminal justice system occurred after a report by school officials to police authorities. Indigenous young people are violently disciplined for not complying with normative settler systems of rule.

Through the discursive formation of inevitable criminality, school failure is positioned by the school itself, not as an inability to support students to engage with curriculum and content relevant to their lifeworlds, but rather students' failure to submit to the Eurocentric and exclusionary order of things. In turn, child welfare and criminal justice systems are framed as enforcing protective measures for non-compliant at-risk Indigenous young people to counter neglect and criminality. Whereas criminal justice, education and child protection are justified in their role as arbiters of safety and cohesion for the civic body, a body which excludes the bodies of Indigenous young people as non-citizens and arguably non-human, rendered as such by these systems which are set up purportedly to protect them.

Indigenous youth out-of-place: Geographical and temporal exclusion

In August of 2018, the Northern Territory government released its population campaign *Boundless Possible* (The Territory Government, 2018). The Territory, described as a place where "ambition and drive lives in harmony with the moments that truly matter", is showcased for its sweeping, spectacular beauty and social diversity. The campaign was created to shift "negative interstate perceptions", attract people and create jobs. The online presence of *Boundless Possible* features links to career opportunities and real estate in the "Top End", enticing its target market:

> One place left in the world with enough silence for your voice to be heard. And enough space for your ideas to come to life … Come for the lifestyle, stay for the opportunities and you'll be rewarded with fast-tracked career progression, a welcoming community and a chance to make a real impact. (The Territory Government, 2018)

"With deep spiritual origins dating back more than 30,000 years", the town of Alice Springs, where *In My Blood It Runs* is set, is described by the campaign as "one of the most diverse and accepting communities in the country", drawing families to the area for "the convenience of schools, parks and activities for the kids." However, this hubristic, romanticised and idyllic picture of "the spiritual and physical heart of Australia" is fundamentally challenged by the presence of Dujuan and other Indigenous young people who live in and on the outskirts of Mparwnte, Alice Springs.

In critically reading this campaign against the backdrop of Indigenous youth incarceration in the Northern Territory, it is clear that the Territory continues to be preoccupied with grounding settlers "in their place" (A. Simpson, 2017, p. 20) by positioning Indigenous political presence as absent and refusal as criminal. These imaginings of the 'Top End' where First Peoples exist primarily as cultural capital to attract non-Indigenous people's settlement work both to deny the ongoing violence experienced by Indigenous people and to recast the Territory as settler socio-cultural space and physical place and thus as white property. This "still settling" (ibid) state of the Territory is reinforced whereby the entitlements and opportunities that accompany

settlement, such as property ownership, education, access to parks and public spaces, are in turn denied Indigenous people.

In an early scene in the film *In My Blood It Runs*, Dujuan and his friends stand atop the escarpment dividing the town of Alice Springs from their home of Hidden Valley Aboriginal Town Camp. Looking over the golf course to their right and the township to their left, one of the boys says: "That is where all the rich mens comes." Dujuan answers in response, "Yeah, they're rich people. How come this mob got clean houses and not us? They got good front, good neighbours. I wish I had one of those houses." The topographical distinction between the town centre of Alice Springs and the marginal Aboriginal town camp is geographical but also alludes to boundaries cut along racialised lines which signify poverty, wealth and corresponding residential patterns. Throughout the film, ontological, temporal and physical boundaries regulate Dujuan's corporeal sense of himself and his physical movement through place and space. This regulation is a reminder that space, as Cameroonian political theorist Achille Mbembe (2008, p. 26) notes, is "the raw material of colonial sovereignty" and violence. Sovereignty, he continues, means occupation, and occupation means "relegating the colonized into a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood." Dujuan's consciousness particularly informed this sense of the intergenerational regulation and containment of and violence experienced by his family members' bodies.

After Dujuan's mother, Mum Megan, receives a letter from child protection requesting a meeting at the school, Dujuan visits his great-Nana Aggie to ask her about her childhood. She asks Dujuan: "What's up?" (00:46:55). And he replies with a question: "Where did you run away from Nan?" (00:47:02). Nan Aggie shares the story of how she escaped being taken from her family by running away from Altunga Mission. Great Nana Aggie walked "a long way" (00:47:30), starting early each morning and sleeping in the hills with no blanket at night. She also tells Dujuan of the children who were taken, "[t]hey used to cry for their mummies" (00:47:47). Those kids, she reflects, "grew up on an island somewhere. They came back when they was grown up. Men and women grown up" (00:48:17). Dujuan leaves Great Nana Aggie's place deeply affected and inspired by her story. In defiance, he asserts:

> This movie is about me. And what I think is: stop taking kids away. That's wrong. I'm not even scared anymore! Me, I can walk up the hill in the middle of the night

> and I can stay in town in the middle of the night. I can walk up and down the street in the dark. (00:49:30)

In Dujuan's statement—as a response to the present risk of his removal and the past removal of children from their families and ancestral Country—he also conflates the risk of his removal with being in particular places at particular times. Removal from his family is the potential ramification for being out of place—in town or out on the street at night. The regulation of his body in space and place extends temporally to its absence from school during school hours or its presence in the town during the day where "attendance and truancy officers conduct regular patrols in public places or communities" (Northern Territory Government, 2019). Nana Carol identifies the disciplining of Dujuan and his body for being out-of-place in how it extends to undermine her role as one of his carers through the police's entanglement with child welfare. She states:

> The police see kids walking the streets, they write a letter and give it to the welfare and the welfare go and see the parents of the children. I'm a strong grandmother. They're not going to take my grandchildren away from me. (00:51:15)

Dujuan's observations about where he feels entitled to be versus the reality of the immense surveillance of his physical movement through the town where he lives are made in the context of mounting calls for a nightly curfew for young people in Alice Springs. Just before Dujuan gets expelled permanently from school, there is a scene where he is standing outside in the night dressed in a hooded jumper and tracksuit. Lighting a firework, he says: "Hold it, chuck it. That's my way" (01:03:00). As the fireworks twinkle against the night sky, Dujuan's voice over tells the story of how he was arrested the night before:

> Last night went to disco, had fun. Went to Anzac Oval played football … from there, down creek. Out the front of library and from there, cops came, chased us, put us in the paddy-wagon … I've been in a paddy-wagon four times in a row. Every time I jump in a paddy-wagon I always start to feel funny. It's like you're in a little box, and you can't get out. I just ranned away, to get away. I'll be free. (01:03:03).

Dujuan's commentary is offset by an announcement made in 2017 detailing the Northern Territory police commissioner's plan to "send a unit of camouflaged specialised

police with military grade weapons to patrol Alice Springs at night" (Zillman, 2017). As part of the Australian government's national counter-terrorism task force, the patrols, said Police Commissioner Kershaw, would "act as surveillance" (ibid), particularly concerning young people in response to "information around Alice Springs of kids jumping onto roofs of hotels and stealing people's wallets and all sorts of things." The Police Commissioner acknowledged that some of the children approached by camouflaged task-force officers could be as young as ten, the age of Dujuan at the time of filming. In stating that the deployment of the task-force was based "on intelligence and information that the community give us", Kershaw said, "for example, if someone says there's been a group of youths hanging out in the area—we may not have seen them— but we've got to validate that information" (ibid). He also flagged that these children's surveillance would act as a preventative measure by identifying young people out on the streets "because of things like domestic violence" before they could commit a crime. In doing so, the police would be working with child protection and other agencies "to answer how do we provide that safe place for these kids to go to and keep them on the right path." The Commissioner ended his announcement by reinforcing his main priority: "we're here to uphold and maintain social order." Police Commissioner Kershaw made these statements only a week after the Royal Commission delivered its Detention and Child Welfare Systems report. The deployment of this camouflaged task-force was despite the Royal Commission's findings that public perceptions of crime perpetrated by young people were not evidence-based nor supported by data. Furthermore, as detailed by Kershaw, the intensified surveillance of young people expressly reinforced the Royal Commission's findings that Northern Territory police overcharge children and young people (see White & Gooda, 2017, p. 248).

