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Indigenous Futurism: Practices and Politics

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Abstract

This thesis examines Indigenous Futurism as an activist practice. Indigenous Futurism is an emerging international mode of Indigenous creative production. Recently, it has become an increasingly used form of artistic expression and tool for political organising in Australia. Indigenous Futurism uses future time to produce visions of Indigenous survivance and to subvert colonial narratives of history and politics. It can transform our thinking in relation to challenges we face in the present as Indigenous people.

In the last decade, a number of texts have emerged in Australia by Indigenous people which imagine political futures. This thesis explores three works made in 2013 and 2014, including Alexis Wright's novel *The Swan Book* (2013), Ellen Van Neerven's short story *Water* (2014), and Nicole Watson's alternative feminist judgment *In the Matter of Djappari re Tukiar 2035* (2014). Additionally, it engages with one Canadian virtual reality work by Danis Goulet, *The Hunt* (2017).

The original contribution of this thesis is to examine Indigenous Futurist works as examples of what Poka Laenui describes as decolonial 'dreaming' (2000). It is also the contribution of this thesis to assert that the works belong to a broader gathering of Indigenous Futurist theory and creativity in an international context. In the Australian context, prior work on the texts studied in this thesis has categorised them based on western genre categories and thematics. Studies from literary theory have not engaged meaningfully with the analytical and philosophical frameworks provided by Indigenous Futurist thought. In response, this dissertation undertakes a critique of how literary theory has related to Indigenous literatures demonstrates how the texts implement the narrative strategies and political principles of Indigenous Futurism.

This thesis engages with these four contemporary Indigenous texts about the near future as activist texts. It extends on the prior work of Indigenous Futurist scholars and practitioners globally to conduct an exploration of Indigenous Futurism as both critical political tool and a distinct artistic movement which is growing in Australia. The thesis finds that Indigenous Futurism is a political form of writing and creative expression which complicates western understandings of genre. It demonstrates that Indigenous Futurist texts present new ways of thinking about justice, war, queerness, racism, climate trauma, and the role of plants and non-human actors in decolonial projects and cultural revitalisation. The analysis of the works studied in this thesis reveals a deep engagement with the dual narratives of the progressive white nation state and the myth of linear progress.

This thesis argues that the texts are methods for critical engagement in themselves. It uses key frameworks from Indigenous literary theory, such as Chadwick Allen's 'Trans-Indigenous' and the emerging methodology of storywork to present an analysis of the texts which breaks away from the normative habits of western literary theory, and to claim them as Indigenous Futurist texts that exist in a growing international critical movement.

Statement of Original Authorship

This thesis is my original work of the author towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Melbourne, Faculty of Arts, School of Culture and Communication. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used, and this thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length.

Signed

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Introduction

Indigenous Futurism: Practices and Politics

Indigenous Futurism is a political practice grounded in Indigenous realism. Indigenous people in Australia have been writing futurist and dystopian works in the genres of futurism, fantasy and science fiction since the 1980s. Recent developments in the field of Indigenous Futurism present a distinct artistic and theoretical movement that requires closer examination. This thesis is concerned with how Indigenous Futurist texts provide us, as Indigenous people, with roadmaps for activist and critical practices, and have the capacity to transform our thinking in relation to challenges we face in the present. Imagining the future through these texts can teach us how to live well, to transform political and social landscapes, and act responsibly as Indigenous people. Using four critical Indigenous Futurist texts, which I engage with as a snapshot of an artistic and intellectual movement, I argue that Indigenous Futurism is an activist practice. I aim to conduct an exploration of Indigenous Futurism as a growing critical artistic movement, emerging globally and increasingly used in Australia, through which Indigenous writers respond subversively to political issues faced by our communities in the present by imagining alternative futures.

In this introductory chapter, I identify my aims and research questions and discuss the significance of this thesis. I introduce the research framework which will support my reading of the four key works. I identify and discuss the key features of Indigenous Futurism and introduce the key concepts of the linear progress narrative and the virtuous racial state. I will also review the key literature on Indigenous Futurism as a global movement with particular reference to the emergence of the practice in Australia. My review of key

literature is embedded in this introductory chapter, but continues throughout the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

Aims and Research Questions

Exploring the political and creative dimensions of futurism and utopianism in Australia, I aim in this thesis to examine how Indigenous peoples use techniques of futurism and imagining to inform decolonial projects and social and cultural movements. I have shaped my research around two key questions;

1. How is Indigenous Futurism practiced in Australia?
2. How do Indigenous Futurist texts articulate the politicised experiences and future visions of Aboriginal people in postcolonising contexts?

In asking these two research questions, I make use of Quandamooka scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson's idea of the "postcolonising"; which she differentiates from 'postcolonial', signifies "the active, the current and the continuing nature of the colonising relationship that positions us as belonging but not belonging" (Moreton-Robinson 2003, 38). The current and continuing state of "postcolonising" struggle referred to by Moreton-Robinson influences the experiences of all Indigenous people in so-called Australia and mediates our relationships with the future. Unangax scholar Eve Tuck has referred to this through the idea of settler futurity, which is defined as the imagination of a "'permanent virtuality' of the settler on stolen land" (Wolfe cited in Tuck 2013, 80). Settler futurity, for Tuck, is "the ways in which the future is rendered knowable through specific practices (i.e. calculation, imagination, and performance) and, in turn, intervenes upon the present" to make the idea of the

future uninhabitable for Indigenous peoples living with settler colonialism (80). Settler coloniality is constituted by futurity in its logic of elimination and replacement which requires the "continued and complete eradication of the original inhabitants of contested land" and the incorporation of Indigenous peoples with a view to further emplacing settlers (Wolfe cited in Tuck 2013, 80).

I have chosen four texts for study in this thesis which are diverse in their form and genre. Alexis Wright's 2013 work *The Swan Book* is a longer form novel. Nicole Watson's *In the Matter of Djappari* is written in the experimental philosophical mode of feminist alternative judgment. Ellen Van Neerven's *Water* is a short story appearing in an anthology published by the author in 2014, and it is the only work in that anthology which imagines a future world in the style of Indigenous futurist narrative. Finally, Danis Goulet's *The Hunt* is a virtual reality film made with a 360-degree camera.

I argue that though these works operate in such a multiplicity of fields, they are Indigenous Futurist works because they each use the future as a critical tool for generating political thought which agitates against the will of settler futurity. Indigenous Futurist texts present visions of what Grace Dillon (via Gerald Vizenor) have named as "survivance" (2012, 6). Dillon, the Anishinaabe scholar credited with coining the term Indigenous Futurism, calls survivance "more than survival, more than endurance or mere response…survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (2012, 6). Survivance is a key feature of Indigenous futurist works for Dillon. I argue, following her, that the Indigenous Futurist texts included in this thesis represent survivance in that they actively refuse and contest settler futurity in their political visions of the future whilst also transcending a simple narrative of resistance or 'mere response'. It is vital to understand the serious political criticisms and visions offered within Indigenous speculative works, and how they can be not only critical, and

expressive of a collective critical consciousness, but also generative and world-making; involved in the necessary work of building new political futures.

Indigenous Futurism, in purposefully presenting narrative survivance, is bound up in the broader politics of decolonial activism. Indigenous Futurism can be considered part of what Hawaiian scholar Poka Laenui outlined in 2000 as "dreaming" (154), a crucial phase in his five step decolonisation process. Dreaming, the third phase of Laenui's understanding of a successful decolonisation process, is a strategic collective imagining undertaken by Indigenous people "where the full panorama of possibilities are expressed, considered through debate…and building dreams on further dreams which eventually becomes the flooring for the creation of a new social order" (Laenui 2000, 156). This process of dreaming must be allowed to run its full course, for if it is cut short "by any action plan or program designed to create a remedy meeting the reception of the issue at a premature stage, the result can prove disastrous" (156). Dreaming to the fullest extent of the collective imagination is a powerful remedy for resisting the imperative for short sighted or materialistic gains and, it seems in Laenui's mind, necessary for the health of decolonial movements.

I argue in this thesis that Indigenous Futurist texts are part of this critical decolonial dreaming project, and that they put forward futures oriented towards Indigenous survivance. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith further explains the role of both "storytelling" and "envisioning" in her chapter, '25 Indigenous Projects' in her foundational text, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012). These 25 projects are part of the "struggle to become self-determining, the need to take back control of our destinies" (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 238). They are imperatives which are conducted strategically and purposefully, and form part of a research

programme which is “relentless in its pursuit of social justice” (238). Storytelling and envisioning are two of these projects. On the importance of envisioning, Tuhiwai Smith writes the following:

> One of the strategies that indigenous peoples have employed effectively to bind people together politically asks that people imagine a future, that they rise above present-day situations which are generally depressing, dream a new dream and set a new vision. The confidence of knowing that we have survived and can only go forward provides some impetus to a process of envisioning. (254)

Tuhiwai Smith’s understanding of envisioning speaks powerfully to the role of imagining the future as a deeply necessary part of survival and Indigenous futurity which is done purposefully as part of a shared decolonial project. It illuminates the power of our communities’ storytellers, artists, and writers in our shared political projects.

Situating the Field of Indigenous Futurism

International scholarship on Indigenous Futurism situates it as a field which is both distinct generically from other forms of science fiction and futurism, and in its expression of Indigenous intellectual and cultural standpoints. An explosion in recent developments in the field of Indigenous Futurism has led international theorists such as critic Lynette James to describe it as a “distinct artistic and theoretical approach” of its own (2016, 151). James elaborates that Indigenous

Futurist texts are set apart from other types of science fictions and speculative fictions by the way they "incorporat[e] Native/Indigenous concepts of community, power, and responsibility" and directly address issues of sovereignty and colonial power (James 2016, 151). For James, Indigenous Futurisms borrow recognisable elements, thematic concerns, and critical methods from science fiction, apocalyptic, utopian and dystopian literature, Afrofuturism, fantasy, magic realism, and other genres. Much like Afrofuturism, she writes that it is "an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory" (Womack cited in James 2016, 152). She adds that it is a "purpose-driven position" which questions

> received ideas of agency, gender…ethnicity, uses of violence and technology, and even the meaning of survival and triumph, while extending more nuanced concepts of tradition, community, scientific exploration, environmental and social consciousness, power, and responsibility. (152)

However, Indigenous Futurism, for James, augments the "framework for critical theory" of Afrofuturism and postcolonial science fictions, and is set apart from Afrofuturist forms by its concern with Indigenous survivance, storytelling, technology, science, and Indigenous notions of time, place, inheritance, and country (2016, 152). Graham Murphy has agreed with this separation, adding that while science fiction has the potential to "honor native traditions, to dig into history lingering behind myth, and to share with readers the ramifications of indigenous diasporas in ways that recognise their accountability", it is further "emboldened" in Indigenous Futurist work by decolonising metholodogies and theories of survivance which are purposefully deployed in Indigenous Futurist narrative (2016, 178). Indigenous Futurism is therefore, for Murphy, "the intersection of sf and survivance" (Dillon cited in Murphy 2016, 178), set apart

both stylistically and theoretically from other genres within critical science fictions and futurisms.

Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon (2012) offered a definition of Indigenous Futurism in *Walking the Clouds* which is explained through five key themes and techniques:

1. Native Slipstream, drawn from conventional academic descriptions of slipstream fiction which are used to describe speculative and experimental writing, is a type of fiction engaged with time travel and the defamiliarisation of time from an Indigenous perspective;
2. Contact, a critical Indigenous adaptation of the 'Alien/other' trope in science fiction;
3. Native Apocalypse, a reflection on colonialism as apocalypse in the science fiction stories of Indigenous writers;
4. Indigenous Science and Sustainability as a key theme in Indigenous Futurisms; and finally;
5. Biskaabiiyyang or "Returning to ourselves" (Dillon 2012, 5). 'Biskaabiiyang', an Anishinaabemowin word, reflects on the decolonial and healing intentions of Indigenous science fictions. Reflecting on the ideas set out by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in Decolonising Methodologies, Dillon notes how 'returning to ourselves' as it plays out in Indigenous Futurism may allow discovery of "how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions" (10).

Dillon's discussion of Native Slipstream argues that time travel appears in Indigenous Futurism as a type of speculative fiction which defies categorisation in the generic terms set by Euro-western science fiction. In Native Slipstream, one "views time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream", utilising non-linear thinking about space-time (Dillon 2012, 4). For Dillon, Indigenous Futurism is therefore noteworthy (and set apart from other types of speculative writing) for its "reflection of a worldview" and for the fact that it "models a cultural experience of reality" (4). Indigenous Futurism's use of temporal defamiliarisation as a "formal strategy" to reflect crisis moments in the present is aligned with the methods of critical science fiction and speculative fiction (C. Scott 2016, 74). However, Conrad Scott notes that it is further set apart from mainstream speculative fiction in this regard, because it "tends to narrate a sense of ongoing crisis rather than an upcoming one" in a continuous narrative arc consistent with patterns of colonialism and cultural destruction (77).

In making these claims that Indigenous futurism is an expression of Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous futurist theory also asserts that the forms of storytelling in its contemporary works are continuous with pre-colonial Indigenous storytelling practices. While Indigenous Futurisms are largely erased from the imaginations of utopian and science fiction theorists, Dillon makes the claim that Indigenous Futurisms have existed for "millenia" (2012, 4). She notes that Indigenous Futurist texts often provide active political critique to the European imagination, "ironically suggesting that Natives had it right all along" (4). By making this argument, Dillon's work provides a reorientation to the study of the genre, showing how Indigenous Futurism is not a 'new' genre, nor an appropriation of a western form, but one with deep connections to First Nations storytelling traditions. In this reading, Indigenous Futurism is re-storied as a powerful practice of (re)connection to traditions of Indigenous science and

technology, languages, or as Dillon writes, 'Returning to Ourselves'; reiterating that Indigenous peoples have active speculative and technological imaginations. Dillon's viewpoint also importantly recognises the aspects of political critique in the practices of Indigenous Futurism.

Dillon's study points out the problematic and appropriative relationship science fiction genres have had with Indigenous peoples. In the context of this relationship, Palyku scholar and author from the Pilbara region of Western Australia, Ambelin Kwaymullina, identifies some of the complexities of engaging with futurist genres as an Indigenous writer. Given that many of the futurist and science fiction techniques of story exist within, and are appropriated from, Indigenous storytelling traditions, she notes a tension in herself when exploring the genre of futurist science fiction. Because of this tension, "one of the complexities that Indigenous writers negotiate is finding pathways to tell stories grounded in our interconnected worlds in a way that does not put those worlds (or connections) at risk", but for her, speculative fictions remain one of the most relevant genres for expressing Indigenous stories and realities (Kwaymullina 2018, 146).

The literature on Indigenous futurism repeatedly highlights its political utility. Darug writer and Indigenous Futurist theorist from the eastern coast of Australia, Mykaela Saunders has drawn on this idea in her description of her creative practice. Like Kwaymullina, Saunders is both a practitioner of Indigenous futurism as well as a theorist. Her Ph.D, consisting of four short fiction works and an exegesis, explores what she terms 'Goori-Futurism', her own engagement with Indigenous Futurisms which is firmly placed on Bundjalung country. In line with Conrad Scott's (2016) understanding of Indigenous Futurism, while it plays

with time, Saunders' use of the genre is firmly placed on country. She explains her own definition of the field:

> I've named this field Goori-futurism. The name and philosophy pays homage to the rich heritage of Afro-futurism, and more recently, Indigenous futurism, particularly Aotearoa-futurism, which has emerged from Maori and other Pasifika storytellers. Less a set of genre conventions, Goori-futurism is specific in people, place, and time, and draws from traditional Aboriginal story-telling modes and post-invasion histories, as well as many genres of speculative fiction. As spec-fic offers humanity wonderful opportunities to imagine the seemingly impossible, so I intend for Goori-futurism to open up the parameters for my community to explore ways that our sovereignty might become a reality (Saunders 2019, 60)

Saunders argues that, while explicitly disavowing genre paradigms, pan-Indigeneity, and the "dystopian/utopian binary", Goori-futurism is concerned with asserting Indigenous survivance and sovereignty, and is often concerned with ecocide while maintaining a view of the resilience, possibility, and magic of the natural world (60). Further, her statement of intent for Goori-futurism "to open up the parameters for my community to explore ways that our sovereignty might become a reality" signals that for Indigenous Futurist writers, their stories of the future are made with the intention to inspire future collective actions (60). Waanyi novelist Alexis Wright, author of *The Swan Book*, said of her more recent work *Tracker* (2017) that it was written as a "blueprint for building an independent Aboriginal-controlled university, one that is tied to land, culture and people",

> This would be a world-class, state of the art learning place for our people. One which works towards building new economic forms of visionary thinking and stories in which to create cultural sustainability for our future, and the long-term enjoyment of land rights. (2019)

Indigenous writers see our work in this way; as a tool with explicit political intent. It is from this point of understanding that I examine works of Indigenous Futurism as part of a political and intellectual movement which is directed towards a project of world building. As Wright acknowledges in her reflections on *Tracker*, that long vision "integral to our regenerative story-telling practices, with its foundations deep in our knowledge of the Law stories of our culture" (2019).

Defining the Field of Indigenous Futures

Building on the work of Indigenous Futurist theorists and writers, both internationally and in Australia, my understanding of Indigenous Futurism in Australia is defined by the following key aspects:

1. Indigenous Futurism imagines an Indigenous politics in the future. By politics, I mean that Indigenous peoples in the future are collectively organised and involved in imaginative and active forms of governance and communal action. Although some Indigenous Futurist texts represent a dim future in which structural racism and colonial violence has

intensified, they also represent Indigenous peoples engaged in adaptable collective governance and resistance strategies. Mykaela Saunders has contributed that a key defining feature of Indigenous Futurism is that it must imagine Indigenous people in the Future, and I extend on her analysis to recognise the distinctly political elements of the texts I look at here (phone conversation with author, 23rd March 2020).

2. Indigenous Futurism uses the future to subvert and defamiliarise colonial time. It uses time to call colonial understandings of reality into question and assert Indigenous perspectives on time.
3. Indigenous Futurism allows for the complexity and agency of women, queers, children, and the non-human world. These often silenced narrative perspectives are made central to Indigenous Futurism.

With the above definition in mind, I focus much of my analysis on two key problems which I see represented and discussed across the works. The first is the unsettling of the linear progress narratives within the texts, and the second is the negation of the virtuous racial state. The linear progress narrative, after Black American theorist Michelle M. Wright (2015), refers to the way time and history are understood in western postcolonising contexts as uniform. The 'virtuous state' is Aileen Moreton-Robinson's (2015) articulation of the ways in which postcolonising states establish linear progress narratives with regards to racial politics, and construct virtue and benevolence as white possessions.