In Kershaw's announcement, Indigenous young people and children are both victimised—as outcast from unsafe homes—while simultaneously criminalised as a threat to social order. These statements render First Peoples' private sphere public for protection and keeping Indigenous children "safe" while ensuring the commons—the public cultural and social spaces seemingly accessible to all—are off-limits to Indigenous young people. Through representations of Indigenous young people as both victim and criminal they, and, by extension their families, come under the purview of state intervention. There is no safe place or space just to be.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that *In My Blood It Runs* shows how Dujuan and his family disrupt the discursive formations of inevitable criminality and inescapable deficiency and how they are disciplined for this disruption. The story of Dujuan and his experience of navigating and resisting the various systems which seek to regulate his everyday reality reveal how discourses of education and criminal justice underpin *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth. Via these conceptions, Indigenous young people are ascribed as deviant from and a threat to the normative body politic. These ascriptions are underpinned by discursive strategies deployed in criminal justice and education discourse that have emerged since the 1970s—as traced in previous chapters—which both mark and normalise Indigenous damage, justifying the state's remediation of that damage through intervention.

In Dujuan's address to the United Nations, he said, "What I want is a normal life of just being me. I want to be allowed to be an Aboriginal person, living on my land with my family and having a good life" (Hoosan, 2019). Dujuan's version of a good life in conjunction with his refusal to perform 'the good citizen' is antithetical to the utilitarian purpose of education for employment while his presence in the township, and what it represents, threaten Western conceptions of property and inherently undermine the ontological coding of Alice Springs as a settler space. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2014, pp. 5–6) note the enmeshing of epistemic, geographical and relational forms of violence, whereby in the process of settler colonialism:

> … land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage. Indigenous peoples must be erased, must be made into ghosts.

Geographer Nicholas Blomley (2003, p. 124) underscores the history of the entanglement of violence and Western law and its focal point—property—in stating that "the space of the savage was one of the absence of law and property and the concomitant presence of violence." This articulation of "savage space" foundational to the rule, reason

and order of law "rests on the definition of a violent world of nonlaw." Thus "Western notions of property are deeply invested in a colonial geography, a white mythology, in which the racialized figure of the savage plays a central role" (ibid). In analysing the temporal and geographic contingency of white supremacy, Bonds and Inwood (2016, p. 722) argue that "interactions between hierarchies of people and hierarchies of space create a white supremacist reality within settler societies." *In My Blood It Runs* reveals geographies of state-sanctioned violence as justified by Indigenous youth's unruly presence. This violence depends simultaneously on imaginaries of space such as *Boundless Possible* and representations of Indigenous people, and Indigenous young people specifically, as outlaws or lawless. The literal implications of these representations manifest in the racialisation, surveillance, containment and regulation of Indigenous child bodies in the maintenance of the rule of law to ensure white community safety and protection of white private and public property. In the next chapter, I draw on the live-action television series *Thalu* (2020) as a futurist text and fugitive practice which aides in imagining otherwise relations to land beyond those ascribed by linear temporal conceptions of progress and development and otherwise modes of being beyond the normative demands made of education and criminal justice. As a text that imagines otherwise, *Thalu* values young First Peoples and children not only for Indigenous futurity but also for our world's future health and well-being more generally.

Chapter Seven - Fugitive futures: Reimagining conceptions of Indigenous youth

> I write, and the world does not close in on me. It does not grow smaller. It moves in the direction of what is open, future, possible. I imagine and the act of imagination revives me. I am not fossilized or paralysed in the face of predators.
>
> — David Grossman (2008, p. 65), *Writing in The Dark: Essays on Literature and Politics*

> Armed with spirit and the teachings of our ancestors, all our relations behind us, we are living the Indigenous future. We are the descendants of a future imaginary that has already passed; the outcome of the intentions, resistance, and survivance of our ancestors.
>
> — Lindsay Nixon (2020, p. 332), *Visual Cultures of Indigenous Futurism*

> Indigenous peoples lived through the end of worlds, but we did not end, and nor did our stories or our cultures.
>
> — Ambelin Kwaymullina (2017, p. 39), *Indigenous Standpoints, Indigenous Stories, Indigenous Futures*

Introduction

Yindjibarndi seventeen-year-old Maxie Coppin stands atop a rocky outcrop overlooking the train line that cuts through Ngarluma country, hauling iron ore from mines across the Pilbara to various seaports along the west coast. Describing his Country as the main inspiration for his art, Max says: “the train line passes Hanning Dam and then gets right up to the table lands, my Grandmothers’ Country. Country is a beautiful thing. Looked after you, take care of you, help you, because that’s who you are” (S. Campbell, 2019). In

Max's near future, he wants to become a train driver. A job in the extractive resource industry, one of the only sources of employment available to him anywhere near the place he and his ancestors have always called home. But Max also says that train driving would prepare him for the role he imagines he would take on in a future world further from the present time, as a driver of his spaceship. As soon we finish my ship, he says, "I'll be going out to space mining some asteroids and they can stop mining our land. Wouldn't that be wicked?" (ibid.). Max finishes this sentence as a train passes behind him, carrying seemingly never-ending moving mounds of iron ore extracted from deep within his country.

Indigenous futurism enables Indigenous storytellers to challenge the present, revealing its dystopian nature, while refusing the inevitability of the conditions which produce it as part of the now and into the future. Since the publication of the award-winning comic book series Neomad (*Neomad: Space Junk*, 2013)—which Max was involved in creating—young people who come from Roebourne and its surrounds have been part of producing a textual revelation of Indigenous futurism which take as a point of contestation the goliath extractive industries which have worked their land since the 1960s. The people of Roebourne hail from tracts of resource rich-land and thus experience the unmediated impact of an imperious global economic system contingent on continuous growth and development, which requires "an insatiable supply of natural resources…often located on indigenous territories" (Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 217).

Max's future imaginary, where mining no longer works to destroy his land, is profound, despite the real possibility that he will eventually take up work in the industry he charges as harming his Country. Indigenous futurism draws on and responds to present harm in order to imagine alternative futures. Max's ancestral claim through his grandmother to his Country, and the strength he draws from that connection, inspires his articulation of a future world where mining would no longer exist on his land. In Max's present and future imaginary, land is recast not in its value as an economic resource but integral to his spiritual and physical well-being. Max's spaceship emerges from what Indigenous futurist Lindsey Nixon (2020, p. 323) terms a catalogue of science fictive imageries which "affords Indigenous artists a creative space to respond to the dystopian

now…fuelled by resource extraction and environmental contamination, completely alternative to our traditional ways of being and knowing."

Given the history of attempted settler colonial erasure of Indigenous peoples as it has and continues to work on the bodies of Indigenous children and young people, in this chapter, I ask: what does an engagement with Indigenous futurisms enable when thinking through the ways Indigenous young people have been represented? This chapter theorises the fugitive futures of Indigenous young people, futures beyond the arrest the linear development narrative; a narrative that figures economic development as societal progress and success in the standard transition from education-to-employment as individual progress. At the centre of this theorising is the five-part live-action series *Thalu* (2020*)*, which Max advised on and was filmed in and around the small coastal town of Roebourne in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, where he is from. The story of *Thalu* tells of an indeterminant future when an ominous dust cloud, called the Takers, is making the land and its people sick. In response, seven children are guided by the wisdom of their Elders on a journey of recuperation. Along the way, these young people gather weapons—petroglyph talismans, knowledge, and courage—to take to a sacred place and invoke the power necessary to defeat the greedy Takers and save our future world.

As an Indigenous text, *Thalu* is co-written by young First Peoples writers including Nayuka Gorrie, Donny Imberlong, Daniel Woodhead and Samuel Paynter, and produced by local man Tyson Mowarin who is the father of one of the young actors in the series, Sharliya Mowarin. This text is part of a revelation of First Peoples futurisms globally responding to the settler colonial present by centring Indigenous children and young people. In Australia, this includes Waanyi writer Alexis Wright's (2016) award-winning dystopian epic *The Swan Book,* the sci-fi young adult trilogy *The Tribe* series authored by Palkyu author Ambelin Kwaymullina (2012, 2013, 2017), and the *Neomad* (*Neomad: Space Junk*, 2013) comic book series, which served as the inspiration for *Thalu*—co-written and illustrated by several children from Roebourne in the Pilbara, including Max. Texts like these are evocative in the way they disarticulate Indigenous children and young people from postcolonizing conceptions of Indigenous child and youthhood. The import of this is further reinforced by the significance of these texts for their intended audiences, including Indigenous children and young people. Thus, the space

created between the interplay of text and audience is one where readers and viewers are encouraged to imagine futures that do not foreclose the continuing and generative existence of First Peoples.

Indigenous futurism was first articulated by Anishinaabe futurist Grace Dillon (2012, 2016) and inspired by Afro-futurism (Womack, 2013). It works to invert reality, destabilising postcolonizing analyses of Indigeneity and blackness. Reinforcing how Afro-futurism enables an analysis informed but not bound by historical conceptions of blackness, in Ytasha Womack's (2013, p.16) says it "stretches the imagination far beyond the conventions of our time and the horizons of expectations and kicks the box of normalcy and preconceived ideas of blackness out of the solar system." Like Afro-futurism, Indigenous futurisms make demands of the present and the past by imagining Indigenous-centred future worlds "liberated by the imagination" (Dillon, 2012, p. 11). In doing so, Indigenous futurist texts can be critically engaged with as assertions of self-determination and sovereignty which "de facto offer resistance to the necropolitics of powerful governments" (Dillon, 2016, p. 4).

Before theorising *Thalu* as Indigenous futurism, as a story of survivance and as a fugitive practice, I attend to the context of its emergence as an essential part of engaging with it as an Indigenous text. In doing so, I respond to literary scholar and Cherokee writer Daniel Heath Justice's (2016, p. 24) invocation that to understand Indigenous literatures, "it is both intellectually and ethically imperative to know something about the meaningful contexts from which those literatures emerge and with which those literatures are engaged." Central to this chapter is *Thalu* as a futurist text, but fundamental to the critical engagement with this text is a sensibility of the historical and contemporary context and, importantly, the place—the town of Roebourne in the Pilbara—from which it emerges. Attending to this context extends a reading of *Thalu* as a text to a critical reading of what the text *makes possible.*

The context: Making futures possible

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On 26th of May 1997, the *Bringing Them Home* (Wilkie, 1997) report was tabled in Federal Parliament. The Report served to prompt recognition and redress and to witness the testimonies of First Peoples who were taken away from their families as children throughout the twentieth century in Australia. Since 1998, National Sorry Day is held on the 26th of May and commemorates the immeasurable pain and trauma Stolen Generation’s people and their families experienced. The day after Sorry Day signals the beginning of National Reconciliation Week (first held in 1997), part of an annual agenda which seeks to “inspire and enable all Australians to build relationships, respect and trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians” (Reconciliation Australia 2020). Beyond this week, ‘reconciliation’ in Australia is formally and recognisably enacted by the uptake and implementation by various organisations and institutions of Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP), which provide a guide and measure of accountability for their engagements with Indigenous peoples.

On National Sorry Day this year—just five weeks after *Thalu* premiered on the Australian television network SBS and on the eve of Reconciliation Week 2020, it was reported that Juukan Gorge in the Pilbara where *Thalu* is set had been detonated by Australian mining giant Rio Tinto without the knowledge or consent of the sovereign custodians and owners of the unceded territories on which it is located. Rio Tinto is endorsed as an organisation that holds the highest ‘elevate’ RAP status and “joins a select group of organisations that have gone above and beyond ‘business as usual’ to embed reconciliation into their core business practices and decision-making at the highest level” (Rio Tinto Pty Ltd, 2016, p. 7). Juukan Gorge is of profound spiritual and historical significance to the Ngarluma, Yaburara, Mardudhunera, Yindjibarndi, and Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo peoples, on whose Country it is located. It was also one of the oldest sites of human habitation recorded in terms of Western science and time. The people of that area have used it for at least 46,000 years (Webb, 2014).

Over the last four decades, the Pilbara region in the north-west of Australia has been arrested as a trove of immense untapped mining potential and, indivisibly, as a place where unmitigated violence against First Peoples lands and bodies has been enacted.

Following the discovery of iron ore and oil and gas off the Pilbara coast in the 1960s, the largest gas plant in the world, the North West Gas Shelf, began production in 1984. The year before drilling commenced, 55 kilometres east of the site, the town of Roebourne was thrown into a state of mourning and despair with the death of 16-year-old John Pat. John Pat (Yindjibarndi) died on 28th of September 1983, from bleeding on the brain and 'many other injuries' (Johnston, 1991), including a torn aorta and two broken ribs. His injuries were sustained at the hands of four off-duty police officers and a police aide outside the local pub. John Pat died in the lockup in the hour after his arrest. While the officers who killed John Pat were charged with manslaughter, they were all acquitted at trial. Commissioner Johnston, who investigated John Pat's case, said that his "death at the age of sixteen in the lockup of the Roebourne Police Station was one of the major catalysts behind national and international demands for a Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody" (Johnston, 1991, p 36). In parallel to Juukan Gorge's destruction, Sorry Day 2020 also coincided with the brutal and avoidable death in police custody of African American man George Floyd. George Floyd's murder prompted protests across the world, and in Australia reignited and made visible First People's ongoing fight against black deaths in prison and police custody. It also brought back into focus the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody's failure to effect change amidst the hyper-incarceration and continuing violence experienced by First Peoples at the carceral state's hands.

The Pilbara region is where Juukan Gorge is located and where John Pat was killed. It is also where the "troubled northwest town of Roebourne" as the Mining Monthly (*FMG's Roebourne Mission*, 2019) described it, is located. The West Australian Government established Roebourne as a place of internment for First Peoples who had been moved off their tribal lands by successive waves of pastoralism and mining throughout the twentieth century. When iron ore was discovered, prompting the West Australian mineral boom of the 1970s, Roebourne was flooded by thousands of single white working men before the government began building Karratha 30 kilometres west of the original town. With the establishment of Karratha, the well-resourced school, supermarket and hospital were re-located there while the region's prison was rebuilt and remained in Roebourne.

In the 1993 the documentary film *Exile and the Kingdom* (Rijavec & Solomon, 1993) was made by the late Yindjibarndi and Ngarluma Elder Roger Solomon as a community response to John Pat's death. Soloman notes that at the same time as the establishment of Karratha:

> … they were creating a welfare trap in Roebourne. All the promises made by politicians … about the benefits everyone would get from mining development never reached our town. Since so many services and businesses moved out, our main industry has become welfare. Most businesses that are left only survive by cashing in on our welfare checks and the money brought in by the government agencies. One of the biggest government departments left in town today is the police.