These three key ideas frame my understanding of Indigenous Futurism as a distinct genre. With all of this in mind, I have selected a series of textual works written and published by Indigenous authors between 2012 and 2017 dealing with the near future which I define as Indigenous Futurist works. These works present a narrow snapshot of a broader movement. I read them in the context

of the continuing development of Indigenous queer culture, Indigenous feminism, and the specifics of the recent resistance held by Indigenous artists, activists and intellectuals to the complexities of treaty negotiations and patriarchal white nationalism.

Indigenous Futurist texts have been written in Australia since at least the 1980s and continue to be written and produced in multiple forms. I selected these four texts, produced within this short period of time, because I believe that taken together they provide a view of the eclecticism, critical sensibilities, key concerns, and the vital experimental curiosity held within this broadening body of work. I also believe that they share common concerns in their understandings of governmentality and progress, and embody the critical understandings of linear progress and governmentality held in the Indigenous community.

Significance

Scholars of Indigenous Futurism both internationally and in Australia have pointed out the way it expresses values of survivance and participates in the political envisioning of a decolonized future for Indigenous people. However, to date, there are no full-length studies of the works I am including in this thesis which has addressed this element, or which has considered them together as stylistically distinct Indigenous Futurist works made with an explicit political intent. There has also not yet been an exploration of Indigenous Futurist texts in Australia which seriously considers Indigenous scholarly and activist perspectives as part of its analysis. My project incorporates both scholarly and activist perspectives into a reading of the texts and draws the larger political context of Indigenous political movements into its analysis.

Only one book length study specifically deals with Indigenous Futurist texts from Australia. That work, *Futuristic Worlds in Australian Aboriginal Fiction* by settler literary scholar Iva Polak (2017), provides a textual analysis of futurist works which argues that they are part of the literary genre of the 'fantastic'. The work looks at Wright's *The Swan Book* (2013) and Van Neerven's *Water* (2014), examining them as transrealist and science fiction works respectively. Polak's study of these texts as Fantastic literature also considers the 1993 work *The Kadaitcha Sung* by Sam Watson, Archie Weller's *Land of the Golden Clouds* (1998), and the 1991 work *Below the Line* by Eric Wilmot.

My own study considers works published since 2010 as part of a distinct wave of Indigenous Futurism in the 21st century. I examine them separately from the works of the 1990s which are part of Polak's study, and I adopt critical concepts from Indigenous futurist theory in order to properly address the political elements of the works; to address their orientations towards Indigenous futures.

My study also identifies the period between 2012-2017 as a significant moment for the development of a contemporary Indigenous futurist movement. Mykaela Saunders has noted the significance of this time period, commenting that after the publication of the three novels Polak deals with from the 1990s by Watson, Weller and Wilmot, there is a significant gap in the timeline before the emergence of the newer Indigenous Futurist works in the 2010s. This "lull", Saunders explains, is followed by a wave of publications from 2012 onwards, when specifically "women and non-binary authors start publishing futurism" in earnest (Saunders 2019, 61). Like Lynette James has done, Saunders has drawn attention to an important detail here in identifying the concerns the newer wave

of Indigenous Futurists have expressed in writing women's stories as well as queer and non-binary narrative into the work. Aboriginal Women, queer people and non-binary writers have a keen interest in driving the newer wave of futurist story in the 21st century. Their unique storytelling methods and philosophical and political interests are one of the ways that this newer wave declares its own distinct sensibility which is different from the Indigenous Futurist and science fiction writing of the 1990s in Australia. This is not to wholly disconnect the texts of the 2010s from those of the 1990s. The newer texts apply many of the same strategies as the older. However, the contemporary Indigenous Futurist movement makes the voices of queer people and women more central, and presents Indigenous perspectives on feminism and queer politics which have not been explored in depth to date.

The previous study done by Polak focussed only on written Indigenous futurist works, mainly novels and short stories, and looked at them through the lens of particular genres (eg. apocalyptic fiction and the literary fantastic). My analysis considers a legal text as well as a virtual reality film alongside the more conventional recent literary works. In doing this, I hope to expand the scholarly view of Indigenous Futurism into a consideration of it as a multi modal movement, not just a literary genre. My study emphasises the importance of situating the works within broader movements of Indigenous Futurism. The "confusion over the differences" between Indigenous Futurism and other genre classifications is politicised by James, who argues that such debates "are not merely due to disagreement over definitions but in fact point to larger issues of perception, attitude and orientation…'about culture, technology, and things to come'" (Alondra Nelson cited in James 2016, 153). For James, identifying a work as Indigenous Futurism "asks readers, critics and scholars to adjust their orientation in ways that may radically alter both their perceptions and reception

of it" (153). This differentiates my study from Polak's; I insist on a reading of the works as Indigenous Futurism, and I hope to develop an analysis of the texts which properly grapples with the works as "frameworks for critical theory" as James has put it (152).

Indigenous Realism: From Genre to Practice

I raised the idea of Indigenous Futurism as a practice of Indigenous realism in the opening pages of this study. A central characteristic of Indigenous Futurist texts is their subversive relationships to ideas of reality and time. Some settler and international critics have drawn attention to this. Polish scholar Agniezska Podruczna, for example, noted the widespread view of speculative fiction as an escapist genre "distanced from any measure of broadly understood realism and divorced from the realm of reality as we know it", despite the fact that it offers a "potent vehicle that allows for novel approaches to issues which the academic world…has been debating for a long time" (Podruczna 2013, 263-264). Her words invite the reader to view speculative fiction as a critical tool rather than a fantasy genre. Palyku scholar and writer Ambelin Kwaymullina (2018) also makes the important point that the languages assigned to such literature tend to assume a problematic and ultimately Eurocentric relationship between fantasy and reality. Where for some literary scholars, the techniques of Indigenous Futurist texts may be conceived of as 'anti-real' and are resolutely in a camp of literary anti-realism, whether this be understood as speculative fiction, science fiction, or magical realism, Kwaymullina understands Indigenous Futurism to purposefully present an Indigenous-centered understanding of reality itself. Alexis Wright's understanding of her own work as "Aboriginal realism" (cited in Ravenscroft 2010, 211), for example, interrupts interpretations of her works as

having such an anti-real genre, and further asserts the real-ness of her Indigenous Futurism. Kwaymullina writes that a "complexity that Indigenous peoples must grapple with in entering speculative fiction spaces is that the very notion of what is speculative and what is not depends on how 'the real' is defined," going on to note that many of the thematics of science fiction, such as time travel, cross-species communication, and multidimensionality, are "aspects of Indigenous realities" (2018, 150), rather than fantasy elements:

> To the extent that Indigenous stories present a view of reality at odds with what Eurocentric traditions define as 'the real'—and to the extent that our stories challenge settler myths regarding Indigenous peoples—all of our narratives might be characterised as speculative. To the extent that our narratives embody Indigenous truths, none of them are. (2018, 150)

This thread on the nature and meaning of reality and its relationship with epistemology is important in discussions of Indigenous Futurism. Indigenous Futurism, as Kwaymullina argues, significantly troubles colonial assumptions about reality and knowledge. Indigenous scholar Daniel Wildcat has developed a relevant idea of Indigenous realism in his work, through which he understands reality and knowledge to be constituted by relationality within the "complex web of life"(Wildcat cited in Whyte 2018, 224) which makes up Indigenous societies:

> In North America many Indigenous traditions tell us that reality is more than just facts and figures collected so that humankind might widely use resources. Rather, to know 'it'—reality—requires respect for the

> relationships and relatives...I call this Indigenous realism, and it entails that we, members of humankind, accept our inalienable responsibilities as members of the planet's complex life system, as well as our inalienable rights. (Wildcat cited in Whyte 2018, 224-225)

Wildcat here names Indigenous realism as an epistemological standpoint which is deeply grounded in an ethics of relation and responsibility, whereby knowledge and reality are formed collectively. Similarly, Dillon understands Indigenous Futurism to represent a true understanding of First Nations philosophies and experiences in relation to time and being:

> Incorporating time travel, alternate realities, parallel universes and multiverses, and alternative histories is a hallmark of Native storytelling tradition, while viewing time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream is central to Native epistemologies. (Dillon 2016, 346)

Given that a multiplicitous and deeply relational approach to ideas of reality and knowledge is central to Indigenous life, as each of these Indigenous theorists have said, I consider Indigenous Futurism as a political expression of Indigenous realism. Wildcat's proposals on Indigenous realism, for me, demand that we pay close attention to the ways that Indigenous Futurist texts understand relationships, responsibilities, and accountability.

The Emergence of Indigenous Speculative Genres in Australia

In this thesis, I examine four texts which were produced between 2013-2017. These texts belong to a larger movement of Indigenous Futurist work across the 2010s. While there are some earlier futurist and speculative works produced by Indigenous authors in the 1990s, I have chosen to focus on this period of time as a moment in which there is a distinct Indigenous Futurist movement in Australia which expresses some common techniques and concerns. In defining and engaging with this field, it is helpful to provide a brief overview of this wave of activity to situate my study.

Since 2010, there has been a densely packed explosion of Indigenous engagement with forms of speculation and futurism in so-called Australia. It is important to emphasise both the literary and the non-literary aspects of this. Teagan Chilcott's 2013 fantasy alien invasion novel *Rise of the Fallen* was published by Indigenous publisher Magabala Books, who published Tristan Savage's science fiction novel *Rift Breaker* the following year. Ambelin Kwaymullina's *The Tribe* trilogy was released between 2012 and 2015. Noongar author Claire Coleman's work *Terra Nullius* (2017) provides an example of an Indigenous engagement with the science fiction generic mode from Australia. *Terra Nullius* uses a near future setting as well as employing the trope of alien invasion to create an allegory of colonial history in Australia.

Grassroots arts and culture have also reflected a similar movement towards futurist and dystopian politics. This importantly decentres the formal literary text and demonstrates the centrality of collective visioning practices to Indigenous Futurism. The Sovereign Apocalypse project, an autonomous collective visioning

for “future imaginings of total Indigenous sovereignty” began publishing zines and holding events in Narrm/Melbourne in 2014 (Harding et. al 2016). Wiradjuri artist Hannah Donnelly, one of the editors in the collective, periodically released playlists from a Soundcloud account called SovTrax, collecting Indigenous new music, often hip hop recent releases as part of the project. Her artwork and writing focusses on climate fiction, futurism, and decolonial land-based politics and aims to envision a future ‘after’ decolonisation. In 2012, the *NEOMAD* comic was produced by Indigenous people in Roebourne, Western Australia as part of Big Hart’s Yijala Yala project, engaging over forty young people in scriptwriting, literacy, design, and technological skills in developing an iPad app for the comic over a period of 18 months:

> Set over three episodes, *NEOMAD* follows the story of the Love Punks, a group of techno savvy young heroes from the Pilbara who speed through a digitised desert full of spy bots, magic crystals, fallen rocket boosters and mysterious petroglyphs (Big Hart 2013).

In 2018, Blak Dot Gallery in Melbourne produced a group show for Midsumma Festival titled *Blak-Queer Futurism*; the description is as follows:

> *Blak-Queer Futurism* re-establishes Queer Indigenous speculative futures from here and abroad, drawing upon resilience, knowledge and spirituality. Through multi-disciplinary works, the artists involved relay narratives attained through story, family, experience, country, and dreaming, to actualise the future today, subverting the imperativity of popular futurist speculation. (Blak Dot 2018)

The show’s understanding of ‘re-establishing’ Queer Indigenous futures rather than *establishing* points again to Dillon’s definition of Indigenous Futurism as a

return to Indigenous selfhood, not an appropriation of a western storytelling mode. It establishes a connection to ongoing activist practices and thinking. Multidisciplinarity is a naturalised part of the Queer Indigenous Futurist practice outlined here.

Blak to the Future is a show which was developed in the neighbourhood where I live, at the Footscray Community Arts Centre by local Koori community leaders in 2018. The show was not only an exhibition, but involved the creation of an autonomous and safe community controlled space specifically for young Blak curators and artists to support the development of the show (one of the youngest artists, Wemba Wemba and Yorta Yorta man Katen Balla, was 14 at the time). The show was in development for around a month, during which that collective had exclusive access to the space to realise their ideas and practice their craft in a supportive intergenerational space. This process decentered the importance of a final product and the viewing experience of the audience, making the art a participatory and generative experience. The show is, at the time of writing, in development for a third iteration.

It is important to my definition of Indigenous Futurism to recognise that it is often process-based. The above examples involved not just the production of an art show or piece of media, but a collective and imaginative gathering of people from multiple communities which was as important as the final product. They involve the creation of spaces which prioritise Aboriginal perspectives and practices in relation to time and place. Such grassroots Indigenous Futurist works and practices happening locally here in Narrm also follow Dillon's understanding, in that they are formed in an explicit relation to family, country and all the relational elements which make up Indigenous understandings of reality.

The works outlined above form an emerging practice of Indigenous Futurism in Australia. They are diverse in content, setting, and medium, but they all show a concerted engagement with the political futurity of First Nations, and more often than not, they involve a community led process with less emphasis on the final 'product' than on the collective work of First Nations people which that project enables. The zine format of *Sovereign Apocalypse* and the *NEOMAD* iPad app signal a diversifying engagement with publishing technologies at a grassroots level, importantly outside institutional fields. Further, the ability of the *Blak-Queer Futurism* show in 2018 to draw a crowd in the Midsumma Festival, one of the biggest LGBT public festivals in the country, signalled that the futurist mode had a wider scope of engagement than I had assumed. *Blak to the Future*'s focus on giving space for young Aboriginal people to develop their arts practice and foster their imaginations also makes it a quintessential example of Indigenous Futurism. Overall, the intensification and mainstreaming of interest in Indigenous science fiction and futurism to a wide audience, which at the time I started writing this thesis seemed much more niche, demands more scholarly attention.

I have provided a short study of what I identify as a growing artistic movement of Indigenous Futurist work in Australia in the last ten years. From this, I've chosen three published Australian literary texts to focus on in depth. In addition, I examine a fourth text which was developed in Canada in response to the 150th anniversary of the Canadian constitution act, a settler colonial sesquicentenary or 'birthday' which occurred in 2017. I have chosen to devote some of my thesis to Danis Goulet's Canadian work *The Hunt* (2017) because I am interested in how Indigenous Futurist practices in Canada thrive differently with a broader scope of institutional and financial support in academia and the arts, and because the text itself assisted me through its provocations and attacks on the

self-representations of the settler Canadian culture as ‘nice’ to develop my analysis of Indigenous Futurism’s critiques and political perspectives in Australia, and I explore the complexities of this transnational examination more in depth in the first chapter on methodology.

International Scope and the Role of Institutional Support in Generating and Sustaining Indigenous Futurist Practices

Indigenous Futurism is increasingly present in an international context. There are a few recent key milestones to look at in the development of Indigenous Futurism as an expanding and international practice. Given that I am engaging in an analysis of a Canadian work in this thesis alongside some selected Australian work, I want to unpack the differing degrees of institutional support in universities and the arts across the Australian and the North American contexts in order to properly situate the works in an international frame.

The 2012 anthology *Walking the Clouds*, edited by Dr. Grace Dillon, was published by the University of Arizona Press and featured a range of First Nations authors from Turtle Island, Aotearoa, and Australia. Dillon edited a further Indigenous Futurisms special issue of Extrapolations, a peer reviewed journal on speculative fictions, with Michael Levy and John Rieder in 2017. This issue featured work by scholars originating from or living in Europe, Australia, the United States, Hawaii, Australia, and Canada. The Initiative for Indigenous Futures was established in 2015 in Montreal, Canada. It is an initiative of AbTec (Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace), a research unit founded in 2005 and led

by Skawenatti (Mohawk) and Jason Edward Lewis at Concordia University which works to increase Indigenous presence in online platforms.

Since its inception, the Initiative has made partnerships with other university institutions and community organisations to facilitate a great volume of annual residencies, media production, research projects, symposia, publications, artist talks, films, guest lectures, and artworks. Operating within a university, with the support of a number of other university partners, education institutions, art and media partnerships and community organisations, Initiative for Indigenous Futures continues to be one of the best examples of the development of the practice of Indigenous Futurisms when it has the luxury of sustained institutional and cross-disciplinary support. It continues to support future generations of artists, writers, scholars, and creators internationally.

Due to its success in securing an institutional platform, the Institute for Indigenous Futures has been involved in the production of significant artistic and cultural events which reach a large audience, including the *2167* virtual reality project which featured at the Toronto International Film Festival, which included *The Hunt* as one of five films. The Initiative has thus enabled practitioners to connect with an international audience and to fully realise both their artistic visions on a large scale, and to participate in national level political conversations. There are no comparable institutional or research bodies in Australia to support the sustained development of the movement. However, in 2019, an Indigenous Futurisms conference was held at the Redfern Community Centre in Sydney, Australia by Macquarie University's Indigenous Studies Department. This conference was the first of its kind held in Australia, and brought together attendees from Aotearoa, the United States, and Australia. It included people working within university spaces as well as independent

creators from media, television, and literature, and meant that the Australian First Nations people working within the field of Indigenous Futurism from east coast to west could connect with one another as well as with the international visitors. This Macquarie University Indigenous Futurisms conference in 2019 provided a glimpse of what an Australian practice might look like with an interconnected and international level of engagement and institutional support. In comparison to the ways that international scholars have been able to build Indigenous Futurist practices into institutional spaces with higher levels of support, funding, and cultural capital, Australian Indigenous writers and theorists tend to work in disparate and niche positions across the country, often without significant levels of funding.

Outside of the literary publishing world in Australia, as I've mentioned, the Indigenous Futurist work produced is often more esoteric and grassroots (such as the Sovereign Apocalypse project, *Blak to the Future*, and the Blak Dot Gallery Queer Indigenous Futurisms work). Bee Cruse, a filmmaker, actor, and writer, spoke candidly at the 2019 Macquarie conference about the process of making *Nightwalkers*, a futuristic Aboriginal vampire television series set in the western suburbs of Sydney. She was originally approached by the director of the series, who she described as "just a white rich guy from the eastern suburbs", and agreed to work with him to create a culturally safe production (Cruse and Glover 2019). Bee then became credited as a co-writer and Indigenous consultant on the project, in addition to acting the part of Dante, one of the Aboriginal vampires who is transformed during the era of colonial frontier wars and massacres. Through careful and continual negotiation with the director and the rest of the crew working on *Nightwalkers*, supported by her partner Lou Glover and their community, Bee managed to arrange for Dante to be made the intellectual property of the Darug Nation, the traditional owners of Western

Sydney, under copyright law. This allows for a portion of future royalties related to the show to be paid to the Darug. This was important to Cruse, given her own knowledge of previous less successful examples of the management of Aboriginal cultural property and language in the mainstream production of science fictions on screen. She noted some examples where Indigenous cultural imagery is either misappropriated or misused in science fiction and futuristic productions that had been at the forefront of her mind during the scriptwriting.