The violence experienced by the Aboriginal people of Roebourne, particularly women and children, with the influx of white mining workers was immeasurable (Rijavec & Solomon, 1993; see also Gilmore et al., 2016). So too were the impacts of removing generations of children and families off their ancestral homelands to this coastal town to enable the clearing of land for pastoralism and mining, a town where the primary services were the prison and police. Drawing a connection between the past and the present, Solomon (Rijavec & Solomon, 1993) notes:

> The old colonial jail was built in 1887 to get our people out of the way of the squatters and their sheep. Today, the Roebourne Regional Prison does much the same job while locking away the problems caused by development and idiotic government planning.

The recent destruction of Juukan Gorge is far from exceptional. Rather it is preceded by decades of ruin left in the wake of the mining industry's work in the region. This ruin includes Murujuga, commonly known as the Burrup Peninsula, where over a million ancient petroglyphs have been carved into stones that are tens of thousands of years old. In reference to Murujuga, Mowarin (2017), who produced *Thalu,* says:

> There's many places around the world that have rock art. But nobody knows who created them. For the civilizations that did create them, have long gone. But we know who created our ones. Our old people. These petroglyphs are actually ten times older than the pyramids. I don't think people would allow anyone else to destroy or alter *them* in any way. But that didn't stop the government giving

> approvals to build the biggest gas plant in the Southern Hemisphere, right here in the middle of Murujuga.

For Tyson Mowarin, the late Roger Soloman, and the children from Roebourne who star in *Thalu* (2020), the entanglement of everyday life with the tangible impacts of resource extraction are immediate. These tangible impacts can be located in Juukan Gorge's destruction and John Pat's death, which still resound in the townspeople's living memory. It is also evident in the continuing over-policing in the region and the wilful neglect and failure of the West Australian government to value and protect Indigenous heritage sites such as Juukan Gorge at the risk of impeding resource development.

The resource extraction industry in the Pilbara is another iteration of development, like pastoralism, which has as its necessary pre-condition the removal and erasure of First Peoples. In making the connection between Indigenous land and Indigenous bodies and foregrounding the importance of Indigenous young people for both the future of settler colonialism *and* Indigenous people, the Canadian-based Indigenous Youth Sexual Health Network and Native Women's Alliance (2018, p. 218) make the point that:

> … the end goal of colonization has always been the erasure of Indigenous peoples in order to gain access to their lands and territories. This is why women and young people—those who carry forward life and create the next generation—have been, and continue to be … impacted by the processes of patriarchy, land dispossession and violence.

I weave these examples together—the occasion of Sorry Day 2020 as the commemoration of state-sanctioned removal of Indigenous children from their families; the destruction of Juukan Gorge; the murder of George Floyd; and the killing of John Pat in Roebourne where *Thalu* was filmed—to gesture to an entanglement of local and global processes which form the context from which *Thalu* as a text has emerged. This critical engagement with the context of *Thalu*'s emergence intends to shift and broaden the analysis of the text to what the text *makes possible* (Tuck & Recollet, 2016). This focus on both text and its context refuses to render *Thalu* as Tuck and Recollet (2016, p. 18) note in their engagement with Native feminist texts as "static or still," but rather as a dynamic response to the contingencies that brought it into being. To read *Thalu* (2020) in context as an Indigenous futurist text is also to assert the profundity of its emergence from a place and time where governments and private enterprise have continually demonstrated

homicidal intentions toward Indigenous life. *Thalu* thus reconfigures the landscape by re-inscribing these children into it and undermines the settler colonial possession of the future by normalising the future as Indigenous as I argue in the next section.

Normalising Indigenous futures

Thalu (Mowarin et al., 2020) begins with Hudson, Noodles and Keile running across an expanse of grassland with an ominous dust cloud rumbling behind them. Up on a hill, three girls, Samara, Lali and Em, reveal themselves to the boys, asking: "Where you mob from?" (00:01:18) The boys point to the dust cloud: "The cloud was coming. Making everyone sick, making the country sick. The old people told us to get away" (00:01:36). After the kids find a freshwater hole and have a feed of fish cooked on a fire, they begin to argue about the quickest way to get past a large rocky hill—around or over? The tension of the moment is broken when they smell damper cooking. Heading toward the smell of baking bread, they arrive at a billowing beautifully coloured fabric canopy, where they meet two Nannas playing cards inside. The Nannas signal they were expecting the kid's arrival and demand the children choose their game, making a wager with them in exchange for damper and information: "Everybody's got something they want to know, sometimes they just don't know it" (00:05:17). One Nanna wagers; if the children win, they get some damper; if they lose, Kiele has to stay behind, forever, rubbing their feet and making them cups of tea. After losing once in a game of gin rummy and in response to the offer of another chance, Hudson chooses a game of snap, knowing he is quicker than the Elders challenging him. Sure enough, he wins and asks: "Well, tell us about that cloud?" (00:06:58)

"Well it's hungry, and it's greedy and its eating everything. Can it be stopped? Yes, it can. Can it be turned back on itself? Maybe. But to stand a chance you mob will have to stick together" (00:07:00), says one Nanna revealing the purpose of their journey as more than an escape— "On your travels you will find eight stones and a key, all marked. When you find them. Hold them. You'll be needing them" (00:07:18). The kids leave the tent and embark on the rest of their journey with purpose. Holding the advice and guidance of the Nannas, they encounter strange, absurd and humorous characters who

reveal clues and essential information which serves to aid them in their quest to stop the ominous cloud. One of these characters is a man hiding up a tree from a little horse. After they lead the horse away and encourage the man to come down, Hudson asks, "you needed to say something to us?"

> *Man Up The Tree:* Inside that cloud are the Takers, bad fellas you want to stay away from them.
> *Kiele:* Who are they?
> *Man Up A Tree:* I dunno, but I reckon I know where they're going—the thalu.
> *Keile:* It's a secret place. My grandfather told me about it; it's a special place, a powerful place.
> *Samara:* We have to get to the thalu before the Takers do …
> (00:23:09)

The children travel with urgency collecting information and the petroglyph stones needed to protect the thalu and combat the Takers. In the last episode (Page-Lochard, 2020), they arrive at the place where they have to arrange the stones to generate a "real big wind to clear away all the dust" (00:19:02) and destroy the fast-approaching cloud. Here it's revealed that the key is one of the children themselves, Vinka, who holds what is needed to defeat the Takers. Vinka summons the power of the thalu and sends the wind toward the raging dust cloud. The Takers are defeated. As the dust settles, a massive mound of rusted and broken machinery is revealed.

As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, the inevitable death of Indigenous people—as an ongoing postcolonizing aspiration of the settler colonial state—has animated settler colonialism's "persistent drive to ultimately supersede the conditions of its operation", an aim which includes the extinguishment of "indigenous alterities" (Veracini, 2011b, p. 3). This extinguishment has figured in the at-risking of Indigenous young people justifying their actual arrest in the criminal justice system and figurative arrest in the discursive production of inescapable deficiency. *Thalu* not only locates risk in the tangible resource extraction industry as represented by the Takers but in the linear progress narrative which rationalises the mining industry's existence as contingent on the destruction of land—and thus Indigenous people, as the valued and valuable presence in place.