Cruse's work on *Nightwalkers*, while it was a collaborative production with a settler director, is an example of a successful values-driven Indigenous Futurist practice at the grassroots level which demonstrates how Indigenous Futurist work in an Australian context might differ from the Canadian context. Australian Indigenous practitioners in arts and media who work with science fiction and futurisms largely practice outside of university funding frameworks and are making important, thoughtful and complex cultural products while negotiating complex power relations in the production context. The above examples from Cruse's practice and other non-institutionalised collective projects such as the *Blak to the Future* exhibition and curatorship workshop held at Footscray Community Arts Centre, demonstrate the power exercised by Aboriginal young people in settings without institutional support. The imaginative power in Indigenous Futurism is necessarily generated in this shared network of community practice.

Conceptual frameworks: Linear Progress Narratives and the Virtuous State

Each of the four texts studied in my project pivot around key milestones in the history of the administration of Aboriginal people. By engaging with these 'milestone' dates and historical landmarks from the perspective of the future, they problematise ideas of linear progress and progressive governance. To understand this use of time as a method for political critique in the works, I use Black American theorist Michelle M. Wright's idea of the linear progress narrative, which refers to the way time and political histories are understood in western postcolonising contexts. I also use Quandamooka scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson's idea of the virtuous state, through which she articulates the ways in which postcolonising states establish linear progress narratives with regards to racial politics and construct virtue and benevolence as white possessions. I see these two concepts as deeply related and as participatory in the operation of Tuck's settler futurity, which can be described as the rendering of the future as knowable and as white property. It is my aim to demonstrate how the four texts I study in this thesis use the tools of Indigenous Futurism to have productive conversations with these two frameworks.

The tool of futuring used in Indigenous Futurist texts asserts multiple pasts, presents, and futures. Time is represented, as Dillon outlines, as "currents in a navigable stream", flowing together with confusion and simultaneity (2012, 3). The works use familiar historical and temporal landmarks to distort and antagonise the notion of progress and through this, present criticisms of the virtuousity of white governance. Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* is set in 2088, three hundred years since the landing of the First Fleet and the beginning of the invasion of so-called Australia. In constructing the world of the text, the novel makes explicit reference to previous historical moments of administration in the protectionist era and the advent of native title, as well as legal and political

formations such as Closing the Gap[1] and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). Nicole Watson's work *In the Matter of Djappari* focusses on the murder trial of a Yolgnu man named Tukiar (Dhikiyarr) which took place a few years prior to the 1938 Day of Mourning protest of the sesquicentennial commemorations of the First Fleet's landing in Sydney. The Day of Mourning event is a landmark in the history of Aboriginal activism on the east coast and in the development of the political consciousness raising of Aboriginal people. The Tukiar case is seen as a flashpoint in historical narratives. Because it represented a sense of changing legal relations between Aboriginal people and the court system, historians have made the argument that the case informed some of the energy of the Day of Mourning protests in Sydney, evidenced by Yorta Yorta activist William Cooper's own interest in the case and the growing awareness on the east coast of matters of racism and justice in the Territory (see Byrne 1990). Danis Goulet's 2017 virtual reality work *The Hunt*, explored in chapter six, forms part of a virtual reality film project which directly criticised the Canada150 celebrations during the week of the Canadian national holiday, by presenting a Canada three hundred years from the birth of the nation stricken by war and violence.

To theorise the ways these familiar historical references are used in the works, I will outline some understandings of linear and Epiphenomenal time which are put forward in Michelle M. Wright's text *The Physics of Blackness* (2015). In this work, Wright mounts a serious challenge to understandings of Blackness in

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[1] "Closing the Gap" refers to a series of policy initiatives and strategies which have been enacted with the aim of closing 'gaps' in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia. Initially, it was constructed as a response to a 2005 social justice report handed down by Tom Calma AO which urged government action on the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people in Australia. CTG broadly seeks to address this 'gap' through improving education, health, child mortality, economic development and advancement, literacy, and other areas. It has been criticised by the First Nations scholar Maggie Walter for it's resulting construction of Aboriginal people as 'Deficit data/problematic people'

American philosophy, arguing that the basis of these historical and political understandings is rooted in a linear progress narrative. She begins by outlining two key arguments from Isaac Newton which exert persistent influence over understandings of history and time in the humanities; linear time and entropy. She unpacks Newton's argument that time is linear and uniform, and progresses in a straight line, and argues that the assumption that "Absolute, true, and mathematical time, in and of itself and of its own nature, without reference to anything external, flows uniformly", has a dominance over modern western understandings of political progress, both in the academy and outside it (M. Wright 2015, 39). This idea holds particular influence over how the development of rights and racial equality in modern settler colonial nation states is understood.

Despite having been complicated by Einstein's later arguments in 1905 that time may speed up and slow down, and is experienced relatively, the Newtonian notion of uniform time has, in Wright's view, shaped understandings of reality and history in both humanities scholars and in laypeople to a great extent. The reason for this is, she speculates, that uniform linear time is appealingly straightforward, providing an "immediate cogency" to narratives of history and civilization (39). From Newton's understanding of time and motion, she notes that what is commonly understood in the western academy as movement and progress is understood through the logics of cause and effect. Progress, it is presumed, is generated by a series of events which logically follow on from each other, summarised here as three laws "so deeply embedded in the consciousness of so many individuals that they might first strike us as disappointingly obvious, but their implications are vast and astonishing" (39);

1. A body at rest will remain at rest and a body in motion will remain in

motion, unless an outside force— such as the friction of a collision with another solid object— intervenes.

2. The greater the force applied to an object, the greater the rate of acceleration.
3. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. (39)

From these three assumptions, Wright argues, we get our understandings of subject and object; those who act, and those who are acted upon. Newton's theories of entropy give us the subject/object dichotomy which is active in understandings of the 'civilised' West and Indigenous otherness:

> The central concept emphasised here is that space and time form a neat line; space moves "forward"— that is, *chronologically*— pushed by time's natural progression. This is, in a nutshell, linear spacetime— and even today, despite the contrary findings since, it dominates the Western imagination to such a degree that it is difficult to think of space and time functioning in any other fashion. Newton, by building on and confirming established concepts of time with his laws of motion, gave the linear progress narrative of time its appeal as the "divine mechanism that drove God's great creation of the Earth". (40)

According to Wright, entropy and linear time provide scholars, scientists, and laypeople with a comfortingly simple understanding of time and history as neat, stable, and logical in their development, informing western notions of progress, civilisation, and modernity.

Within writings on Black history, the translations of Newton's understandings of time and entropy-that is, of linearity and cause and effect- reduces what is really a "history of negotiations…like the history of all peoples" to a linear timeline of progress from A to B (38). This linearity generates contradictions and "logical paradoxes" and obstructs what Wright notes is the "horizontal" multiplicity of Black experiences (37):

> Even when enjoying superior numbers and superior weapons for murder and terror, oppressors must constantly threaten and terrorize or torture and kill members of the oppressed collective in order to maintain their compliance. Even so, not all members will comply; some will resist until they are dead, some will escape, and a rare few will become quite famous, even historically successful, subversives and revolutionaries. These horizontal negotiations deeply inform everything from how lives are actually lived (versus the historical records left by the oppressors) to how laws are inaugurated and how some historical events occur and conclude, but they are often lost in linear progress narratives unless they fit neatly on the timeline. (37, 38)

Wright notes here that the voices of women and queer people are often likely to be ignored or left out in these accounts of linear time and history. For Wright, linear time belongs to the narratives of heterosexual men, including Black heterosexual men, when examining narratives contained within Black history in the United States. If progress is marked off in a linear fashion, histories written from this perspective are then likely to exclude and ignore exceptional accounts which do not neatly fit into this narrative.

In my examination of Indigenous Futurist works, I am interested in how Michelle Wright's critical philosophy of progress is reflected. Countering the linear model, what Wright terms Epiphenomenal time brings about the agency and stories of women and others within the Black community who are left out of histories rooted in understandings of linear progress. Epiphenomenal time, in contrast to linear time, is another western understanding of time as more horizontal than top-down. While maintaining the same stable and tripartite view of time as pasts, presents, and futures, Epiphenomenal explanations of time allow for an acknowledgement of time as a constant flow of conversation between the three; "In physics, Epiphenomenal time…means that the 'now' is always in process—that is, the present and future are not discrete moments but rather are conflated into the one moment that is the now" (41). For Wright, when confronted with a challenging moment of agency of Black women in a male-dominated text, "Epiphenomenal time can help" to restructure an understanding of their personhood (2015, 71). While Wright's theoretical engagement does not address Indigenous writing specifically, it provides some helpful analysis. Indigenous Futurist authors are interested in the often silenced or absent narratives of women, queer people, children, and the non-human world, and use their narratives as counter points to assertions of linear progress in racial politics. These less heard narratives in Black history and literature are made central, and they interrupt dominant understandings of progress and change in the works. Wright's outline of the linear and epiphenomenal positions on time assist in understanding the use of time as a formal strategy in Indigenous Futurism, highlighting how it opens up space for the narrative voices and agencies of women, queers, children, and the non-human world.

Reading Michelle Wright's positions on linear progress narratives helped me to understand how each of the Indigenous Futurist texts I have written on take

notions of progress to task. The texts make it their project to uncover narratives of Aboriginal women, queer people, and non-human agency which might be hidden within seemingly stable narratives of historical progress. They each prevent alternative view aligned with what Alexis Wright calls the "long vision" (2019, n.p), asking in their own ways how far we have really come, despite political declarations of progress, agreements, treaties, and acts of parliament seemingly made in the interest of Aboriginal people. Michelle Wright's explanation of Epiphenomenal time as a structure which opposes linear progress narratives and offers space for the voices of Black women, queer people, and others who are marginalised within the narratives of linear progress in history is, while helpful, an incomplete framework. It assists in producing an understanding of the disruptive experience and expression of agency within historical and textual narrative (66), producing experiences within the text as "negotiation through active dialogue" rather than straightforwardly linear narrative (71). However, there is a critical perspective in the texts which is as much focussed on how place and country is understood as it is on time. While linear time is a disrupted and subverted, the works do not construct a defamiliarised place in which to situate themselves, and country remains a stable and enduring presence in the narratives.

In addition to using time as a strategy for displacing colonial notions of progress, Indigenous Futurist narratives are also interested in postcolonising nations' constructions of themselves as virtuous. Goulet's *The Hunt,* which I explore in chapter six, was created within the context of an upswell of national discourse focussed on Canada as a 'Nice' country at the time of the 150th anniversary of the enactment of its constitution act. Ellen Van Neerven's *Water* takes on the evils committed by a future government that sees itself as committed to inclusion, rights and justice for Indigenous peoples. In order to

understand these textual responses, I draw on Aileen Moreton-Robinson's concept of the virtuous racial state.

Moreton-Robinson's (2015b) exploration of the virtuous state argues that settler virtuosity is framed as a white possession. Settler moral virtue, she writes, was used politically in relation to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In Moreton-Robinson's theorisation, settler states have historically asserted the right to appropriate Indigenous lands and dehumanise Indigenous peoples through the securing of a unique moral and virtuous status. Morality and politics are "deployed" as strategic devices and co-opted as white possessions; "as an attribute of patriarchal white sovereignty, virtue functions as a useable property to dispossess Indigenous peoples from the ground of moral value" (2015b, 176). Audra Simpson also articulates virtuosity as part of the 'story' told about settler colonialism; "The story that settler societies like the United States, Canada, and Australia tell about themselves is that they are new, that they are beneficent, and that they are virtuous" (2016, 1305). In the chapters that follow, I look at how each one of the texts under consideration reveals the untenable paradoxes and contradictions in narratives of linear progress and settler virtuosity.

I will draw out both of these concepts of linear progress and the virtuous state across my engagements with texts in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6. In chapter one, I outline my approach to textual analysis, and build a case for consideration of Indigenous Futurist texts as political and activist works. I use methodological prompts from Chadwick Allen (2012a) on what he calls 'Trans-Indigenous' methods for reading international Indigenous texts alongside those from so-called Australia. Chapter two establishes my understanding of the relationships between science fiction, futurism, and settler colonial futurity, and discusses the

utility of these ‘genres’ and practices for collective political envisioning. I explore utopianism as a technique of political imagining with a complex and contradictory relationship with Aboriginal lands and life. Chapter three examines the unique futurist work of Munanjali writer and scholar Nicole Watson, In the Matter of Djappari (re Tukiar) [2035] FNCA 1. Chapter four looks at two Indigenous futurist fiction works, Alexis Wright’s novel *The Swan Book* and Ellen Van Neerven’s short story *Water*, as examples of policy dystopias. Chapter five provides an in-depth study of Ellen Van Neerven’s short story novella Water as a queer ‘contact’ story. Chapter six examines the representations of war in Danis Goulet’s virtual reality work *The Hunt*, made in response to the 2017 celebrations of Canada150.

Chapter 1: Methodology

Indigenous literature presents readers with blueprints and 'long visions' for the generation of new futures where, as Mykaela Saunders writes, our visions for the future may become "a reality" (2019, 60). They are part of the critical decolonial project of dreaming as a full scale reimagination of the "structures of government and social order" which is outlined by Poka Laenui (2000, 155). It is my intent in this thesis to read Indigenous Futurist works in a way that acknowledges the level of political theorisation being done by the authors. I aim to create space in my research for an understanding of the works as political provocations within the context of Alexis Wright's own description of her writing as part of a movement to develop a "self-governing literature", and to provide a basis for discussion of those works as political roadmaps (Wright 2019, n.p.).

In this chapter, I outline my methodological approach to selecting and theorising the texts studied in this thesis. I critique some of the dominant theoretical habits in the way Aboriginal texts are analysed in the academy and problematise the idea of textual analysis as a method of colonial meaning-making. I aim to apply approaches to using and learning from texts from Indigenous literary theory which conceptualise texts as agential, rather than as inert objects which the scholar gathers data from or uses for their own purposes as a critic. Thinking through textual work as part of the critical decolonial projects of collective 'dreaming' and 'envisioning' outlined by both Laenui and Tuhiwai Smith, my approach involves building a case for the consideration of texts themselves as methodological tools, rather than as objects upon which methodological and theoretical tools operate. I have shaped my research around two key questions:

1. How is Indigenous Futurism practiced in Australia?
2. How do Indigenous Futurist texts articulate the politicised experiences and future visions of Aboriginal people in postcolonising contexts?

I am focussing my enquiry throughout this thesis on the presentation of political visions of the future for Aboriginal people within the works, showing how each text uses the future as a critical tool for generating political thought. Finally, I will provide some basis for critical study of Indigenous Futurism in an international frame to facilitate my analysis of *The Hunt* in chapter 6.

Conceptualising Indigenous Texts

In asking my research questions, it is important to note that I am not concerned with asserting any familiar generic structures, linguistic or stylistic features within the texts which would provide neatly categorical labels through which to interpret them. I'm also resisting the imperative to reproduce a strict definition of a text within my methodological framework. Definitions of what constitutes a text are laden with colonial hierarchies. While the focus of this study is on largely written works in the English language, scholars such as Daniel Heath Justice and Ambelin Kwaymullina have provided commentary on the vibrancy of Aboriginal textuality beyond the relatively recent form of the book. Justice has commented that "we still live in a world that demeans" Indigenous literary works that fall outside the exclusive confines of written works published in English, and has argued for the considerations of all forms of what is considered literature (Justice 2018, 20). He notes further that "it bears explicit acknowledgement that these texts…are only one part of a much broader expressive archive in many languages and forms" and that Indigenous peoples "have always communicated ideas, stories, dreams, visions, and concepts" in many media (21). This is

consistent with Alexis Wright's (2019) description of the "ancient library" of Aboriginal storytelling tradition which informs her long engagement with the art form.

Considering these tensions, written histories and analyses of Aboriginal writing vary in their assessment of when Aboriginal writing began, and the broader question of what writing is. Within the historicisation of Aboriginal literatures, the late Noonuccal activist Oodgeroo's (aka Kath Walker) poetry work often signifies the beginning of a distinctive 20th century Aboriginal literary movement which is characterised by a set of political sensibilities, responsibilities, and evolving stylistic choices, and also by substantive involvement and success in the white Australian literary community (see Grossman, 2003). In the decades following Oodgeroo's first published works, a growing community of Aboriginal writers has grappled with issues of editorship, publishing norms, critics, and the hierarchies of literary awards and value.

Broadening Eurocentric definitions of Aboriginal writing and literacy, Wiradjuri writer and critic Anita Heiss, lays down parameters for further analysis of Aboriginal writers, publishing, and Aboriginal content in Australian literature. She acknowledges that Aboriginal people have been involved in contributing to written and oral languages, discourses and publishing, both independently and in collaboration with settlers since the 1800s. She argues that 'Aboriginal writing' as a specific genre, however, did not develop until more recently:

> Apart from [David] Unaipon's work it is generally accepted that written Aboriginal literature did not fully develop into a distinct genre until the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Penny van Thoorn qualifies this generally

> accepted view commenting that, "Aboriginal people began using the technologies of alphabetic writing far earlier than the dominant narrative would suggest”. (Heiss 2003, 25)

Indigenous critics have posited holistic and inclusive definitions of writing and text that acknowledge the deep intellectual cultures of Aboriginal nations as a rich textual tradition. Our intellectual, textual and philosophical cultures pre-exist colonial contact and the introduction of the codex. Sandra Phillips has articulated the printed book and ‘literacy’ itself as a historically and culturally specific form of knowledge transmission located in Europe, which holds a hegemonic power over how literacy and knowledge are understood (Phillips 2012). Phillips’ 2012 doctoral thesis provides greater detail on the politics of the book in the colonial context. For my study, I remain flexible with regards to my understanding of Indigenous Futurism as a movement with many variations in practice, genre, mode, and applicability, and this led me to consider the legal work by Watson and Danis Goulet’s virtual reality work alongside the novel and short story format.