These seven young people are at the centre of this moment as the saviours of our future world. Their aim is to stop the Takers, who are making people and Country sick. In rescuing the world from the Takers, economic development and industry, as the bulwark of contemporary settler colonialism, are wholly undermined. So too is the endpoint of settler colonial progress as the elimination of the native. While Indigenous peoples' continued existence renders settler sovereignty as unfinished business, part of imagining settler colonialism as a completed project is to figure a future where Indigenous people no longer exist. Through this linear development narrative, whiteness possesses the future. This future is one of economic prosperity incurred via the dispossession of Indigenous land. Throughout successive waves of intervention into Indigenous peoples' lives, Indigenous children and young people as the present future have been an integral site in the attempt to bring this settler colonial future—one where Indigenous people and claims to land are absent—into being. With this absence, the nation-state and private enterprise can reap the benefit of unimpeded access to these lands, valued and valuable only as resources. *Thalu* imagines an Indigenous future dependent on the existence and power of Indigenous children, a power contingent on their connection to and knowledge of Country and the respect they hold for their Elders and ancestors. Thus, *Thalu* is a refusal to accept that land's value is its utility as a resource for global markets while simultaneously negating presumptions about the absence of sovereign Indigenous futures, and thus pasts and the present. As Indigenous Futurism, *Thalu* is "not the product of a victimized people's wishful amelioration of their past, but instead a continuation of a spiritual and cultural path that remains unbroken by genocide and war" (Dillon, 2016, p. 2).

Throughout *Thalu,* Indigenous women and young people, particularly girls, and the land/Country are at the centre of the quest to defeat the Takers. The Nannas sagely guide the children, investing in them the responsibility to save the world; the girls within the group often lead the journey, and Vinka is the key who holds what is needed to invoke the sacred power of thalu in the contest against the Takers. In describing *Thalu* as a series that follows children travelling across a seemingly remote landscape with little food and water in escape of a foreboding enemy, the text could be read as an apocalyptic dystopian account of the future. If it were any other children, particularly non-Indigenous children, perhaps it would be a story of dislocation in an unfamiliar landscape. Yet, Samara, Hudson, Vinka, Keile, Em, Noodles and Lali are not lost children. Instead, they hold an

intimate relationship with Country as they travel through it and are thus unquestionably located in every moment throughout the series where they should be—both geographically and temporally. In this way, *Thalu* recuperates the figure of the Indigenous child through the significance and symbolism of the future. This recuperation works to disrupt the linear development narrative that rationalises violence on the land and its necessary pre-condition, violence on Indigenous bodies.

In collaboration with the Women's Earth Alliance, in the context of Canada, the Native Youth Sexual Health Network (Konsmo & Pacheco, 2016, p. 2) define environmental violence as the:

> … disproportionate and often devastating impacts that the conscious and deliberate proliferation of environmental toxins and industrial development (including extraction, production, export and release) have on Indigenous women, children and future generations, without regard from States or corporations for their severe and ongoing harm.

The co-constitutive relationship between the knowledge of women Elders, land, bodies and young people as the future is made explicit throughout *Thalu*, where the Takers' conduct is "making everyone sick, making the country sick." The centrality of this relationship to the narrative holds power in its naming. For Indigenous communities, the relationship between land and body create a powerful intersection that "when overlooked or discounted, can threaten their very existence" (Indigenous Youth Sexual Health Network and Native Women's Alliance, 2018, p. 2). *Thalu* attends to this relationship as imperative to an Indigenous future while also signalling this as its condition as the focus of destruction wrought by the Takers. Violence on the land cannot be separated from the violence experienced by Indigenous people. In response to this violence in the series, there is a subversion of taken-for-granted understandings of progress in the location of the young people as at home in, and indeed the saviours of, the future. To save the future is to save the land and people from what is making them sick—the insatiable and greedy extractive industry and what it represents in the form of the Takers. *Thalu* works to normalise the future as Indigenous while refusing to normalise environmental violence and thus violence against Indigenous peoples. In establishing the future in this way, the

existence and power of Indigenous young people in the present are simultaneously asserted.

Fugitive futures: Escaping registers of damage and criminality

Throughout *Thalu,* the children travel with urgency, seeking to arrive at the powerful place fully prepared to defeat the Takers and save the world. Time is measured only by the impending dust cloud that rumbles behind them throughout their journey, compelling them to continue when they become distracted or delayed by the characters they encounter along the way. Despite this urgency to arrive at the thalu in time to defeat the Takers, their movement is primarily guided and influenced by the landscape—the need to find shade, water and food, the desire to collect bush-lollies when they arrive at a place where they are plentiful, the decision to go around or over a rocky outcrop. One of the only features that locates the children in a particular place is their use of ancestral language throughout the series, yet in every other way, *Thalu* defies temporal or spatial location in its suspension in an unnamed landscape in parallel to the absence of any markers of time. Beyond the urgency to reach the thalu, time is not only indeterminate but its linearity is confounded over and over again as the children encounter characters who appear and disappear, fade away and reappear, who are stuck in time or unaware of it. They meet shadow boxers who have been sparring since time immemorial (Mowarin, 2020) and brothers who have grown old over decades since they fought about the ingredients in a kangaroo tail stew and can't remember, let alone agree, when their impasse first began (Page-Lochard, 2020). They are also guided by ancestors who appear at significant moments throughout their journey.

One of the features often deployed within Indigenous futurism is a playfulness with time and the conflation of past, present and future. This playfulness is subversive in the way it refuses colonial time and the hegemony of its linearity. Indigenous futurist Elizabeth LaPensée talks about how Indigenous futurisms recognise "space-time as simultaneously past, present, and future, and therefore futurism is as much about the future as it is about right now." For LaPensée, this presencing of the future in the now "requires and enables telling alternate histories [and] imagining a future where unceded territories are taken back." (LePensée in Roanhorse et al., 2017). To imagine this kind of

future as fugitive suggests Eric Ritskes (2017, p. 85) there must be a rupture or break from:

> … the definitions the world that colonialism has created, there must be a fugitive futurity that refuses recognition and integration, that remains irrecuperable to colonial being, sensing and knowing, and that creatively imagines and builds futures beyond the limits of colonial forms of knowing, relating, and being.

When engaged with for its evocation of a fugitive aesthetic, *Thalu* forces movement away from both the limited and limiting colonial conceptions of Indigenous youth as they have been figured through the discursive formation of inescapable deficiency and inevitable criminality but also from any standpoint where these colonial conceptions make sense, let alone can be assumed as common sense. Through this evocation, *Thalu* deeply troubles the way conceptions of Indigenous youth are grafted, though the linear development narrative, to educational success and registers of risk and criminality.

The evocation of fugitivity is evidenced explicitly in the series when the children's curiosity is piqued by a structure up on a hill that looks like an old, abandoned water tank (Curtis, 2020). While five out of the seven go inside, Kiele and Samara do not have a good feeling about the place and choose not to enter. As their eyes adjust from the brightness outside to the shadowy interior, Hudson says: "Looks like something from the old days" to which Lali replies: "The real old days" (00:02:44). Then a teacher, played by Trisha Moreton-Thomas (Anmatyerr), appears behind them, locking them in. Not long after the kids inside start plotting how they are going to escape: "Miss, I need to go to the toilet", says Lali (00:06:25). In refusing this request, the teacher replies, "Last time I let kids out of my class, they never came back".

> *Hudson:* When was that?
> *Teacher:* 20, 40 years ago. Maybe 100. It's hard to keep track of time in a cupboard.
> (00:06:34)

While the children are trapped inside, Kiele and Samara on the outside feel the urgency of the Takers approaching and start plotting how to free the others. After

dismissing Keile's suggested rescue plans, Samara has a revelation. Talking to Hudson—who is by now in detention for talking—through a window, Samara says: "Listen up, this is what you gotta do. You know how teachers hate nits?" (00:09:57) As Hudson is released from detention, walking back to his seat, he shares the plan with the others: "Hey, Samara has a plan. We're all gonna pretend we have nits" (00:10:33). All the kids start scratching as the teacher overhears the conversation and starts screaming and scratching her head: "Nits? I can't have those parasites in my classroom! Out now!" (00:11:03) As they tumble out of the building, the urgency propelling them on their journey intensifies as the taker cloud rumbles loudly on the horizon.