Indigenous intellectuals have pointed out the dense relationship between the emergence of Australian literature and colonialism as a structure. Indigenous writers contend with, as Alison Ravenscroft (2010) has pointed out in relation to Alexis Wright, the misconceptualisation of their writing as a derivative or descendent of white Australian writing. Noongar author Kim Scott makes a point of situating settler Australian writing within its relationship to power and dispossession, refocussing on the roots of Australian literature itself within the context of the colonisation of Aboriginal country and Aboriginal stories:

> Some might place Australian Indigenous writing in the realm of Australian literature, but there is a wider context; that of the emergence of Australia, as a nation, at the same time as some of the stories which have grown from our land continued or were adapted, or died forever. Australian literature, in such a context is a sickly stream. (K. Scott 2003, i)

Rather than positioning Aboriginal literature as a descendent of white Australian writing, Scott places Australian writing itself in the context of colonisation, linking the emergence of an Australian literary culture inextricably to the colonial dynamics of illegitimate occupation of Indigenous lands. He notes that the role of colonial history in the literary field "can't be over-emphasised. Land was stolen, a particular power relationship has been imposed and maintained" (i). That power dynamic, for Scott, continues to infect the field of Australian literature and muddy the distinctions drawn between Indigenous and 'Australian' writing. He argues that Australian Indigenous writing is seen as a "by-product" (i) of colonialism which also provides a means of connection to land and culture, and has become a necessary tool of cultural regeneration, connection and continuation. Non-Indigenous US scholar Scott Lauria Morgensen has, like Kim Scott, emphasised the emergence of European cultures in the processes of colonisation in postcolonising contexts:

> In light of colonial histories, Europe is Western only to the extent that it is metropolitan — a center of colonial empires — which means neither Europe nor Western cultural legacies will be understood

> before studying their formation in colonial and settler societies. (Morgensen 2011, 110)

This re-reading of cultural imperialism as producing a co-constituted Europe in relation to the colonies positions European literature in relation to Aboriginal exploitation and colonial anxiety. Aboriginal literature is not, in this reading, the descendent of a white Australian canon; the white Australian canon cannot take place without the colonial relationship, it's co-constitutive relation with the 'other' or the other's country.

The Colonialism of Textual Analysis

There is a dangerous capacity in the literary studies field to underestimate the power of both literature and theory, as Evelyn Araluen argues, to "operate as a force of imperialism" (2019, 507). Araluen's work in the field of decolonising methodologies has examined how literary theory is practiced in such a way that prevents it from approaching Indigenous political agency and subjectivity and reproduces colonial subject/object distinctions. She importantly emphasises that literary theory is too concerned with abstracted theories from the western canon which rely on notions of "civilization and Other" (2019, 510-511). In colonial contexts, literary writing has been a means of gathering, imagining, and circulating information about the colonial 'others'. This has a powerful effect on what is known, assumed, and accepted about Aboriginal people. Jeanine Leane notes in her study of the written representations of Aboriginal people that for the first 150 years of contact with Aboriginal people,

> non-Aboriginal writers, in their many forms as scientists, historians, novelists, filmmakers, photographers, journalists and others, across a range of genres have produced most of the portrayals of Aboriginal people. This corpus and range of materials continues to constitute the archives of Aboriginal Australia that are drawn upon when discussing Aboriginal matters. (Leane 2010, 1)

This influential corpus of materials shapes the responses of non-Indigenous students, Leane remarks, to Aboriginal-authored content in the classroom setting, where “arguably the realisation that they no longer control the characters and images across such genres seems to be as confronting as the lived realities of Aboriginal people today” (6). The close connection suggested here between representation and control reflects the powerful position of literary representations in the colonial context.

Textual analysis is also a colonial process of meaning-making. In academic research, ideas of textual analysis have constructed the reading of a text as an act through which the (here presumed white, western) reader might come to know an ‘other’ culture. Literary theorist Alan McKee, for example, writes that textual analysis is

> a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. It is a methodology - a data-gathering process - for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which

> they live...We interpret texts (films, television programmes, magazines, advertisements, clothes, graffiti, and so on) in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them. And, importantly, by seeing the variety of ways in which it is possible to interpret reality, we also understand our own cultures better because we can start to see the limitations and advantages of our own sense-making practices. (McKee 2003, 3)

McKee's construction of a disembodied 'we' in the textual research space is problematic, as is his assertion of textual analysis as a data-gathering method through which 'we' might learn from other cultures. The interpretive data 'gathered' from a text reveals more about the (colonial) interests and epistemological values of the researcher than it does about the text, or the image of the 'other's culture reflected in that analysis. Araluen has argued that the over-reliance in literary criticism on certain types of theory as tools for analysis reproduces the western academic reliance on critical tools which are grounded in understandings of civilization and other, and this presents a limitation when it comes to understanding Aboriginal writing. She argues that "the totalizing rhetorical principles of theory aspire to prevent all discourses from directly approaching lived experience" altogether (2019, 510-511).

From the perspective of Aboriginal researchers, texts do not only become meaningful through the knowing, interpreting gaze of the researcher or the authoritative lens of theory, and they are not only inert objects or cultural containers from which knowledge can be gathered and metabolized into new knowledge by the scholarly reader. Ambelin and Blaze Kwaymullina

have written on the dynamic between materials and researcher with this in mind, noting the power held within texts and the complexity of encountering stories in the research process:

> Aboriginal voices and stories continue to connect to Country and hold power even when translated into text, told outside of the contexts of the Country where the knowledge is lived, and potentially circumscribed by Western understandings. Researching texts, whether published or archival, creates a relationship between the knowledge and the reader that intersects and finds its embodiment in many realities, laws and relationships. It is a complex process. (Kwaymullina et al. 2013, 6)

Their insistence on defining texts in terms of their relationality and agency is echoed in Aileen Moreton-Robinson's work on Indigenous women's memoir and lifewriting. Moreton-Robinson writes in her 2002 study that the texts of Aboriginal women manufacture a "distinct subjectivity" which is "both an expression of difference cultural forms and resistance to white domination" (Moreton-Robinson 2002, 14). Through this, there is "little room made available for the reader to be distracted from the inter-subjective meeting or to objectify them" (12-13). The author is, for Moreton-Robinson, "the subject of their own gaze rather than the object of white anthropological scrutiny and knowledge" (2-3). The researcher is implicated in an inter-subjective meeting, rather than being the authoritative voice who interprets the text.

Lived Experience and Indigenous Standpoint Theory

Throughout my thesis, I frequently narrate my analysis through my own experiences and standpoint as a Yugambeh trans person. This is done with the intention of reflecting on my own politicised positioning as an Aboriginal reader. Story is a means of bringing my own practice of literary analysis closer to the politics of lived experience. Araluen has called for methodologies which divert from the conventions of a literary theory rooted in "semiotics, hermeneutics, linguistics, cultural and critical theory, philosophy, historiography, psychoanalysis, anthropology" and instead centre lived experience and political struggle, looking to a deeper examination of the cultural and political conditions in which the works are made (2019, 508). Western theory, when applied to literary texts by Aboriginal people, is frequently, as she writes, "unconcerned with our material realities and processes of cultural production, or [have] seized upon our creations for its tropes and metaphors" (510-511). Sto: lo First Nations scholar Jo-ann Archibald has also noted the increasing significance of "Indigenous lived experience stories" within methodology for Indigenous scholarship, to provide "a deeper and more authentic perspective of Indigenous knowledge systems, colonial impact, and sovereignty approaches" (Archibald 2019, 59-60). In response, I use story with the awareness that, as Araluen argues, that literary theory is limited and at times unproductive as a means of interpreting Aboriginal realities.

In using lived experience and story as a framework for understanding, I draw from a few positions on Indigenous standpoint theory as a methodological and theoretical tool. In 1993, Martin Nakata, reflecting on standpoint theory and the ability of Torres Strait Islander young people's ability to navigate an

educational context in which they are inevitably raced, made the observation that

> What they need most is an understanding of the political nature of their position, and that requires both the language and the knowledge of how that positioning is effected in the mainstream world. They also need a way of maintaining themselves in the face of it, as well as working against that knowledge system that continues to hold them to the position that it has produced for them...it isn't enough to just be literate. (Nakata 1993, 65)

Nakata's contributions on the uses of Indigenous standpoint outline its ability to empower the researcher/student with critical tools for navigating the politics of knowledge and authority in the colonial context. It is both a powerful tool for research practice, and just as importantly, a survival mechanism. In his later work, he clarifies that while standpoint theory involves utilising the everyday experience of the researcher, this lived experience is "the point of entry for investigation, not the case under investigation" (Nakata 2007, 349). It should not be "endless production of subjective narrative to disrupt objectified accounts", but rather involves the critical understanding of how one's social position is "epistemically significant" (347). Aileen Moreton-Robinson's 2014 work on Indigenous women's standpoint theory also provides a view of how a standpoint is actively produced and theorised, rather than being an innate quality possessed by the researcher. Standpoints are not simply the uses of lived experience, but are

> ascribed through inheritance and achieved through struggle. It is constituted by our sovereignty and constitutive of the interconnectedness of our ontology (our way of being); our epistemology (our way of knowing) and our axiology (our way of doing). (Moreton-Robinson 2014, 340)

For Moreton-Robinson, standpoint theory is intended to be used purposefully as part of a decolonising research project. Indigenous women's standpoint theory is further defined by a negation of Cartesian rationalist mind/body split, relationality, and the specific sovereignty of Indigenous women as a site of knowledge production and practice. Both scholars have taken care to emphasise that the development of an Indigenous Standpoint requires active theorising and is not innate.

Following from the work of Indigenous theorists who have worked to establish standpoint theory as a form of enquiry, I will situate myself. Situating myself and implementing story as a process of meaning making is an ongoing process which will inform my writing and my responses to the texts across the thesis. In doing so, I take methodological direction from settler academic Conrad Scott's introduction to his exploration of the Indigenous Futurist works of Eden Robinson and Richard Van Camp in the Extrapolations volume of 2017. Scott writes that "To begin any critical endeavour is to place oneself…This discussion is, after all, one of place and time", emphasising the need to locate oneself in relation to one's own histories, belonging, in relation to the land, and to the politics of sovereignty and land justice in which one lives and writes (C. Scott 2017, 74). Nakata's works have also signalled the deep relationship between understanding one's own positionality and the integrity of any research process. I establish here both my own identity and my community's relations with

academia and theory, drawing on the works of Yugambeh academics and activists, and examining the case of the excavation of Yugambeh remains at Broadbeach by the University of Queensland as an event which emphasises the relationship between our communities and research institutions.

My family are from the Kombumerri clan, part of the Graham family. The Kombumerri are part of the Yugambeh language group of the Gold Coast and surrounds. The Yugambeh language is part of a dialect chain which encompasses family groups from the Logan, Albert, Pimpama, Coomera, and Nerang rivers, "including all the adjacent streams and creeks" (Best 1994, 87). Yugambeh people have diverse ways of identifying, but generally, family groups are known as the Kombumerri, Wangerriburra, Migunburri, Munanjali, Gugugun, Birrinburra, Bolongin, and Minjinbul. We have family and linguistic connections all the way down to the Tweed River and into Bundjalung country, across the New South Wales border, until you reach to the country of the Gumbaynggir to the south, whose language is distinct from the Bundjalung/Yugambeh dialect chain. In the Kombumerri clan, many can trace their connection to a single matriarchal ancestor, Jenny Graham, a Yugambeh woman who was born on the banks of the Nerang River in the 19th century. Jenny married a white man, Andrew Hamilton Graham, and lived in Southport in the twentieth century protecting her children and many other extended relations in her care. Both Jenny and her brother, William Drumley, who lived in Beaudesert, were strong Aboriginal community leaders who protected their people and were able to keep their families together through the era of the Queensland Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897. Because of the efforts of William and Jenny in keeping their families safe and together during the era of protectionism in Queensland, Yugambeh people have been able to stay strong in their family connections and remain on country over generations. I

have lived in Victoria in the lands of the Kulin Nation with my family since I was born, and I have spent the course of my own thesis journey doing a great deal of learning about our history and making time regularly to visit our country. This learning process has been central to the writing of my thesis, and it has deeply informed my understanding of the texts.

Referring to the published work of Yugambeh writers and scholars is illuminating, and presents a story of cultural strength and resistance to white histories written about us which erase our presence and sovereignty. The body of scholarly and literary work published by Yugambeh people since the 1990s demonstrates that our nation, culture, identity, and kinship systems have remained strong despite years of occupation on the Gold Coast, and that we are engaged in an ongoing struggle to protect our cultural heritage and environmental resources from exploitation. Kombumerri historian Ysola Best provides some of the first academic writing on southeast Queensland history from a Yugambeh perspective to counter the erasure of Aboriginal narratives from Gold Coast history. Her article "An Uneasy Coexistence: An Aboriginal Perspective of ‘Contact History’ in Southeast Queensland" (1994) put on the record that Yugambeh people exist, that we have our own genealogies, relations to land and people, economic systems, spiritual beliefs, and distinct language, and sets an agenda for a project of ‘speaking back’ to colonial narratives of Southeast Queensland. She notes that

> there is a need for continued research on the subjects of contact and conflict in south-east Queensland. For this purpose, I have attempted to briefly assess some early historical records to determine, from an Aboriginal perspective, how Yugambeh people adapted to a changing environment and survived through an uneasy co-existence with

> newcomers to their land. I will conclude by questioning what benefit Yugambeh people gained by assisting the newcomers who moved into their country illegally, usurping the right of Yugambeh people to access their economic resource - the land. Indeed, had those many early European arrivals to southeast Queensland respected appropriately those Aboriginal individuals and communities who assisted their progress and aided their survival, the 'contact history' would have been easier to interpret. (88)

Best asserts a distinct Yugambeh ontology in her work, and also notes Jenny Graham's influence in the region alongside other Yugambeh ancestors such as Bilin Bilin in advocating for Aboriginal people and ensuring the survival of our people in the southeast of Queensland since colonization. In her critical history work on contact history, Best engages with settler accounts to argue that previous writing on contact and conflict in pastoral and frontier history in the southeast was Eurocentric, lacking proper understanding and consideration of Aboriginal peoples' genealogies, linguistics, and belief systems. She writes that Aboriginal people in the Yugambeh nation were in possession of our own distinct economic systems, contesting the popular perspective on frontier conflict history that Yugambeh and settler conflict occurred due to Yugambeh people's desire to control and share in the economic overabundance of the settler society. Best argues instead that conflict arose not from jealousy or a failure to adapt, but from the Yugambeh demand to protect what we already had; water, land, and people. Dr. Mary Graham further argued the following on the resistance of the contemporary Yugambeh community:

> Aboriginal people have a kinship system which extends into land; this system was and still is organised into clans…it does not matter how

> Western and urbanised Aboriginal people have become, this kinship system never changes. (It has been damaged by, for example, cultural genocide/Stolen Children/westernisation etc, but has not been altered substantially). (Graham 2008, n.p)

Both Best and Graham have set out to contest persistent notions within the settler academy that Yugambeh people's language and culture have been eradicated, arguing instead that Aboriginal communities, sensibilities and kinship systems in the region are continuing, and becoming stronger over time. Graham has further advocated within the health and community development space for what she calls the re-construction of Aboriginal communities post-colonisation. Expressing the sensibilities of Indigenous Standpoint theory, Graham has also reflected on the uses of Indigenous knowledge positions in destabilising the Cartesian rationalist assertion of "I think, therefore I am" which promotes disembodiment; noting instead that "I am placed, therefore I am" (Graham cited in Black 2011, 350).

The desire expressed within Graham's philosophies to resist the Cartesian view of knowledge and research is particularly important when considering the extractive relationship between universities and researchers and Aboriginal people. In the 1960s, an archaelogical dig was conducted by the University of Queensland at Broadbeach Waters after a Yugambeh gravesite was disturbed. The remains of around 150 Yugambeh ancestors, which had been cared for by the community for many generations, were taken and held by the University for decades. In the 1980s, a group of Yugambeh people including Patricia O'Connor and Ysola Best were successful in lobbying the University of Queensland to return the remains to their resting place. They are now properly reburied in Kombumerri Park in Broadbeach, and were re-

interred with the help of Laila Haglund-Calley, the archaeologist who was responsible for mapping the remains and excavating them on behalf of the University of Queensland's anatomy department in the first instance. Haglund-Callie's 1969 master's thesis documents the discovery and excavation of the remains in distressing detail, including extensive images of Aboriginal ancestral skeletal remains being dug up, measured, and collected. The site, as she reports, was accidentally discovered in 1963 by a group of soil contractors removing soil to be sold as lawn top dressing (Haglund-Calley 1969). It was hurriedly excavated by the archaeological team to prevent the loss or damage of any remains as much as possible. Haglund-Calley's assessment of the Aboriginal history of the area in 1969 relied on the accounts of the area presented in the works of the same historians whose accounts are contested by Best's historical work for their inaccuracies and Eurocentric attitudes; and they follow those same attitudes in erasing the living community. The Broadbeach excavation is not an isolated case. It is symptomatic of a broader system of spiritually violent relationships between Aboriginal communities and universities. The University of Melbourne provides one of the worse cases of the treatment of Aboriginal remains. The fight to have those remains repatriated and reburied, to establish the laws on cultural heritage in Victoria and provoke long term structural change in the relations between the university, the Melbourne Museum, and the Victorian Aboriginal community, is detailed in the work of Uncle Jim Berg and Shannon Faulkhead (Faulkhead and Berg 2010). This case instigated an ongoing interrogation of the University's participation in eugenics and racial science movements, and its continuing celebration of the champions of those movements as great researchers whose names are immortalised on the campus buildings. While the issue of the remains in Broadbeach was eventually settled with the repatriation and re-establishment of the resting

grounds, researchers and university people are still looked on with a degree of suspicion in our community.

Establishing the Critical Habits of the Academy

The damaging practices of the university in relation to Indigenous communities in cases like the Broadbeach excavation and the repatriation of remains from the University of Melbourne are now well known in the field of decolonising methodologies. Evelyn Araluen writes how the university is underpinned by "a range of beliefs and assumptions regarding Western authority over Indigenous lands, bodies, knowledges, cultural practices, and histories", noting how disciplines such as anthropology have been critiqued by Indigenous scholars for their "more direct role in structures of ongoing dispossession and genocide, simultaneously erasing, extracting, and testing beliefs and methods from and on Indigenous communities" (2019, 505). Literary studies has, however, "at times been protected from suspicion of these empirical underpinnings by its own disciplinary ambiguity" (506). This "underestimation of literature's power to operate as a force of imperialism" is, for Araluen, part of the problem of scholarship on Indigenous literature (507).

In the latter years of writing my thesis, I taught a seminar on Aboriginal writing under the supervision of Wiradjuri writer and scholar Dr. Jeanine Leane. The critical readings set on the novels we had to read were often given to us by Jeanine to provoke critical reflection on the part of the mostly white students, and to invite them into a critical interrogation of their own reading positions. In light of the normative binaries established within textual analysis, working through questions of positionality, and doing politicised work on the self in the context of global white supremacy and colonisation, was integral to the work of engagement with the text.

Working through the scholarly sources we were provided with alongside the texts, the students and I identified some commonalities in the ways that settler critics would write about Aboriginal books. Settler critics largely base their discussion of Aboriginal texts according to a few models that appeared with frequency. Firstly, the theorist might look at the text as an expression of Aboriginal culture. This form of textual analysis is exactly as Alan McKee describes, in that it seeks to understand the text as an expression of the 'other's culture through which Aboriginal cultural values and expressions can be better understood by the white reader. Daniel Heath Justice has linked such understandings of Indigenous intellectual output as purely cultural as a sign of "culturalist prejudice" (Justice 2011, 336). The reader might argue that the text constitutes an expression of a distinct Aboriginal worldview, in either its content or its style. This is especially present in writing about genres such as poetry and autobiography, which are seen by critics and students approaching Aboriginal texts as natural extensions of an Aboriginal oral storytelling practice. It might be attached to the linguistic register of the text, to the unconventional ways the text is organised, the genre chosen (which might, in some settler critic's minds, reflect a continuation of a mythic or oral storytelling modality), a subversive relationship to the language used, a lack of punctuation or an experimental relation with punctuation, or other aspects of a text which present potential expressions of an author's ethnicity. These methods within the text are often attached to the Aboriginality of the author. During our class, Jeanine sometimes prompted the group with what felt like a trick question; "what is uniquely Aboriginal about this book?". Engaging with this question alongside a thoughtful examination of the student's assumptions about Aboriginality was useful, as it required an interrogation of both the perceived 'signs' of Aboriginality in the published text, and the reader's perception. It often

prompted a vigorous discussion about why this question would be asked of the text at all.

In order to illustrate some of the problems with this reading, I will present a further example from my own experience here. While completing a coursework subject in Indigenous research, in an all-Indigenous classroom this time, the issue of identifying Aboriginality in a text unintentionally became the focus of discussion. A non-Indigenous presenter was trying to demonstrate Gestalt principles to us, a cohort of Aboriginal researchers in our first years of our Ph.Ds. She showed us a series of incomplete images, commonly associated with Gestalt psychology, to demonstrate the ability of human brains to complete already-seen patterns and identify similarities, and fill in the gaps around visual and verbal gestures made in line with recognisable patterns (pyramids, faces, cats and dogs). One of the images towards the end of her slideshow was a painting done by an Aboriginal person from central Australia.

The class was given no information about the artist or the artwork at first. The image contained detailed line work. The presenter asked the class if they thought it was Aboriginal art or not, assuming that as Aboriginal people, the students would have a moment of instant recognition, and be able to 'complete the picture' as immediately as we had done with the previous images of incomplete triangles and pictures of human faces. We were a cohort of around thirty Aboriginal researchers of a range of experiences, disciplines and ages, and we were from all corners of the continent. There was a long silence. Eventually someone in the class pointed out that not all Aboriginal people have the same innate art style, that some Aboriginal cultures did utilise straight lines in their painting, and that it was simply not

possible for all Aboriginal people to be able to quickly verify each other's visual cultures just by seeing an image. The facilitator admitted that she was shocked that we didn't have the prior knowledge of this particular type of art style and couldn't verify whether it was Aboriginal art or not. She noted that the point of the exercise was recognition based, dependent on her own belief that we would all have that knowledge. Afterwards, the class reflected together on the position of Aboriginal art within Australian culture and on the slippery boundaries of realness and authentic cultural connection within art modes. We were all perplexed by the assumption that we would just always know what 'we' were looking at. We all shared our discomfort with the assumption that Aboriginality could be so easily identified within a text or painting.

Aboriginal writing is subject to long standing debates conceptualising its nature and authenticity, and Aboriginal writers have subsequently developed responses to identity debates and ethics of language, content and audience. As Anita Heiss outlines in *Dhuuluu-Yala (To Talk Straight)* (2003), since Aboriginal people have gained access to the publishing industry in Australia, there have been debates about authenticity, form, genre and identifiably Indigenous content that have significantly influenced and defined Aboriginal publishing and writing practices. She writes that this debate within publishing and broader Australian cultural discourses is as much a symptom of white Australian anxiety as it is a reflection of the ethics of publishing Aboriginal voices; "it is apparent that the debate and discussion around who is and isn't Aboriginal is a reaction, in part, to white Australia trying to understand the concept of Aboriginality on its own terms" (Heiss 2003, 21). In particular, she cites debates around ethical publishing, identity and

authorial voice which came to, for better or worse, define some of the key aspects of Aboriginal writing within the community of Aboriginal creatives.

What I am hoping to illustrate by presenting the above example is that settler critics in the humanities continue to perceive Aboriginality as a knowable, essentialised, and easily identifiable aesthetic quality within literary and visual cultures. This perception is present in settler literary analysis of Aboriginal writing, and it attempts to neatly distinguish which parts of a writer's voice or style are true to an Aboriginal voice and which are not. Oodgeroo Noonuccal was, for example, famously criticised for her inability to correctly demonstrate an authentic Aboriginal voice in her poetic works in the 1960s (see Mackay 2009). While this is less common in literary analysis now, it is still common for critics to make casual and vague remarks on how aspects of an Aboriginal authored text are reflective of an essentialised Aboriginal worldview, without elaboration or specification. A colonial impulse of control and possession through knowing prevails here in the discourses of publishing and genre, and in the university disciplines. This impulse is deeply rooted in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, as Mick Dodson writes in The End in the Beginning (1994):

> Since their first intrusive gaze, colonising cultures have had a pre-occupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling "Aborigines" and Aboriginality. Under that gaze Aboriginality changed from being a daily practice to being "a problem to be solved". (Dodson 1994, 2)

Citing the scientific, cultural, and disciplinary obsessions with measuring and making Aboriginality knowable, Dodson's work on the obsessive colonial categorisation of Aboriginal ontologies and epistemologies finds resonance in the understanding of Aboriginal writers in literary disciplines.

The obsessive colonial relation to 'knowing' the other is identified through its explicit relation to whiteness and possession of land. The production of knowledge about Indigenous people, Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues, reveals a way of knowing which is not racialised as white "despite whiteness being exercised epistemologically" (Moreton-Robinson 2004, 75). Moreton-Robinson emphasises that key to the function of whiteness as epistemology is that it definitively constitutes Indigenous being as 'known', establishes the limits on which Aboriginality can be known, and critically, through doing so, enables possession of land:

> Representations of the Indigenous 'other' have circulated in white Anglo discourse since the 1700s. The most infamous was that given by Cook, who stated that the Indigenous people of Australia had no form of land tenure because they were uncivilised, which meant that the land belonged to no one and was available for possession under the doctrine of terra nullius…since then we have been represented in many ways, which include treacherous, lazy, drunken, childish, cunning, dirty, ignoble, noble, primitive, backward, unscrupulous, untrustworthy and savage. These apparently uncomplicated representations mask not only the complexity of Indigeneity but also their role as a set of differences that work to assist the constitution of whiteness as an epistemological a priori that informs one's ontology. As a categorical object, race is deemed to belong to the other. (76)

Whiteness as epistemological *a priori* for Moreton-Robinson is firmly possessive, and this possessive logic as discourse is related to the construction of Aboriginal difference. Through identifying Aboriginality within texts, critics attempt to bring Aboriginality into the scope of white possessive knowing.

A second habit that I observed was a 'genre' reading, where the theorist might debate whether the text writes acceptably to the conventions of an established genre; whether a text 'counts' as a sincere work of science fiction, autobiography, or poetry, for example. In a genre reading, the fine points of texts are pulled apart to determine whether they qualify as belonging to a tradition of genre fiction (see Karin Althans' detailed 2013 investigation of whether certain works of Aboriginal writing can be called gothic fiction, for example) magic realism, and so on. The debate over the minutiae of the language and narrative signifiers of these genres in relation to the texts is lengthy. In the literature, it spills over into a searching interrogation of the politics of assigning a genre at all.

Ive Polak's *Futuristic Worlds in Australian Aboriginal Fiction* (2017) provides an apt example of the 'genre' reading in application to Indigenous Futurist texts. This analytical work does what I have described previously in the work of my class; it is structured around identifying and labelling aspects of Aboriginal texts as belonging (or not) to particular established genres. Polak is deeply interested in fantasy and magic realist genres, and her book addresses Ellen Van Neerven's and Alexis Wright's works alongside the earlier work of Archie Weller, Sam Watson, and Eric Willmot. Polak's book is a good example of a genre-centered reading of Indigenous Futurist writing, which classifies the texts as part of the broader structure of the 'fantastic'.

The central characteristic of the fantastic as a literary category is that it is anti-realist. For Polak, the fantastic is a flexible generic signifier which is present as “a flavour” or framework which informs fantasy, science fiction, Gothic, magic realism, other genres which are, for her, defined by their antagonistic relationship to the ‘real’, and by the reactions it may produce in a reader such as surprise, fear, and shock (Polak 2017, 65). This designation of the texts as embodying the fantastic is active in her readings of Ellen Van Neerven and Alexis Wright. In her study of Van Neerven’s work, Polak also draws on science fiction to describe aspects of the story, identifying the key science fiction motif of the ‘monster’ or 'alien' within *Water* and noting that Van Neerven “takes this basic matrix of the icon of the monster and rewrites it from within” (124). Science fiction, while Polak recognises it as a troubled framework in application in Van Neerven’s work, is the basic apparatus through which she understands the story. Polak argues that the 'monster' or ’alien’ in her reading becomes a “metaphor for culture”(2017, 121) in Van Neerven’s hands, a device through which Kaden is incited to become more familiar with her cultural roots.

Polak’s classification of the works as ‘fantastic’ is oppositional to an understanding of the works as Indigenous realism. It demonstrates the tendency within western scholarly criticism to attempt to label and define Aboriginal literatures according to western genre traditions. This is apparent even (or especially) where she presents an understanding of the texts as ‘blended’ or ‘hybridised’ in their generic features. Wiradjuri scholar Jeanine Leane has presented an alternative account of the uses of genre by Aboriginal writers as “eclecticism”, emphasising a level of intentionality, subversion, and artistry in the creative use of genre by the writers (2020, n.p). In Leane’s Ph.D thesis, focussed

on representations of Aboriginal people within Australian literary works, she makes an astute assessment of the existing body of generic theory, noting that

> these theories do not adequately address agencies of Aboriginal people…inadequacies in this part of their theory formation renders textual engagements with Aboriginal subjects in a contingent relation to a singular and static Western hegemonic condition, uncomplicated by the Aboriginal reality of converging worlds of experience. (Leane 2010, 45)

Although Leane's work was published in 2010, her commentary on the relation of literary theory to Indigenous writing is consistent with Polak's 2018 study. Polak's deferral to western generic categories overtly structures her understanding and presentation of the works, even where she recognises that it presents an incomplete and unresolved picture, and obscures an analysis of their political and agential aspects.

Leane's important point on the failure of literary theories to address the agencies of Aboriginal people is reflected, too, in the fact that very few Aboriginal voices are cited on genre in Polak's development of the term fantastic. In framing her understanding of the genre of the books under discussion, Polak acknowledges Dillon's work with a nod to her concept of Native Slipstream, which for Polak is subsumed into broader methods of "slipstream fiction" (2017, 84). However, she neglects the full complexity of Dillon's work on Indigenous Futurism, especially its idea of Indigenous Futurism as a more culturally relevant mode of storytelling or a mode of political critique which is reflective of Indigenous worldviews and values and as a continuation of

surviving Indigenous storytelling methods. Polak's work instead contextualises the Indigenous Futurist work she looks at within the history of Australian literary fiction and western fantastic genres. In doing so, she does what many literary critics have done to Indigenous-authored works; reasoning that the work appropriates aspects of western writing, but with a cultural or postcolonial 'twist'. The book opens with a Henry Lawson quote as an epigraph, and its opening pages refer to the works of Lawson and Patrick White as the origins of the realist traditions of Australian writing, before discussing the tradition of the 'great Australian novel' and the birth of Australian magic realism in the work of Tim Winton. It is disappointing and alienating to see the words of white Australian men foregrounded so heavily in a study of Aboriginal authors, and this is, I believe, a symptom of the mentality of the literary academy in which Indigenous texts are defined against the norms of white writing. Polak's lack of deep engagement with critical Aboriginal voices in the formation of a literary framework to address Indigenous futurist texts feeds into a perception that Indigenous peoples do not have a sophisticated body of knowledge and thought on the issue of Indigenous literature. Greater recognition of community voices on these texts, and on issues such as fantasy, realism, futurism, 'postcoloniality', and the novel are necessary.

In my view, Indigenous Futurism, a term which Polak does not engage with, is an important intervention into the genre politics between science fiction, fantasy, transrealism and speculative fiction. Indigenous Futurism as a framework for reading the texts gives more room for community self-definition of aesthetic and literary movements. It also signifies, as explained by Kwaymullina and Dillon, an alignment with a diversity of Indigenous value systems and complex understandings of reality and time. Beyond using this term to resolve the academy's persistent genre questions, I also want to engage with the term to

direct focus away from genre debates and towards Indigenous Futurism's political utility. I am most interested in the instructions and provocations Indigenous Futurist texts leave Aboriginal audiences for dealing with our social, cultural, and political realities and the challenges they present to the reader's understandings of reality. In addition to addressing this definitional problem, I also want to be intentional in centering Indigenous scholarship and using the work of Indigenous philosophers to assist in interpretation of the texts and their themes.

The third question is to do with whether or not the text complies with or resists an established structure, whether that structure is a social and political structure like whiteness, a generic or literary norm, or a theoretical approach or value system such as eco-feminism or postcolonialism. Of particular interest to the students and to some scholars is whether the text adequately resists colonialism, and by extension, whether it resists or complies with the expectation of a white reading audience. The question of resistance/compliance came up most frequently with our initial discussions of Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987), during which non-Indigenous students asked self-reflexive questions about why they enjoyed the text so much, and whether their enjoyment and defense of the text against sustained criticism was evidence of the text 'pandering' to a white consciousness.

This conversation represents a type of analysis which is focussed on the text's resistance or compliance to a structure. When conducting this kind of analysis, the critic will make an assessment of whether an Aboriginal novelist resists or complies a theoretical formation or value system such as utopianism, postcolonial literature, ecofeminism, or anthropocene literature. The critic may make the argument that a piece of Aboriginal fiction is compliant with a

neoliberal value system, for example, because they have produced genre fiction or romance writing which could be termed 'popular fiction' (See Gelder 2004 for further insight into how literary and the popular fiction are dichotomised). Critics engaging with Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book,* for example, have repeatedly made an analysis of the book as an 'Anthropocene novel', and I will explore this in more detail in chapter four.

To provide more detail on the problematics of the resistance reading, I will explore some of the contributions made by the non-Indigenous literary scholar Alison Ravenscroft on genre and agency in Alexis Wright's novels. Ravenscroft's work *The Postcolonial Eye* (2010) has been influential in academic literature on Wright's *The Swan Book,* and I'm interested in the issues it raises about the power dynamic between text and critic, and for how it contributes to the resistance reading in its assessment of how Indigenous authored texts resist the understanding of the white reader. Ravenscroft has focussed heavily on Wright's 2005 Miles Franklin award winning novel *Carpentaria*, and critiques the labelling of Wright's work as magic realism. She writes a compelling analysis of the tendency by critics to mislabel Aboriginal writing with regards to both genre and influence, including the tendency to attribute it to a lineage of Australian literature. She argues that both readings are symptoms of white possessive epistemology. In response, she proposes a methodology of white *unknowing* which has been adopted by other critics in relation to *The Swan Book*. She argues that these types of analysis position both Wright's work and the author herself as objects which can be known by settler theorists, and locates the problem of white possessive knowing within textual analysis studies of Aboriginal writing more broadly. Ravenscroft notes the prevalence of a white scholarly critique which hopes to resolve Wright's text into the confines of Australian literature, or magic realist genre, and makes the argument that this is

done in such a way as to assimilate the work into a white perspective. She identifies the rigidity and western centricity of the critiques of writers who have tried to label Alexis Wright's work in this way, and notes the prevalence of analyses which situate Wright's novels as a descendent of white Australian writing:

> White critical efforts to make meaning of Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* have sought to anchor it to the big names among white Australian novelists. Such moves presume to make Wright indebted to these literary masters, assessing the significance of her text by its proximity to theirs. Frank Hardy's name is frequently evoked and so is Patrick White's; Xavier Herbert's name is repeated with the frequency of a nervous tic, one critic going so far as to suggest that *Carpentaria*'s 'subversive high-spirited vernacular voice' might have been learnt from Herbert. White creativity appears in these critics' eyes as if it were the original creativity, the inventive one, the prototype. These moves are surely another way of saying 'but we know your story already … because it is our own'. (Ravenscroft 2010, 194–95)

Ravenscroft's assessment of the workings of this genre labelling is still highly relevant and is applicable to works like Polak's study of Indigenous Futurism. Her account of the popular understandings of Aboriginal texts reveals a strong tendency for white critics to attempt to 'assimilate' Aboriginal novelists into their understandings genre while also anchoring them to white Australian writing through comparison or claims of influence and derivation. For Ravenscroft, any attempt by the white reader to 'see' or know is an attempt to refigure the text and the author in line with their own, "install[ing] themselves into the text, rewrite it so that it becomes another version of

[their] own stories" (213). Ravenscroft is highly critical of the gaze of the white scholarly *knower* who positions themselves as the objective knowledge holder about Aboriginal people. She is conscious of the impact of white epistemic violence in the context of knowledge production about Aboriginal people as outlined by Dodson (1994) and Moreton-Robinson (2004). She sees reading and interpretation in the postcolonial tradition; as colonial encounter as a process of assimilation or integration of the other into the white subject's knowing world. However, her response to this dynamic is to attempt to withdraw from the position of white knowing. She presents a reading (or not-reading, if 'reading' is itself taken to be a process of 'assimilating' the text) strategy of embracing a position of uncertainty or strangeness. She positions the text unknowable, unable to be 'seen' by the white reader at all:

> This is reading as a process through which we bring ourselves into uncertainty, through which we cause doubt to fall on our perceptions. This is an idea of reading not (or not only) as that act which brings us into knowledge, but one that puts our knowledge under pressure until we can say: *'I do not – cannot - know the other.'* And then to hold with this willingness to be an unknowing reader a willingness to read anyway. (Ravenscroft 2013, 20 emphasis mine)

The emphasis is placed here on a conscious disavowal of a white knower position. She declares a refusal to determine the meanings of the text and proposes a turning back of the eye onto one's own desire to 'know', to attribute to the author recognisable traits of white authors. This is as much a refusal of the authoritative voice of whiteness as it is a critique of the habit of judging the text by its relation to white literature or white genre structures.