The school building in these scenes is a relic of the past. As the children step across the threshold into the classroom, they enter a time warp of shadowy recesses, old wooden desks, chalkboards and slate tablets. There is an absurdity to the teacher's demands for the young people to comply with her rules and remain quiet during the math lesson. Despite finding out later that one of the children enjoys maths and intends on returning to the classroom once the Takers are defeated, the lessons in these scenes are rendered irrelevant in the face of the impending destruction the Takers will inflict on the people and the land if they are not stopped. In the present moment, Indigenous children have historically and are currently propelled into the category of youth so systems of criminal justice and education can recognise and respond to them with violence. Therefore, this evocation of fugitivity provides an entry point to question formal education's centrality in places like Roebourne. Particularly when the utility of schooling lies in qualifying young people to work in one of the only available industries on their Country, paradoxically involved in its destruction. Read in this way, *Thalu* forces a consideration of what matters to the people who have created it. These children's non-compliant actions are figured as heroic within a futurist framework and are juxtaposed against the destructive implications of linear progress and economic development as represented by the Takers.

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced the story of Max and his future imaginary, which enabled him to transcend the paradox of the present. The present moment for Max is one where he desires to stay on his Country. But to do so and to conform to the demands of the linear progress narrative, he would take a job in the mining

industry that he identified as harming the very thing he sees as giving him life. Like Max's future imaginary, *Thalu* compels an engagement with conceptualisations of Indigenous young people, which are untethered from institutional and political discourses that have only thus far located Indigeneity as deficient, criminal or, if successful in normative systems of education, exceptional. These binding registers not only disable a meaningful reading of *Thalu* as a text which signals the desires and future imaginaries of the people who created it.

Thalu figures Indigenous childhood as transcendent of current discourses, which dictate what can be known about Indigenous children and young people. It presents a refusal to suspend young people within discourses that currently circulate in relation to them, justifying interventions into their lifeworlds and delineating the frameworks through which their actions, intentions and desires can be interpreted. In *Stolen Life*, Fred Moten (2018, p. 131) writes that:

> Fugitivity, then, is a desire for and a spirit of escape and transgression of the proper and the proposed. It's a desire for the outside, for a playing or being outside, an outlaw edge proper to the now always already improper voice or instrument.

The young people in *Thalu* are fugitives. Mowarin and the creators of the series positions them as transcendent of current limitations that circumscribe how Indigenous young people are positioned, understood and responded to within policy, the academy, media, education and criminal justice. Yet as young First Peoples, they are respectful of their Elders and intimately invested in their Country's well-being.

One of this thesis's guiding intentions was to consider how Indigenous young people have come to be so knowable. As I have outlined in previous chapters, this legibility, as it has worked through and been reinforced by censuses, research, statistics, policy documents and government reviews, has served a particular purpose, one which justified interventions into the everyday lived realities of Indigenous young people—and indeed Indigenous families and communities more broadly, across the country. *Thalu* renders Indigenous child and youth-hoods as illegible to these frameworks. Thus as a text it orients toward and responds to the particularities of the Pilbara region's colonial history *through* an assertion of the ongoing sovereign relationship to land of the Indigenous

peoples of that place. In doing so, it opens up a different world "than those at play in dominant settler orderings, articulations, and reckonings of time" (Rifkin, 2017, p. 3). In this way, it may also be read as what Mark Rifkin describes as a move to "refocus the discourse" to the:

> … the continued commitment of Indigenous peoples to telling their own stories in their own ways [which] often rupture settler-colonial national narratives and dominant understandings of the trajectory of history. Vanishing end point of settler colonialism.

Rather than being at-risk themselves, these young people are saviours of a world which is at risk of destruction from a force positioned within linear progress narratives as the way forward. This way forward is represented in *Thalu* as the end of the world rather than integral to its future. The world normalised within the live-action series is one where Indigenous young people are centred and indeed central.

Conclusion

In my engagement with *Thalu,* I have considered the importance of First Peoples stories that fundamentally reimagine, and indeed normalise, the future as sustained by and centred on Indigenous children and young people. Drawing on *Thalu* as an Indigenous futurist text and Indigenous futurism as a framework of critique, this chapter follows these seven colourfully-clad kids as they travel with purpose across the mudflats, along the coast and up rocky outcrops of their Country to save our future world. While this children's television series appears to be a humorous and light-hearted story of camaraderie, I suggest it can also be read as what White Earth Ojibwe writer and theorist Gerald Vizenor (1998, p. 15) (2008) calls a story of survivance—as "more than survival, more than endurance or mere response … [as] an active presence … an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (p.15). Read as a survivance story, *Thalu* forces a recognition of the profundity of locating Indigenous young people in the future presently. This move is particularly profound when done so in a place like the Pilbara, which is the coalface of the Australian resource extraction industry and the location of the world's largest gas plant.

In making these claims, *Thalu* is a text that works to normalise the future as Indigenous while refusing to normalise environmental violence and thus violence against Indigenous peoples. When I say normalising the future as Indigenous, I resonate with Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013, p. 80) who say that in making a commitment to Indigenous futurity, the existence of non-Indigenous peoples on the lands of First Peoples is not foreclosed. However, settler colonialism, its logics and epistemologies are. "That is to say", they continue "that Indigenous futurity does not require the erasure of now-settlers in the ways that settler futurity requires [the erasure] of Indigenous peoples." Thus *Thalu* creates a space for alternative lives which elude the coded postcolonizing logics of the linear development narrative. This space is important in undermining the inevitability of settler colonialism which locates its endpoint in the replacement of Indigenous peoples and our connection to place with industries and markers of neoliberal progress. By imagining Indigenous children and young people at the centre of our future word, *Thalu* ruptures the inevitability of this endpoint while simultaneously designating it as harmful in its enactment of violence on Indigenous land and bodies. In escaping the inevitability of settler colonial progress by normalising the future as Indigenous *Thalu* is a fugitive text, a text which escapes what Gerald Vizenor (1998, p. 5) calls "a mere response" to colonialist demands. Through this evocation of fugitivity, *Thalu* evades a critique bounded by conceptions of Indigenous youth as grafted, though the linear development narrative, to educational success, and registers of risk and criminality.

Conclusion

Late in the summer of 2020 fires raged along most of the eastern seaboard of Australia. The catastrophic loss of life, which included the immeasurable death of animal, bird, and insect lives, invoked a nation-wide response. After the immediate danger the fires presented, this response notably included the broader public's recognition of the importance of Indigenous practices of fire management and the utility of First Peoples' knowledges of place. This recognition also occurred amidst mounting acknowledgement of the increasing climate crisis and the importance of these knowledges and practices in attending to issues in the present to secure a liveable future. Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) suggests that the present moment of environmental and ecological crisis serves as an interruption to the normalising and normalised sense-making practices of history that are based on an assumption of linear progress and time where past, present and future are connected by the "continuity of human experience" (p. 197). As ecological crises orient toward the need to intervene in the present to mitigate uncertain futures, Indigenous knowledge is being engaged with by non-Indigenous people more broadly as something not only of the past but especially relevant to the present and integral to the future. In this way, the climate crisis might make it easier to imagine changing present practices, which render the future more Indigenous. However, this imagining is not currently projected onto how young First Peoples are supported as the embodied future of Indigenous people who will carry this knowledge forward. Instead, as I have argued in this thesis, Indigenous young people are understood in present discourses of education and criminal justice as sites where normative (white) futures unfold. In contrast, their futures—as First Peoples—are made uncertain by the bulwark of progress as it is seemingly assured by the education and criminal justice systems and through the work of the extractive resource industry on Indigenous land.