Within the work, there is an assumed transformational power in the position of 'unknowing' for the white critic which becomes "radical" and "allows" Wrights work "its difference, strangeness" (2010, 197). Asking "how might whites read differently so that our doubleness and division remain, so that our own magic, dreams and delusions might make their appearance?" (2010, 197), Ravenscroft asserts that white readers must accept the impossibility of interpreting the text at all:

> The question I can ask, the question I will insist on, is this: how would a white subject ever be able to read either Yanyuwa or Waanyi narrative, to read the country, to read skin and tattoo, to read the country as Waanyi might?...how do we see, or know, or imagine, from a Waanyi point of view if we are not Waanyi?...My argument here is that Indigenous Law cannot be 'seen' from a Waanyi point of view if one is not Waanyi. (2010, 213-214)

Ravenscroft's rejection of her own capacity for understanding here as 'not Waanyi' forms the basis of her reading methodology of refusing a white reading standpoint.

The symbolic refusal of white interpretation which is expressed in *The Postcolonial Eye* has directly influenced critics writing literary work on *The Swan Book*. Jessica White's work on *The Swan Book* engages with the novel through the grounds of Australian speculative fiction, climate fiction, or cli-fi, foregrounding the novel's allusion to climate change as a prophetic warning. While doing so, she draws on Ravenscroft's warning not to attempt to 'translate' aspects of the text which exemplify a Waanyi consciousness into

her own, and invokes the same awareness of the settler/Indigenous power dynamic and how it plays into textual analysis:

> To attempt such a conversion is to overstep the boundaries of one's "local realism", the means of knowing derived from one's particular locale. It is to risk the Eurocentric and anthropocentric approach to knowledge which has dispossessed Indigenous people, created environmental havoc and precipitated climate change. Rather, we should approach Wright's text as representation of a local consciousness which, when pieced together with other perceptions of environments and ecologies, weave into a global network. (White 2014, 153)

White's analysis, while withholding from such a 'translation' of the text, still does place it within the global movement of eco-fiction or climate fiction. There is an ambivalence in these readings between the refusal to embrace certainty or translation, and the placing of the text in a broader pattern of theoretical engagement (eg. Anthropocene fiction). White's work raises a broader question for me of how white readership understands the appearance of a distilled Aboriginal or Waanyi consciousness within the text as a foreign substance which can't be computed into their own.

Aboriginal textuality is constructed in these readings as carrying a strange or foreign knowledge. This paradoxically relates it back to the model of analysis proposed by McKee, where the reader looks to find and extract meaning from the cultural 'other' through the text. Even within the work of critics like Ravenscroft and White, where the settler author has tried to resist the

philosophical and epistemological position of a white knower, there is a persistent conceptualisation of the text and the author themselves as *unknowable others* rather than *knowable others* which places Aboriginal writing in the realm of mystery and unfamiliarity. The assertion that the text "cannot be 'seen' from a Waanyi point of view if one is not Waanyi" might reaffirm for the reader a regard for the text as an exotic, alien other, this time through the *unknowability* rather than the *knowability* of the text. The text becomes, through the disavowal of a white possessive maneuver, "an object which we cannot see" (215). Ravenscroft stops short of prohibiting herself from ever approaching the text at all, saying she does not want to encourage "that sort" of distance between non-Indigenous and Indigenous. However, critics Ann Maxwell and Odette Kelada point out that there is a "fine balance" between the act of deconstruction of whiteness and the "orientalising" of the other in Ravenscroft's work, asking whether "'othering' Indigeneity is taken to the extent of 'radical difference' how can this open possibilities beyond a paralysis in a problematic discourse founded on a colonial paradigm?" (Kelada and Maxwell 2012, 5,7). Ravenscroft's association of Aboriginal difference as "an other's strangeness [which] cannot be tamed and assimilated" is taken to task by Maxwell and Kelada for "deploying as it does the ideas of difference with 'strangeness' and 'taming'" (Ravenscroft cited in Maxwell and Kelada 2012, 6). This language of taming and unassimilability in relation to Aboriginality is certainly fraught; regressing to images of a wild and inhuman Aboriginal object of study.

The 'unknowing' approach constructs a possibility of a transformation of race relations at the site of reading. It aims to ultimately *transform* the white reader through the process of falling into uncertainty, and therefore refigure the practice of reading away from the habits of white possessive knowing. Crucial to this argument, however, is an assumption that such a retreat or

renunciation of a white reading position is possible at all, and Kelada and Maxwell have pointed out that the abstraction of the reading process from the process of land possession in literary studies obscures the relationship between whiteness and occupation in Ravenscroft's work. Where Ravenscroft argues that whiteness is constituted ("made and remade") through reading the 'other', Maxwell and Kelada argue that reading is not itself a process which can disavow and deconstruct whiteness, and in fact, the reader is not able to relinquish a white possessive gaze as an individual; "The fact that whiteness may be socially constructed does not necessarily enable such a positionality or its attendant objects to be relinquished if desired" (Maxwell and Kelada 2012, 2). They argue, following Sara Ahmed, that a disavowal of whiteness is performative rather than substantive; the power dynamics inherent to the textual encounter are not purely symbolic, and cannot be simply refused.

By conceptualising Aboriginal writing as unknowable, settler critics represent Aboriginal texts through their expression of distinct Aboriginal worldviews as well as their *resistance* to themselves as white readers. These texts then become 'important' *because* they resist the white gaze. The cultural illegibility of Aboriginal texts to a non-Aboriginal reader which Ravenscroft insists upon leaves little room for encounter with the text as an Indigenous reader. The criticism of white 'decidability' in the literary academy's treatment of Aboriginal texts is an important one, and this usage is, as Maxwell and Kelada point out, "about implicating 'ourselves in the critique rather than always locating whiteness in others'" but in doing so, "suggests… that 'no one else is in the conversation'" (2012, 6). The possibility of an Aboriginal critic then becomes disavowed and unimaginable. Further, if the only possible encounter theorised

between the text and reader is through whiteness, the texts are necessarily defined by their resistance to and difference from the white viewpoint.

I am not the first Aboriginal theorist to address the problematics of a resistance reading. Gomeroi poet, academic and essayist Alison Whittaker remarks on how the dominant modes of engaging with Aboriginal intellect in the literary sphere rely on a reading of Aboriginal writing as resistant and 'important' that is ultimately infantilising:

> In December, Nayuka Gorrie[2] and I both turned up to speak at the Stella prize longlist party with the same itching discontent. We had separately written speeches to confront its majority white audience. I talked about the "endless, patronising praise" I got from white audiences, and how I salve it with the frank reading of Indigenous women who "do you the dignity of taking you seriously"…devaluation is maybe most visible in how those voices are critically engaged with, prevalent across a whole gamut of white reviews –positive and negative – that evade dealing with the text before them. Many responses to Indigenous literature obligingly call it "important", as if that was a useful assessment rather than an empty flattery. It's a running gag among us that is getting less funny. After I mentioned my hatred of the I-word in my Stella rant, white women still came up to tell me that the speech was important. Some hand-wringed, then called it "crucial" or "vital". It was neither. It was a six-minute rant at a literary longlist. That night, no one called it funny or smart. It might not have been. I'll never know. (Whittaker 2019, n.p)

[2] Nayuka Gorrie is a Koori writer, commentator, essayist and activist based in Narrm, Melbourne.

The words of Whittaker above describe a common reception that finds Aboriginal queer writing within the white literati. Whittaker's call for earnest critique and engagement asks critics to step into more serious forms of dialogue and criticism with the texts written by Indigenous authors; to refuse to entertain the writing as simply "crucial" or "vital" in relation to their resistance of the mainstream and their inhabiting of non-normative modes of writing. Black scholar Alexander Weheliye has noted similar challenges to the lexicons of resistance in response to the cultural practices of radicalised people. In *Habeas Viscus*, his philosophical examination of violence, biopolitics and the body from a Black feminist standpoint, he notes the dominance of agency and resistance as "modes of analysing and imagining the practices of the oppressed in the face of extreme violence" (2014, 2), and says in response that the writing practices of the oppressed ought not to be understood only within the "lexicons of resistance and agency", because,

> as explanatory tools, these concepts have a tendency to blind us, whether through strenuous denials or exalted celebrations of their existence, to the manifold occurrences of freedom. (Weheliye 2014, 2)

Weheliye engages with a kaleidoscope of cultural products and postmodern theories on power and violence to address questions of resistance and marginality which are of interest to Black philosophy and gender studies, and to demand a re-reading of Giorgio Agamben's 'bare life' and Foucault's biopolitics which takes the bodily experiences of racialisation into account. His examination prompts readers to pay closer attention to what the political theorist in gender studies Annie Menzel termed "a locus of complex political responsiveness not

fully describable in terms of agency or resistance and which prevailing analytical frames systematically deny or neglect" within the practices and cultural outputs of racialised peoples (Menzel 2016, 2). There are a multitude of expressions of freedom and political will which inhabit spaces often determined as 'lifeless' by European philosophical theories of biopolitics, and which are obscured in critical writings about power which focus purely on a binaristic relationship between structure and resistance, and argues for reconsideration of the "alternative critical, political, and poetic assemblages that are often hushed in these debates" (Weheliye 2014, 12).

It is important to reorient the study of Indigenous writing away from this resistance framework. Alexis Wright has said of her own work that she hopes for it to generate a "self-governing literature"; that her overall aim is to

> try to achieve the highest standard in the art form of literary fiction, the practice of imagining, by working more forcibly with literature. My personal challenge has always been to develop a literature more suited to the powerful, ancient cultural landscape of this country. (2019, n.p)

This account by Wright demands Indigenous literature must be produced and read in terms of its powerful practice of imagining, and what they can do within the art form as well as within the political and cultural landscapes they operate in; or as Araluen writes, with, the political and cultural modes of production they are engaged in (2019, 506). In other words, their demand is that we move the paradigm within which Indigenous writing is held beyond mere response or

resistance, and into survivance, and all the intellectual and personal complexity it represents.

These three modes of analysis persist across peer reviewed scholarship of Aboriginal texts. Students in my class continually fell into these patterns of discussion in their essays, despite my efforts to get them to question those modes of analysis. I wondered over the course of our discussions if those questions presented a simple enough escape hatch under the pressure of final assessment time that the student was happy to accept them as an inevitability.

While I was pushing my students to evolve their criticisms out of these three modes, which I saw as over-simplified responses to the complexities of artistry and intellect I saw in the works, I could relate. Much of what I had tried to do in my thesis in the first two years was to make sense of the texts discussed here according to one or another of these questions. I had particularly, in the early stages, wanted to produce a reading of the texts as being involved with the genres and discourses of Science Fiction, utopianism and dystopianism, and tried very hard to structure my understanding according to the conventions of those genres. The texts often weren't directly addressing any of those things, I was; and therefore, I had fallen into a pattern of reproducing the models of that categorical mode of western literary analysis which mainly served to distract from a serious engagement with the texts. Upon noticing this, I reframed my research on utopianism, moving from questioning how Indigenous writers were working *within* utopianism, to questioning how utopianism has, as a genre, related to Indigenous peoples and colonialism.

Indigenous Perspectives on Learning with Texts

After spending some years grappling with the three critical habits I have outlined in the classroom and my own reviews of the literature, I began to ask new questions of my project. If we are to pull away from the restrictions of the 'resistance' framework, how can we engage with the ideas, and agencies expressed in these texts? How can we look at them in the context of the contemporary political struggles we are engaged with as a community?

Consequently, I draw on the work of two Indigenous critics in forming my framework for thinking about texts. Firstly, I draw on Bundjalung writer, researcher and poet Evelyn Araluen's understanding of the Indigenous novel as a methodological tool for thinking about political problems, and secondly, Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice's work on literature's role in 'how we learn to be human'. Araluen conceptualises Indigenous literatures as critical tools for understanding the political issues which face Indigenous communities. Her work on Bundjalung writer Melissa Lucashenko's *Mullumbimby* (2013) positions the text within discourses of land rights, native title and sovereignty, noting that these discourses "are the external forces that the novel and its readers are subject to", inviting readers to note how "A text brings forth a discourse and may also shape the discourse" (Araluen 2018, n.p). For Araluen, Lucashenko's text leaves the readers with notes for understanding subsequent events and shifts in land rights and native title discourse even years after publication. Her analysis uniquely shows how texts can provide roadmaps for understanding issues in a way that transcends the temporal limits of the text. For Araluen, looking 'back' at Mullumbimby from our present can assist in understanding current scenarios and challenges in native title law through the text's criticisms of the legal mechanism of native title legislation, and the ways in which it has challenged

and changed Aboriginal relationships to country. The significance and relevance of the novel within community is, for Araluen, in what it can teach us, what it can contribute

> to discussions and community based discourses about sovereignty, native title, and how we engage with land, each other, language, belonging, law, identity, nation, sovereignty, cultural continuity and culture. (2018, n.p)

Araluen is invested in how the text can be used as a tool in this way to "better understand the complexities of these things" (2018, n.p).

Finding survivance in the works and reading them as examples of decolonial 'dreaming' and 'imagining' means allowing textual analysis, as Araluen puts it, to "directly [approach] lived experiences" (2019, 507). It means grounding the works in an analysis of "our material realities and processes of cultural production" as Aboriginal people, and understanding that the text cannot be understood without tying them explicitly to those lived experiences (510-511). Daniel Heath Justice's body of work on Indigenous literary study continues Araluen's line of thought, positioning Indigenous literature "within a larger matrix of relationships, influences, and effects" (Justice 2011, 336). His text *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018) presents a study of the dynamic and exciting potential of Indigenous literary studies outside of the established habits of the academy. What Justice understands as a transformative Indigenous intellectualism contained in our literatures resists both what he calls "culturalist prejudice" and the temptation to "subsume literature into politics" within literary study (2018, 337). For him, a study of Indigenous literatures should be

conducted in a way which recognises them as "an expression of intellectual agency as well as aesthetic accomplishment" alongside a recognition of the role they can play "in the struggle for sovereignty, decolonisation, and the reestablishment of Indigenous values" (336-337). For Justice, literatures are not to be understood as an "archive of frozen tradition", nor attached to essentialised views of culture. They should be recognised instead for their "adaptive, responsive, and proactive qualities in asserting the dynamic continuity of Indigenous peoples and nations" (336).

Following from Araluen's ideas of how texts can be intellectually and politically instructive, he has also commented on textuality's role as part of "how we learn to be human" (Justice 2018, 70). Justice contextualises a broad view of Indigenous story and literatures as integral to producing understandings of Indigenous civility and humanity. For Justice, "to be human is to be a good relative, and in doing so to be respectable and dignified", and further, these kinship and relationship practices are both learned, and under sustained and purposeful attack within the settler colonial order (43). Justice studies how an Indigenous civility is envisioned within literature and story in such a way that undoes some of this harm and reimagines humanity and kinship. He distinguishes his view of Indigenous civilisation from the damaging and violent process of western civilising:

> 'Civilisation' here isn't the punitive system of English language use and literacy, Christian conversion, white supremacy, and capitalist acquisition…instead, civilisation is measured by the practice of thoughtful relations, good behaviour, and generosity of spirit, all of which make for stronger communities and more responsible individuals within the social network. (46)

Therefore, from story emerges a sophisticated Indigenous humanism through which it is shown how we come to be socialised collectively to act properly and in good relations to each other. Stories for Justice are "both the process and the consequence of the transformations into the fullness of our humanity" (34), and the "planting" of these humanising stories within the generation of a complex and creative Indigenous literature is part of "how we become human" (70). The function of story is instructive, deeply involved in knowledge transfer and social exchange, and deeply implicated in processes of kin relation and becoming. This is demonstrated within the way Justice reverently uses the works of novelists in his literary studies as text to learn from and learn with.

The view from these scholars positions Aboriginal texts as methods for producing new understandings of law, language, cultural and spiritual practices; social, familial, sexual, and non-human relationships; and country. The texts present new ways of understanding political issues, and in some cases, they also present roadmaps for remaking justice and governance systems. They are instructional, cautionary, and highly politically conscious. They have an exciting and challenging "overt multiplicity of purpose"; with the capacity to repair, reconcile, and educate (Justice 2010, 336-337). The works highlight the importance of, as Araluen writes, "distinguishing between Aboriginal texts that instruct and offer interpretive textual methodologies, and the texts to which those methodologies are to be applied" (2019, 537). Araluen's invitation here to consider the works as methodologies, rather than objects which methodologies are practiced upon, challenges the dominant habits of textual study and invites us to consider the impacts of the texts in new ways.

I am interested in the 'complex political responsiveness' present within the works. Therefore, throughout the thesis as I read the works, I focus on how the texts respond to their political and historical contexts, and reflect on how they imagine the future of the country or countries they are writing about. I am most invested in how each text presents an Aboriginal political reality in the future, and how they might impact Aboriginal people as a viewing audience. This study emphasises what Craig Womack calls the attempt to "find Native literature's place in Indian country, rather than Native literature's place in the canon" (Womack 1999, 11). Womack has written that literature

> has something to add to the arena of Native political struggle. The attempt, then, will be to break down oppositions between the world of literature and the very real struggles of American Indian communities, arguing for both an intrinsic and extrinsic relationship between the two. I will seek a literary criticism that emphasises Native resistance movements against colonialism, confronts racism, discusses sovereignty and Native nationalism, seeks connections between literature and liberation struggles, and, finally, roots literature in land and culture. (Womack 1999, 11)

Drawing on his explanation for the political importance of literature to Indigenous liberation struggles, I have sought to engage with the new visions and blueprints for Indigenous futures the texts present to the readers. I want to understand, through my research, what kinds of political incitement and understanding the texts invite in their readers.

Methodological Prompts from Allen's Trans-Indigenous

I have made the choice to include a Canadian work, *The Hunt* (2017) by Danis Goulet, within the thesis for analysis alongside the textual works written by Australian Aboriginal writers. As both a virtual reality or 'non-textual' work, and a work which was made in Canada, it sits outside the scope which I had initially set for the thesis. However, I found *The Hunt* relevant due to the way it exercised a powerful critique of the virtuous state within the Canadian context, and my experience of viewing the work informed my analysis of the rest of the texts covered. Indigenous literary scholar Chadwick Allen provides some methodological prompts and reasonings behind the examination of Indigenous texts from disparate global contexts alongside each other.

Indigenous literary theory has also been conceptualised by Indigenous critics as a vehicle for global Indigenous engagement; a space where Indigenous texts can encounter each other. Chadwick Allen's (2012a) *Trans-Indigenous* develops a reading methodology for using texts in relation to each other in a research frame which moves beyond traditional scholarly comparative modes. *Trans*- in Allen's theory is placed in relation to Indigenous to provide a frame for Indigenous texts to be read in conversation with one another across geographic and temporal locations. Additionally, it provides a reading of text as able to speak across the boundary of traditional scholarly disciplines. Indigenous literary conversation becomes, through this reading, a valuable pursuit in the study of self-representation. Allen writes:

> So much of the work of orthodox literary studies has been to limit the possibilities for reading and interpretation to a single track among the many parallel, perpendicular, and intersecting tracks of movement and engagement…global Indigenous literary studies (primarily) in English must move beyond scenarios in which Great Book from Tradition A is introduced to Great Book from Tradition B so they can exchange vital statistics, fashion tips, and recipes under the watchful eye of the Objective Scholar. (Allen 2012a, xix-xv)

Specifically designed to provide an understanding of Indigenous sources in relation to other fields of self-representation, Allen's analysis here also looks to displace the centrality of whiteness in literature by privileging the relation of seemingly (or at least, geographically or temporally) disparate Indigenous textual discourses to one another. These encounters have powerful effects, not just on the researcher themselves, but through what Kwaymullina et al. describe as "a subversion of the colonial order physically" which takes place "in the exchange of goods through gaps in the walls, and metaphysically, in the power of the song that records this resistance and declares the agency, cleverness and cunning" (2013, 8). This discussion positions 'comparative' exercises as potentially powerful. Further, Allen's work purposefully recalls the colonial binary of self/other constructed through text in his analysis of comparative methods:

> As instructors, we ask our own students to set their chosen objects of study side by side with at least one (beloved, tolerated, or despised) *other,* in the hope that through an encounter with such situated configurations of voices, texts, and contexts they will be enabled to see individual poems, stories, novels, plays, memoirs, essays…in a light

> not simply "different" or "new" but in some way both enlarged and more precise. (2012a, xi)

While there is generative possibility in this encounter which makes textual meanings more "enlarged and more precise", he goes on to note, however, that in practice, these comparative efforts are "more difficult to conceptualise" and much more fraught than imagined due to a long and frustrating history of "settler-driven, colonial comparisons" and a repetitive stifling of the local concerns specific to communities in favour of a globalised focus (xiii). However, for Allen, the tension between contexts may be made into productive conversation between texts on certain topics and points of similarity.

Moreton-Robinson's note on the collusion of Australia, New Zealand, United States and Canada in their resistance to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) indicates some degree of tactical similarity when it comes to the exercise of a possessive moral virtue. She notes that settler moral virtue is invoked whenever it is needed across history to enable the theft of Indigenous lands, observable in the doctrine of discovery from the sixteenth century onwards, and "it is invoked every time the state proclaims its ownership" (2015b, 178). For my study, a look at *The Hunt* in the moment where it was produced as a protest against the 'Nice'-ness of Canada during its national holiday enlarged my own understanding of the politicised operation of virtue in Australia. I will explore this more closely in chapter 6, alongside Allen's exploration of the bicentennial celebrations and settler colonial 'birthdays' in Australia and the United States.

Chapter 2: Travelling to Another Time: Utopias and Indigenous Peoples

> There never was and there never will be a paradise-neither an Indigenous one, a religious or moral one, a worker's, futuristic, technological or even a physical one. This is important to understand, because the hierarchical structure of many societies gives the impression that one is always on the way to some destination, to a better position, life or world. Although this is an illusion, Western people were (and still are) habituated to the notion of 'travelling', metaphorically, toward some great unknown where they hope that what might be waiting for them is, if not Heaven, then maybe, Happiness, Love, Security, a Theory Explaining Everything. (Graham 2008)

Part of the work I've done in researching this thesis is to think about the role of futurism and its companion practice of utopianism in critical thinking, politics, literature, and arts practice. I conceptualise these modalities as activist practices with many applications and uses, but I have drawn an important distinction between Indigenous Futurism and political utopianism and science fictions, despite both forms using time and place as "formal strategy"(Scott 2016), to imagine politicised visions of future worlds. When I began writing, I hoped to make an argument that the works studied in this thesis could be examined as part of the utopian and dystopian genres. That 'utopia/dystopia' interpretation of the works became more complicated because, as I explored in the previous chapter, my argument was troubled by the problematics of the genre reading and how it is applied to Aboriginal writing within restrictive taxonomies of

western writing. Instead, in this chapter I want to explore utopianism as a practice with an extractive and ambivalent relationship with Indigenous peoples which provides a contextual framework for our textual interactions with the settler colonial state. Utopianism, claimed as a universal impulse with a diversity of expressions and aims by some scholars of the genre (see Pohl 2010; Dutton 2010), has drawn heavily from the corpus of European knowledge which is produced about Indigenous cultures, and owes much to what Gamilaraay scholar Jared Field has called settler "trafficking" (2020, n.p) in Indigenous knowledges and cultural property . Utopian writing and other associated practices of utopian social organising rely on dispossession and the colonial encounter to produce its stories, and it is this context which distinguishes Indigenous Futurisms from utopianism and science fiction. While I situate our texts, as Kim Scott (2003) does, within the colonial power dynamic, I assert that they are an expression of Poka Laenui's (2000) dreaming stage of decolonisation which speak to localised scenarios, rather than being an expression of a universal utopian genre. To this end, I proceed in an interrogation of the genealogy of the utopian genre/practice, and how it has emerged in the Australian context in this chapter.

The Utopian Text

The Utopian genre's 'origin story' is commonly located in Europe, most often beginning with Thomas More's 1516 text *Utopia*. *Utopia* established a literary 'tradition' which drew on colonial travel writing to narrate a journey (by boat) to an alternative society, providing an image of a country which is organised differently to the home country which the narrator eventually returns to. The 'journey' for European writers provides a vehicle for imagining possibilities for

new means to arrange society and power structures (Vieira 2013, 4-5). More is credited by many scholars of the utopian novel as the inventor of the utopian tradition. Sociologist Krishan Kumar writes that "Utopia was invented by Sir Thomas More in 1516 in the book that bore that name", and he names More (along with older figures in western political and philosophical history such as Plato) as the father of the modern utopian novel, which by his definition, is a text which produces an idea of the "good society" (Kumar 2003, 68). This belief in ideals of the good society or 'good life' persists, and remains one of the important threads across textual and academic work on the topic.

Portuguese utopian studies scholar Fatima Vieira writes about the origins of utopian texts in the early colonial era, as travel writing cultivated a relationship between Europe and its Others, bringing about speculation on new ways of organising society and framing new explorations of possibility and futurity:

> More wrote his Utopia inspired by the letters in which Amerigo Vespucci, Christopher Columbus and Angelo Poliziano described the discovery of new worlds and new peoples; geographical expansion inevitably implied the discovery of the Other. And More used the emerging awareness of otherness to legitimize the invention of other spaces, with other people and different forms of organization. (2013, 4)

Locating the genesis of utopian fiction in colonial travel writing about the 'new world' frames utopian writing as explicitly expansionist and imperial in its relations and its effects. Vieira and others (see Claeys 2010a; 2010b; Kumar 1995; 2003) situate Utopia within global political histories and European ideas of

“social betterment”, human aspiration, and social and political critique (Viera 2013, 22). Utopia is described as a desire with “persistent ubiquity…in human history”, a symptom of natural human ambition and pursuit of betterment and perfection, traceable to Platonic ideals of democratic sociality (Pohl 2010, 51). At the same time as they align utopian writing with positive philosophical projects which respond to social crises, scholars in the field acknowledge its role in informing colonial ideologies which “not only reinforced the superiority of the ‘Old World’ but justified and naturalized the extensive appropriation and colonization of the ‘New World’ – as we have seen in Thomas More” (Pohl 2010 59). Kumar has written "my impression is that there is no real tradition of utopia and utopian thought outside the western world", expressing a common belief among scholars that the utopian tradition is exclusively based in European aesthetic impulses toward socio-political aspiration and social betterment (2003, 72).

Anti-Utopia and Dystopia

The literature shows that utopias often emerge in response to perceived problems or crises in European capitalist society. The emergence of anti-utopian (and dystopian) works are described as responses to the post-industrial revolution realisation in Europe that many utopian visions could be achievable, though not necessarily desirable. English utopian scholar Gregory Claeys defines anti-utopian literature’s characteristics as “a dark, despairing tendency, arising in the past century, towards…pessimism and the fear that all utopianism somehow eventuates in totalitarianism of one form or another” (2010a, xi). Anti-utopia and dystopia in European and American speculative fictions have been theorised as responses to perceived threats of nuclear war, late capitalism and environmental

collapse. Kumar notes that the anti-utopia also has its roots in a response to what he calls the "hubris of human reason", or the belief that societies can and should be regulated and controlled in accordance with values of good order, reason and pragmatism (2003, 66-67). Novels such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1949) are named as exemplifying this tradition. In the accounts of the development of utopia, anti-utopia, and the increasingly apocalyptic speculative texts of the late 20th and early 21st century, utopia is often narrated as a development from aspirational (Such as in More's *Utopia* and Plato's *The Republic*, to use Kumar's examples) to disillusioned and cautionary (*Brave New World, 1984, News From Nowhere*) to apocalyptic, doom-laden and "profoundly negative…debased millenarianism, without a compensating utopian vision" (Kumar 1995, 212-215). This progression is often attributed to the threat of late capitalism, the fall of communism in Europe and modern nuclear and environmental catastrophe (see Claeys 2010a; 2010b; Milner 2006; Stableford 2010). Apocalypse, as Weaver (2011) and Kumar both note, contains utopian elements; "a sense of hope, of something constructive emerging from the ruins" (Kumar 1995, 205). In addition, Weaver has illuminated the long history of apocalypse dating back to what is often viewed as the classical utopian period, in order to show how colonial mapping and apocalypse were intertwined from pre-colonial Europe and superseded the contact settlers and Indigenous people had. Both note the dynamic interrelationship between utopia and anti-utopia.

The Limits of Futuring: The Colonialism of Utopia

More's *Utopia*, emerging from the diaries of colonists like Columbus as they moved around the Americas, is seen as the origin point for a proliferation of

textual types and futurist practices. The interrelationship between visions of the 'good life' in utopian thinking and colonisation persist well beyond the origins of the genre in More's text. Utopias and dystopias are also described by theorists like Claeys and Jameson (2005) as responses to political, social, and cultural crises or problems, mobilising an imagination of the future to attempt to "intervene on the present" (Tuck 2013, 80). To illustrate this, I want to explore an example from the 2016 Sydney Biennale, on an occasion where utopian futuring was used as a practice in response to a social and cultural crisis in the arts.

As part of the 20th Sydney Biennale in 2016, I took part in a 'Futuring the Arts' workshop in an independent arts space in Gadigal country, inner west Sydney. The group of creatives running the space took on 'futuring' as a community response to the arts funding cuts which had recently taken place under the then-Abbott government. 'Futuring' in this workshop was being used as a mode of reimagining the survival of the arts in response to new expressions of government repression, which offered possibility, and demanded creativity and imagination of the participants. Aside from myself, the workshop was attended by a small community of non-Indigenous creatives attached to various universities and arts colleges, who were instructed to reassess the future of an art world without their usual modes of funding, institutional support, and cultural status. This was a 'future' world in which art had been stripped of what it had come to mean for these workers; university and public support, an allowance of physical and cultural space and influence, and assured financial backing as well as class status and inclusion within an inner-city social class.

This structured and collaborative mode of 'futuring' was unfamiliar to me at the time, being largely a textual researcher. However, it provided a useful way into

the problem facing this arts community, which would potentially require a radical rethinking of their traditional modes of generating cultural dialogue and its familiar identities; gallery spaces, curators, classrooms and academic spaces. The category of artist and its attendant cultural position was under critical reinterpretation; they were being asked to understand art in a way that could adapt to a world in which institutions and government no longer defined it or funded it, attempting to imagine a future in which this institutional dissolution had already taken place. Grappling with this 'crisis' facing the arts, workshop attendees attempted to articulate a vision of the arts industry 'after' capitalism and in preparation for the destabilisation of their institutions, to think without the limitations of our current situation, using the future as a tool.

The ensuing discussion brought up a few issues for me. Firstly, the dual positioning of art: as a vehicle for political criticism and indictment, and as a space of political complicity and complacency. The 2014 Sydney Biennale, two years prior to my engagement with this event, was subject to a boycott on the grounds of its significant financial links to detention centre operator Transfield. Artists who pulled their work from the 2014 event, in response to the violent death of asylum seeker Reza Barati on Manus Island on the 17th February 2014, stated that they saw their participation "as an active link in a chain of associations that leads to the abuse of human rights. For us, this is undeniable and indefensible", while noting of the Biennale, "there will be no movement on their involvement in this issue…the financial agreements are too important to re-negotiate" (Taylor 2014, n.p). The member of Transfield sitting on the Biennale's board resigned, Transfield was ditched as a sponsor, and the action was cautiously celebrated as a success. The boycotting artists, it seemed, had the power and the will to seriously influence matters of politics and justice (De

Costa and Lentin 2014, n.p). The subsequent Biennale's theme, in 2016, was then titled; 'The Future is Already Here, it's Just not Evenly Distributed'.

Utopian theorist Fredric Jameson argues that in capitalist modernity, there arises an assumed separation of art and culture from the social world which "inaugurates culture as a realm in its own right and defines it as such" (2005, xv)., bringing into question the potentiality of art to be critical, subversive, and effective As such, art's very distance (or perceived distance) from the social context "allows it to function as a critique and indictment" while also "doom[ing] its interventions to ineffectuality and relegate[ing] art and culture to a frivolous, trivialized space in which such intersections are neutralized in advance" (xv). For Jameson, it is questionable whether art is "necessarily reappropriated and coopted by the social system of which it is a part" (xv). While Transfield ceased to be a sponsor of the Biennale following this 2014 boycott, leading activists to declare that "boycotts work" (De Costa and Lentin 2014, n.p), Jameson's problematic still hovers over much of what we do in the art world. In closed circles, artists who did not want to pull their work from the 2014 Biennale might have been defended on the grounds that they are artists and should not have to deny themselves wages nor bother themselves with political concerns. In doing so, they implicitly reproduce the distinction between cultural and social realms and the claim for the independence of art from politics which Jameson troubles. The contemporary position of arts in the public sphere as an uncomfortable enabler and benefactor of state and neoliberal regimes of terror -such as the offshore detention industry- in fact places it in opposition of its assumed ability to mobilise political criticism.

During the futuring workshop at the 2016 Biennale, I also considered the enduring differences between Indigenous futurists and non-Indigenous

futurists. The white settler arts community in Australia is accustomed to the prestige of institutional legitimacy and public funding. As such, they may see the neoliberal decline of the arts as a kind of crisis moment. However, while art is often considered to be the exclusive territory of the elite in capitalist, postcolonising societies; First Nations peoples have long produced arts and knowledges which are not funded by, nor generated for, the consumption of an elite and moneyed class. As I noted in the introduction, many Indigenous Futurist practices persist without institutional backing nor consistent funding.

With this 'crisis' moment in the arts being the central concern of the night, the workshop began with an exercise in which participants were asked to introduce themselves as if it were twenty years in the future. As an ice-breaker activity, this was also revealing. Participants were asked by a non-Indigenous facilitator to provide a vision of both themselves and their future environment. The future setting, we were told, had no limits; they could create any setting they desired, rather than limiting themselves to what was considered reasonable or possible in the current climate. Some participants described futures in which society had regressed to an idealised pre-industrial, pre-capitalist reality; there was no plastic, no money, no machinery. Sydney was pictured by some participants as a community garden, permaculture practice had become widespread. In some futures, cars had been eradicated and everyone used bikes. One or two participants even mentioned that in the future, they and their children spoke Gadigal language. However, no one described a future which included Aboriginal people. Nor were there any iterations verbalised by participants of organised Aboriginal governance, sovereignty, decolonisation, or even treaty between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Reflecting on this in the coming months, I came to a deeper understanding of

the limitations of utopian futuring, rather than the supposed limitless possibilities. Fredric Jameson argues that utopian visions of the future can reveal the limits of the imagination of the author, as they are shaped by the author's own social reality. He notes that while early utopias tended to eliminate property or money from their vision, in more modern utopias, money remains a persistent feature. In modern utopias, it is “an absence which…become[s] unthinkable when the use of money is generalized to all sections of the "modern" economies” (2005, 17). As Jameson writes, “our imaginations are hostages to our own mode of production”, and thus utopias have the “negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment” (xiii). Similarly, in reference to science fiction and utopianism, he writes that since the end of the Cold War, “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (199). In futurist movements in 21st century Australia, while the end of capitalism or even the end of so-called anthropocentrism might be imaginable to white people, the end of colonialism remains unimaginable. In the imagined future, Aboriginal presence was itself not imaginable, even where Aboriginal cultural products (languages) and knowledge systems might be implemented in the white future. In essence, their utopian visions exercised the dichotomy of absence and appropriation outlined by Sierra Adare (2005) in her in-depth assessment of the colonialism of science fiction.