In making this broad argument, two questions have animated this thesis: Why and in what ways have young First Peoples come to be known through *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth? And how have these conceptions been contested and imagined otherwise? The approach I took in answering these questions brought together a bricolage of methodological and theoretical tools to respond to the dissonance between

postcolonizing representations of young First Peoples and how these representations have been unsettled and imagined otherwise through the textual practices of Indigenous people. Here, in the conclusion, I return to the insights facilitated by this approach to offer an original contribution to critical Indigenous and youth studies and other fields of study concerned with Indigenous youth and young First Peoples' lives. Lastly, I reflect on the productive incommensurability that has emerged from this research project, where I am left with more questions than answers.

Contribution of this study

In attending to the two distinct yet related questions guiding this study, I began by theorising time and normativity as concepts which offer insight into how First Peoples and young people, respectively, have come to be represented and responded to through colonial constructions of Indigeneity and temporal constructions of youthhood. I then examined how time and normativity, through the discursive and material relations of Indigeneity and youthhood, coalesce around the concept of Indigenous youth. From this theorisation of time and normativity, it became clear that the concept of Indigenous youth fixes young First Peoples normatively as deficient and damaged, and temporally as racialised, at-risk and as a risk to the present and future of Indigenous people. Through this fixation, concepts of Indigenous youth figuratively and corporeally *arrest* young First Peoples in time and as inherently deficient. Lastly, fugitivity provided the theoretical grounding in this thesis from which to read contestations of *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth. Fugitivity enabled me to theorise the dissonance between how young First Peoples are represented through postcolonizing conceptions of Indigenous youth and how they represent themselves and are represented in the texts created and stories told by other Indigenous people. In this way, fugitivity laid the groundwork for me to recognise escape routes and instances that contest the seeming infallibility of institutions, such as schools and universities, as the antidote to the damage narratives of Indigenous young people dominant in the discursive practices of government and research. Building on this theoretical foundation, I then introduced my ethical and intellectual standpoint as a Gumbaynggirr woman, articulated methodologically using Indigenous Standpoint theory. Following this, I presented the two distinct methodological approaches used to address

this study's aims—a Foucauldian critique to trace the way concepts of Indigenous youth have emerged *a priori* and a desire-based approach for my analysis of fugitive texts. The desire-based approach I outlined re-searches for and values the wisdom possessed by and complexity within the lived lives of First Peoples, thus locating the conditions of humanity of young First Peoples beyond participation in and adherence to postcolonizing institutions or norms. This approach to accounting for the lived complexity of young First Peoples was deepened by my deployment of Chris Andersen's concept of density in Chapter Five and Avery Gordon's theorisation of complex personhood in Chapter Six. From applying this bricolage of theories and methodological approaches to the discursive practices of government and the fugitive texts of First Peoples, several important points became apparent in the substantive chapters of this thesis.

Through this doctoral research, I have examined how Indigenous youth have been conceptualised in state-sanctioned and institutional discourses via a linear development narrative foundational to settler colonialism. This narrative, which ultimately works to diminish Indigenous people's connection to and ownership of land, prescribes normative—and justifies the disciplining of non-normative—trajectories at both an individual and community level: from transition discourses in formal education to economic participation in the workforce; to what an acceptable self-determined Indigenous politic looks like in the eyes of the state. I have also highlighted how Indigenous young people who refuse to comply with these normative trajectories are criminalised, designated as deficient and experience harm in response to their counter-presence in places where institutions and systems such as criminal justice and education have sought their erasure.

I have argued in this study that conceptions of Indigenous youth have been produced through discourses of education and criminal justice since the 1970s through the discursive formation of inescapable deficiency and inevitable criminality. As they apply to the way young First Peoples are understood and responded to by education and criminal justice systems, these designations of inescapability and inevitability seemingly secure the fatalism of a settler colonial future—a future where First Peoples no longer exist. This argument—that the bodies of Indigenous children and young people continue to be the locus of state-sanctioned Indigenous erasure—troubles the discursive practices of

government and the seemingly progressive and anti-discriminatory contingencies that brought them into being during a policy era often characterised by a respect for Indigenous self-determination. This argument also challenges the idea, which is often presented as an assumption in much of the research relating to Indigenous children and young people, that participation in education is the antidote to Indigenous poverty, criminality, damage and deficiency. Such an assertion calls into question the infallibility of education systems as they are presented as the self-evident solutions to the problems facing young First Peoples.

The argument that Indigenous young people continue to be the focus of settler colonial attempts at Indigenous erasure is especially pertinent given the now wide-spread recognition and denouncement of the explicit and concerted focus on Indigenous child bodies, often through the removal from their families pre-1970s; a focus rationalised by explicit race-based ideological laws and policies. The argument presented in this thesis thus creates a bridge rather than a break between these race-based policies before the 1970s and more recent and ostensibly empirical social policy approaches to addressing the 'Aboriginal problem.' The analysis I present reveals how racialised conceptions of Indigenous people, albeit cloaked in the benevolence of contemporary policy language, continue to rationalise postcolonizing interventions into young First Peoples' lives. The mendacity of this benevolence is revealed in Chapter Five, where the promise of inclusion in higher education rationalises the existence of young First Peoples at university as an exception (to the rule of Indigenous deficiency) and is experienced as a precarious unbelonging; and by Dujuan in Chapter Six who is presented with a limited 'choice' between compulsory schooling, or as an alternative, youth detention.

The argument that *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth are produced in a way that works to secure settler colonial futurity has implications for the broader scholarship on youth and Indigenous peoples, respectively, and for research that takes as its focus Indigenous young people and their lifeworlds. It compels youth studies, educational research and criminology to question the concepts attached to the young people we seek to represent and for our research to benefit, in this case, young First Peoples. By examining how the production of Indigenous youth has figured Indigenous young people as a problem, the solutions offered to the problem of Indigenous youth are likewise troubled.

This troubling is important, as my analysis demonstrates, because the problematization of Indigenous youth has been produced through discourses of education and criminal justice, while systems of education and criminal justice are simultaneously proposed—particularly in policy and research—as the solution. As a field, youth studies has maintained robust debate around the constructed nature of 'youth' as a designation and of the conceptual and theoretical frames—such as transitions, subcultures, and generations—used to make meaning of young people's lives. However, as I outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, this complexity has not been extended to questions of Indigenous youth. Likewise, in Indigenous Studies, nuanced and complex analyses of representations of Indigenous peoples and their corresponding material effects have not been extended to the way Indigenous young people have been figured and continue to be responded to. This thesis thus offers an original contribution in its critical attention to the nexus of youthhood and Indigeneity.

The value of this contribution more broadly also lies in my demonstration throughout this thesis of what emerges when *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth are refused in making meaning of the lives of young First Peoples. What kinds of analyses emerge when we do not ask empirical questions of who Indigenous young people are or normative questions about whom they ought to be (S. Nakata, 2015b)? What emerges in our research when we refuse the *a priori* concepts that coalesce around particular problematised bodies and problematise these concepts instead? It is incumbent on us as researchers to contest and reflect on the foundational concepts we deploy. In this study, the refusal to take concepts of Indigenous youth as a given has provided productive possibilities to both contest the hypervisibility of Indigenous youth as deficient and criminal and re-theorise young First Peoples' lifeworlds as complex, contradictory and strategic. This theorisation, undertaken in the context of a postcolonizing Australia which has rationalised the erasure of Indigenous peoples through our dehumanisation—and in this case through the fixation of inescapable deficiency and inevitable criminality as the most accessible registers for the making meaning of the lives of Indigenous young people, is profound. Thus, this project has been about re-humanisation. It has been about refusing the hypervisibility of Indigenous youth and instead, researching for and valuing the dense and complex humanity of young First Peoples, even when this complexity extends to the

rejection of and refusal to participate in education and employment as the pre-conditions of entry into full humanity.

As a critique that troubles settler colonial systems of rule that uphold the postcolonizing relationship between the state and Indigenous peoples, this study contributes to and is made possible by a rich and growing body of scholarship produced by Indigenous researchers that likewise seeks to contest settler colonial logics. This contest occurs particularly through the celebration of Indigenous survival and resistance and the recognition of value in lives lived beyond the demands of the settler colonial state. I have contributed to this process by addressing the question: How have these *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth been contested and imagined otherwise? My engagement with Indigenous texts as fugitive practices revealed entanglements that are not reflected in the academic literature nor addressed in policy. For example, how education and criminal justice work in relation to each other as systems which enforce normative social participation while disciplining young First Peoples and families who desire lifeworlds and imagined futures outside of what it means to be normatively 'human'. However, while there may be a lack of academic scholarship, there is a rich articulation by Indigenous people beyond the academy which foregrounds the importance of children and young people in ensuring *Indigenous* rather than normative futures.

In the previous and final chapter of this thesis I introduced the live-action television series *Thalu* (2020). I return to *Thalu* as a text here in concluding because it works to disrupt what Nurrunga poet and theorist Natalia Harkin (2014, p. 10) the "colonial-continuum of history." In reference to Indigenous writing, Harkin says:

> We write to create, to survive, and to revolutionise; we write to haunt and we ache because we refuse to leave the past alone. We aim to disrupt the State's founding order of things, to disrupt 'patriarchal white sovereignty' (Moreton Robinson), white heteronormativity, and the colonial-continuum of history. (p. 10)

Documenting the impact of child removal policies on her family, Harkin (2014, p. 3) notes the power of the colonial-continuum of history, which works to "obliterate stories within a broader history of erasure." *Thalu* inverts this colonial temporality and its function and purpose by going beyond signalling an Indigenous present to asserting an Indigenous

future, a future which the present—and existence of Indigenous people as ancestors to the future saviours—is contingent on. *Thalu* is set at an indeterminate moment in the future. It is an intervention, a message, which as bell hooks (1990, p. 152) says, is from that space in the "margin that is a site of creativity and power and a resistance to colonial entrapment."

More questions than answers: Future research possibilities

This thesis has traced the contours of *a priori* conceptions of Indigenous youth and how these conceptions have emerged as a problem for education and criminal justice. It has also examined how these contours are responded to, contested and transcended in imagining otherwise. Yet, as I move toward the end of this study, more questions arise for me than were answered. While a text like *Thalu* works to ensure an Indigenous future, is it possible that policy, research and practices—so entangled with and responsible for locating damage within Indigenous communities as part of settler colonial inevitability, which also offer these policies, research and practices as the solution to this damage—do the same? As researchers, policymakers, educators and program administrators, how do we work and increase the access, retention and inclusion of Indigenous children and young people in education in ways which are not anchored by their damage? How can we support a beneficial engagement with learning and education in a way where non-compliance is not responded to punitively? Is there a way of supporting the strategic engagement of Indigenous young people with education where their inclusion is not seen as exceptional, and the experience of 'being included' is not harmful? Is it possible to work from the assumption that systems of criminal justice and schooling are, in fact, the problem, not the solution? If we begin with this assumption, what then follows? But these questions are also complicated because any consideration of Indigenous children and young people must be done in light of the settler colonial purpose of systems of education and criminal justice. A question that emerges for me is then: Why do we want to include Indigenous children and young people in an education system which has been instrumental in colonisation and continues to work within the broader logics of settler colonialism alongside criminal justice to ensure Indigenous erasure, and in turn, a

normative future? For me, as someone who deeply believes in the transformative potential of education, particularly in my work with young people, these questions are imperative.

Tanganekald, Meintangk, and Boandik legal scholar Irene Watson (2011, p. 633; see also Moreton-Robinson, 2014) asks similar questions of inclusion regarding human rights and the demands made by Indigenous peoples within rights-based frameworks to be recognised by international law. In signalling the difficulty of contending with questions of inclusion into and the benefit of systems that depend on the dehumanisation of Indigenous peoples, Watson (2011, p. 633) writes that perhaps:

> …the questions of inclusion-exclusion are both abstraction and a distraction from the immediate threats to the lives of Aboriginal peoples. But then the critical need to respond to crises and emergencies such as starvation and death is what keeps us dependent upon the human rights regimes of the nation states. Within this 'needy' space, we remain the 'wronged victims', inferior and dependent upon the state, while the state performs as both perpetrator and saviour. So how do we survive genocide while residing in the belly of the genocidal beast? That is our question: How do we survive as peoples?

After Watson suggests that maybe there is no answer, she states: "Perhaps there is hope for a future to come, one in which Aboriginal peoples are positioned to construct and to name that which is 'human, inhuman, the animal, the beastly'" (2014, p. 633). Possibilities for attending to some of these seemingly "terminally incommensurable" tensions can be found across the critical Indigenous studies literature, and in the scholarship written by Indigenous peoples. And importantly, as I have emphasised throughout this study, in texts created by Indigenous people beyond the academy. But also as scholars, policymakers and practitioners, both First Peoples and non-Indigenous, who are committed to better outcomes for Indigenous children and young people, attending to the terminally incommensurable tensions is vital. To quote Sandy Grande (2018, p. 60) extensively, she continues that:

> When Black peoples can still be killed but not murdered; when Indians are still made to disappear; when (Indigenous) land and Black bodies are still destroyed and accumulated for settler profit; it is incumbent upon all those who claim a commitment to refusing the white supremacist, capitalist, settler state, to do the hard work of building "interconnected movements for decolonization" (Coulthard,

> 2014). The struggle is real. It is both material and psychological, both method and politics, and thus must necessarily straddle the both/and (as opposed to either/or) coordinates of revolutionary change. In terms of process, this means working simultaneously beyond resistance and through the enactment of refusal—as fugitive, abolitionist, and Indigenous, sovereign subjects.

Texts like *Thalu* created beyond the academy should be inspirational to the work that occurs within it, particularly as these texts signal possibilities which remain unrecognisable to current research and policy representations of young First Peoples. These texts are an assertion of presence in relation to the absence which has functioned as integral to the problematization of Indigenous young people as part of the settler colonial project. This absence is challenged by the futurity asserted in *Thalu,* as the children save humanity from the Takers. This futurity is recast in the present moment for viewers who engage with the television series and the young people on whom these fictional characters are based. The future is reimagined otherwise. The young people are not only present but also central. And this centrality is informed by intergenerational and ancestral knowledge, all part of a sovereign connection to Country that is thousands of generations old and continuing. Texts like *Thalu* are inspirational. They tell of movement, rooted in the intention of reconnection, and yet exist as celebratory manifestations of continuity and an assertion of the presence of Indigenous children and young people into the future. They open up possibilities to reflect on the complex political and social environment they are created in and responding to, while forcing an analytical engagement with Indigenous children and young people beyond taken-for-granted registers of criminality, deficiency and exceptionalism. This text works to subvert these registers by centring and celebrating the non-normative futures of Indigenous young people. In these futures, mining and the destruction of Country and Indigenous people are not considered a positive register of progress. Like the young Noongar man in the story of mamang the whale, who I introduced in the very beginning paragraphs of this thesis, the young people in *Thalu* are also guided by the knowledge of their old people and "take risks; trust their heritage and what their fathers told them, their mothers too … They orbit, they move away and return. Are very mobile but held to a centre. Are like meteors and comets and stars" (Scott & Robinson, 2011, p. 6). In *Thalu*, these young warriors defeat the Takers and then come home.

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