Utopian Appropriation

First Nations and Aboriginal Futurists who write science fiction and speculative fiction contend with popular assumptions of using 'European' genres to complicate colonialist narratives of the future. As Nalo Hopkinson observes, there is a popular conception that the tools of the science fiction genres are the

“master’s tools” (2004, 1). Sierra Adare’s work complicates this narrative, illuminating the ways that science fiction in fact appropriates from Indigenous cultures, mobilising stereotypical cultural images of First Nations people to add colour to its narratives of space and the future. Fredric Jameson describes the interest of utopian writers in Indigenous cultures during colonial times as one of its foundational aspects. Beginning with Thomas More’s *Utopia*, the same 'foundational' European text which is said to hold such territorial and definitional weight in the genre, Jameson identifies a specific utopian fascination with Indigenous societies that arose during the period of exploration and colonisation of the Americas. In More, he notes a “distant identification with the Inca empire, whose 'communistic' social system has not ceased to fascinate the West” (2005, 24). *Utopia* is explained as a bricolage of material from the past and present to form an idealised other world. During the exploration of the so-called ‘New World’, Indigenous societies are described here as one of the ‘raw materials’ of these utopian texts. Christopher Kendrick explains:

> What are the ultimate elements of Utopian society? It represents an imaginary combination of modes of production, including major aspects of at least four distinct modes. First, its economic arrangements are partly modelled upon those of tribal communism...The encounter with tribal communism in the New World doubtless provoked Utopian communism, yet More's island - mirror for England that it is - hardly takes the print of New World tribalism in any sort of serious way...Yet, utopian communism can hardly be accounted for as a modernized version of the tribal system, it must also be drawn from the representation of "accomplished" communism. (cited in Jameson 2005, 27-28)

The Marxist definition of 'primitive communism' or 'tribal communism' is at play here; Marx for his part conceptualised Indigenous societies in this way as one of the main forms of precapitalist modes of production. Jameson goes on to note that the function of utopian text is to be a "registering apparatus",

> for detecting the feeblest positive signals from the past and the future and for bricolating and combining them and thereby producing what looks like a representational picture. I would only want to add that these elements and impulses need to be translated into cultural or ideological representations in order to be effectively mediated into the present situation. (2005, 29)

This observation of Jameson's that utopian writers use Indigenous cultures as a material for their future-building and political visioning, indicates a representational relationship evident in the body of science fiction more generally. European writers use Indigenous social structures in their writing in a way that shows a western form of longing for an outside; a romantic, often anticapitalist sensibility which sees Indigenous cultures as holding some kind of solution to the ills of modern society (in Adare's case, this relationship is complicated further by the pleasure First Nations participants in her study took in seeing representations of First Nations characters on screen). This engagement with Indigenous societies as a 'raw material' for a bricolated representation of a yet-to-be-realised communistic future, happens concurrently alongside the exploration and exploitation of the American continent. This reflects a distinct relation between utopianism and the transfer of knowledges from the colonies to Europe. It also entails the conceptualisation of Indigenous societies as static, not fully realised, and unable to modernise through the basic marker of 'primitive communism' alone.

Jameson's descriptors of 'tribal' and 'primitive' appear untroubled in the way they are used freely to refer to Indigenous thought and social structures throughout his text, *Archaeologies of the Future*. His analysis presents the utopian writer as having a "workshop like the inventor's, a garage space in which all kinds of machinery can be tinkered with and rebuilt" (2005, 14), while Indigenous society becomes a "representational code" among many others; all of which are tools in the inventor's toolbox (25). The utopian writer synthesises aspects of each of the elements they draw from. By positioning Indigenous peoples in this way, Jameson implies a lack of coordinated, conscious or intentional political organising on the part of Indigenous peoples. Utopianism requires the use of Indigenous people by western thinkers, but through "the constant effort of a process that seeks to combine them", and to unify them into a "whole political program" (25). This involves identifying their "still existing social spaces" which are "barely surviving from the past" as deficient, lacking in political will and complexity (25). Indigenous societies are, in this account, only part of the utopian canon to the extent that they may form the passive raw materials of it. But even in this sense, they are written as rudimentary, undeveloped, and in need of incorporation into the more accomplished western mode of Marxist thinking to give them direction and political meaning. In the case of More's 1516, this meant creating a synthesis of "Greece, the medieval, the Incas, Protestantism" as four elements of the new, perfect, society, from which "new ideological values might be incarnated" (Jameson 2005, 24).

Jameson and Kendrick's comments on the foundational materials provided to the utopian genre by Aboriginal societies show a deep relationship between colonialism and utopia. Reviewing their work, I argue for a definition of utopianism as a process of mobilising Aboriginal lands and peoples in service of a settler political identity. Utopia involves both the occupation and invasion of

Indigenous lands, and the extraction of Indigenous knowledges and cultures as what Jameson calls the "raw materials" of utopian visions (xiii). This is reflective of an overall relationship between Indigenous peoples and western theory which is, as Evelyn Araluen writes,

> structurally and conceptually embedded in the intellectual products of nineteenth-century imperialism, such as notions of civilization and the Other, reflecting geographic and economic forces of appropriation, expropriation, and incorporation. (2019, 482)

The process of incorporation and appropriation is particularly clear in Jameson's identification of utopian writing's attempt to extract and "unify" Indigenous societies as a "raw material" to be infused with other materials and "incarnated" as new forms of critical ideology (2005, 25, 35). Araluen's critique of literary theory for how it has failed to respond to, or to even approach, the lived experience of Aboriginal people, urges new ways of theorising utopianism which account for the lived effects of its processes.

Utopianism is both a fictive genre *and* a political practice. Acknowledged by literary theorist Jack Fennel as being far more than a genre, it "encompasses literary theory, philosophy, and political/cultural critique and addresses a diverse range of subjects—from music and architecture to realpolitik and activism" (2011, 370). Scholars in the field are not unified on this definition, and debate continues on the distinctions between utopia as a form of fiction and utopia as a practice of imagining of 'real' political worlds and possibilities. Krishan Kumar's definitions of utopia and anti-utopia, for example, emphasise the fictive rather than the "real" or the aspirational political utopias, and insist on distinctions

between the two. Utopia and anti-utopia, two interdependent genres, he argues, need “the literary imagination to proclaim [their] message" (2003, 71). Eugene Holland’s exploration of utopian dimensions of thought in Deleuze and Guattari makes a distinction between utopian dimensions of thought; those which are products or ‘blueprints’ and those which are processes; generative modes of becoming:

> An important point of departure is the distinction between what can be called ‘utopianism as a process’ and utopia as a fixed ‘product’: that is, the various utopianisms under consideration here all involve not the elaboration of an ideal blueprint for a perfect society (such as those of Thomas More, Charles Fourier, et al.), but rather the identification of real historical forces or trends that are judged likely to ameliorate rather than aggravate the human condition. (Deleuze and Guattari 1972 cited in Holland 2006, 218)

In settler colonial contexts, distinctions between utopian and apocalyptic texts and ‘real’ world practice is further muddied. Where Kumar is insistent on the inherently fictional nature of utopian text, dealing exclusively “with possible, not actual, worlds” (2003, 69), Roslyn Weaver instead places them firmly in the realm of the ‘hyperreal’. Using Baudrillard’s discussion of the relationship between “the simulacrum and the original”, Weaver suggests that within an Australian context, there are apocalyptic and utopian “strands” that weave together reality and science fiction (Weaver 2011, 26). Baudrillard describes hyperreality as the “conflation of the real and the imaginary” (cited in Weaver 2011, 24). The hyperreal, he writes, is the “generation by models of a real without origin or reality…the territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it” (cited in Weaver 2011, 1). The ‘map’ then comes to represent all of what is known; “when

the map covers the whole territory, something like the principle of reality disappears" (cited in Weaver 2011, 123).

Using hyperreality, Weaver points out that the Australian continent was represented through mapping prior to European invasion, and this hyperreal representation continues to inform and confuse the 'reality' of what is known about Indigenous people and lands. Weaver notes that "early speculation about Australia created an apocalyptic map that preceded colonization" (2011, 24) and informed colonization through models, science fictions, and utopias in European discourse about what was called *terra australis incognita* pre-colonisation. She discusses colonization as a process of constructing an "apocalyptic map" (24) which shaped much of settler knowledge about the land and its inhabitants long before first contact. Textual expressions of apocalypse and utopia superseded the experience of the continent by settlers and shaped encounters with both the land and with Indigenous people, and they continue to shape what is known about Aboriginal people in fantasy, science fiction and film.

Utopian theorist Lyman Tower Sargent's work on utopianism also examines deeper connections between text and practice, acknowledging the utopian desires inherent to settler colonial processes in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. In his work on the utopianism of national identity, he has identified utopian wilfulness in the construction of nations as well as smaller scale utopian endeavours like intentional communities. Intentional communities or communes, he explains:

> were once called by many other things, including utopian communities, utopian experiments, and practical utopias…an intentional community is a group of five or more adults and their children, if any, who come from

> more than one nuclear family and who have chosen to live together to enhance their shared values or for some other mutually agreed upon purpose. (Sargent 2010b, 7)

Looking at the settler colonial context, Sargent has noted that:

> the word 'utopia' is now used as a label for many types of social and political activity intended to bring about a better society and, in some cases, personal transformation…all utopian practice is about the actual rather than the fictional transformation of the everyday. (Sargent 2010b, 6)

Sargent situates a multitude of large and small scale modes of colonial occupation within utopianism, noting that while religious desires and political desires often provide the incitement for settler colonial migration, the desire for an improved life, "a full stomach, decent shelter… and a better future for themselves and their family" are also utopian visions which motivate and sustain colonisation and land occupation (2010, 200). Sargent's work is notable for his discussions of intentional communities as utopian and particular to settler colonial contexts. He has singled out Australia in this respect as a strong example of the utopian impulse bound up with colonisation:

> the most significant aspect of Australian utopianism has been in practical attempts to put utopia in place. While historically the number of Australian intentional communities was not great, from the 1970s on Australia has produced more such communities per capita than any country other than Israel. (Sargent 2010a, 209)

Thus, the history of intentional communities in the area must be seen as utopianism at work; what Sargent calls putting "Utopia in place" (2010a, 209). Further, the act of the occupation of land itself is utopian in Sargent's reading. This is significant. It situates settler presence on Aboriginal land itself as an act of utopianism and imagining. Sargent further observes that the most significant works of utopian literature reflect the logics of colonial activities on the ground; "More's Utopians simply did not consider the inhabitants of the area to be colonised to be important, and this attitude is frequently repeated in utopian literature set in colonies" (2010a, 202).

The political will contained in utopianism is, I argue, specifically invested in settler futurity. Lyman Tower Sargent's work reveals a foundational relationship between utopia, the construction of settler colonial nation states and the occupation of Indigenous lands. I take up Eve Tuck's definition of settler futurity here, as the "'permanent virtuality' of the settler on stolen land" (2012, 173 cited in Tuck 2013, 80). She makes note of the need to understand the inherent futurist tendency of settler colonial projects:

> 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. To say that something is invested in something else's futurity is not the same as saying it is invested in something's future, though the replacement project is invested in both settler future and futurity. (Tuck 2013, 80)

Tuck argues, following Patrick Wolfe, that settler coloniality is constituted by futurity in its logic of elimination and replacement which requires the

"continued and complete eradication of the original inhabitants of contested land" and the incorporation of Indigenous peoples with a view to further emplacing settlers (80). Futurity for Tuck is "the ways in which the future is rendered knowable through specific practices (i.e. calculation, imagination, and performance) and, in turn, intervenes upon the present" (80).

The political visioning of utopian projects and practices participates in the expansion of white occupation of Indigenous lands as it generates new visions of the future. Settler author Darren Jorgensen's insightful analysis of Australian utopian imagination illuminates the formative and deeply uneasy relationship that settler utopianism has had with Aboriginal people living under settler occupation. Bringing this into an immediate context, he writes that "non-Indigenous people frequently consume constructions of the tribal and traditional that are implicitly utopian" in their cultural essentialism (Jorgensen 2006, 181), and much of the early frontier and pastoral exploration and exploitation of the continent was informed by utopian spatial aspirations . Weaver picks up on the deep ambivalence of this relationship with the land in her analysis of the settler articulations of "beauty and terror" in their experience of the land;

> There is, then, an apocalyptic dialectic evident here in two very different attitudes to Australia. One approach sees the land as a new world of potential and blessing, while the other sees it as a dystopia, a place of horror and disillusion. (2011, 42)

In Australia and other settler colonies, Aboriginal people have been constructed in many ways as timeless and future-less (see Nanni 2006; Perkins 1998). Fantasy

modes of representation and articulation have been used to fictionalise and operationalise the spatial qualities of the Australian continent, and fantasies of utopia and the 'primitive' still drive much of colonial expansion. As Jorgensen has written in his exploration of utopian Aboriginalism[3] in Australian literature:

> Early European interest in Aboriginal Australia was indeed humanistic, as anthropologists and missionaries brought to light the character of a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. These early texts, with their description of unchanging cultures and kinship systems, can be read as utopian spatializations of the prehistoric… Painting the noble savage coincided with the decline of another fantasy about the interior... Indeed, the first piece of Utopian fiction written that could be found on the shores of this delusion, in the arms of a thriving, pale-skinned civilisation cut off from the rest of the world. After the loss of several famous explorers, the dryness of the centre became the greater wisdom, and this fantasy of an oceanic interior was superseded by the idea of Aborigines living in harmony with nature and themselves. (2006, 180-181)

Jorgensen's work indicates that the processes of Australian colonialism are highly imaginative and deeply connected to utopian textual habits. For Indigenous peoples, the possession and limiting of the spatialisation of the Australian continent by colonists in this way represents a mode of colonial control over bodies, consumption, access, economics, and movement. Roslyn Weaver also notes the proliferation of romantic and deeply ambivalent fantasies about the interior of Australia in settler writing. Colonists hoped that the inland would harbour a paradise, which would provide relief from their difficult

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[3] Aboriginalism, the term coined by Bain Attwood, refers to…

experiences along the coast; "European explorers had colonised Australia but hardly touched its interior, and writers found the vast unmapped areas an attractive space in which to rework the themes of the Australian utopia" (Weaver 2011, 46). Non-Indigenous relationships to land display a complex interconnection between the "fear of separation and the terror of not belonging" (45). Colonial utopianism, by these accounts, deeply informs the relationship which Europeans have had with Aboriginal Country and peoples.

Anti-Colonial Utopianism

The basis of utopian writing is in social critique, and occasionally involves anti-colonial critiques of Euro-American culture. Nicole Pohl writes that 17th century European utopian texts from influential writers in the genre like Jean Jacques Rousseau, Denis Vairasse, Gabriel de Foigny, and Aphra Behn drew on the innocent and peaceable representations of the 'noble savage' to create their critiques of western society. From the 18th century, utopias continued to criticise western civilisation using Indigenous societies as a model. Texts from writers like Frances Brook and Henry Mackenzie she notes, "combine primitivist anthropology with an explicit social critique" of European economic and gendered norms and inequalities, using early colonial accounts of the "simplicity" of Indigenous social life as a model (2010, 64). She names these accounts as "ambivalent", involving an idealisation of "simplicity of the Native American societies" they write about (64). Kenyan novelist and anti-imperial theorist Ngugi wa Thiong'o names a similar contradiction in the postcolonial writing of the 19th and 20th century, noting that within the writing of even the most "sceptical" authors on imperial culture, remains a "collaborationist tendency" with the project of colonial representation (1993, 18). The utopian

genre is no exception. Roemer writes that during the 19th century (often referred to as the 'golden age' of utopia in text), while some American writers formed critiques of the colonial culture, within these texts, First Nations people were typically included in derogatory implications of savagery and incivility, or as quickly disappearing to make room for civilisation, represented as too weak to adapt:

> At the turn of the century the native population in the United States was at its low point and the remaining Indian population was perceived as a part of the past. Their cultures, numbers and association with the past did not fit into either the bleak portraits of the oppressive present or the grand visions of the future of (white) America as utopia. (Roemer 2010,100)

Australian colonial literature has positioned utopia in relation to Indigenous presence in very similar ways. Brian Attebery notes that the exclusions of Aboriginal people from science fictions about Australia are

> a form of control…the fictional equivalent of the longstanding legal principle of terra nullius, by which the Australian continent was treated as if it had no ownership before white settlement. (2005, 385-87)

Utopianism and apocalypse have been an integral part of the formation of the Australian postcolonising state, and have evolved as the progression of the frontier has continued; from Utopian literature about the interior of central Australia, to visions of Aboriginal people as spirit guides, living in a state of "primitive communism", in harmony with nature and destined for extinction, giving way to a more sophisticated civilisation (Engels cited in Jorgensen 2006, 184). This way, even the criticality of anti-colonial utopian texts is characterised

by assumptions of primitivism, dying race fantasies, and its criticisms are necessarily limited by what Moreton-Robinson terms the "possessive investments" (2004a) in whiteness and settler colonialism. To illustrate, I want to explore the example of the 2013 text *White Beech* by Germaine Greer.

Germaine Greer: A Possessive Utopia in Action on Yugambeh Country

In 2013, notorious Australian feminist Germaine Greer published the memoir *White Beech*, which narrates the story of her return to Australia from the United Kingdom to establish an ecological conservation land care project. This project is a deeply political one for Greer, who seeks to establish herself as an ethical actor in the future of the nation and its lands. The book begins with Greer tracing her search for an appropriate tract of land to make into a rehabilitation and rewilding scheme, a legacy project requiring an appropriate place to own and care for. Greer notes that she has particularly romantic visions of living in the desert:

> What I really wanted was desert. For twenty years I had been roving back and forth over central Australia, hunting for my own patch of ground…one of my fantasies has always been to lie in my own bed and watch the desert landscape slowly turn violet while fat yellow stars pop out in the inky sky and owlet-nightjars shake the still-warm sand. (2015, 55)

However, her desert notions evaporate as it becomes clear that a suitable plot of land must be one which both fulfils her fantasies of remote wildness and closeness to the earth, while not interrupting her ideas of herself as an ally to Aboriginal people. For Greer, Central Australia is too close to the politics of dispossession and native title, and too tied in with visible Aboriginal presence. At the conclusion of a chapter detailing her deep love for and desire of a parcel of land to care for in the desert, she notes with some complaint the psychological complexities of dealing with land which is open to potential native title claims. Her sister questions her:

> Jane said,
>
> 'You wouldn't contest the validity of any Aboriginal land claim, would you?'
>
> 'No.'
>
> 'Never? No matter what?'
>
> 'Never. no matter what.'
>
> 'So that's that?'
>
> 'That's that.'
>
> And that was that. (77)

Instead, Greer and her sister go coastal, seeking out plots of land in Eden and Bega before eventually acquiring freehold land in the Numinbah Valley, on Yugambeh country in the hinterlands of the Gold Coast-Yugambeh country. Exploring the possibility of acquiring freehold land in Eden further south on the NSW coast (which she calls a 'backwater' (51)), Greer explains that she feels she

can't quite connect with the available land there due to the crowding in of waves of new development, industry and persistent environmental damage and pollution:

> If I had bought Leon's parcel of forest, I'd have had a munitions wharf and storage depot, a chip mill working twenty-four hours every day, and 163 timber lorries a day, and fifty hectares of mussel farm to look at and listen to, as well as several battles to fight…I wondered whether it might not be my destiny to be caught up in the struggle to preserve the forests of the south east. (53, 52)

Greer's search for a piece of land she can both save, but which is not too far gone to save, gives the impression of selecting a moderate difficulty level on a video game, to make it just hard enough that one feels challenged, but not hard enough that she might become too frustrated. For her, Yugambeh country in the forest hinterland serves multiple purposes; it represents damaged goods, enough so that she can perform her own operation to save it to her satisfaction, but not 'unsaveable', and suitably undisturbed by active industry (although the presence of tourists disturbs her peace occasionally).

While this text is a memoir, it exemplified for me the way that settler colonial possession, utopian desire, and settler futurity are enacted in how settlers relate to Aboriginal country. The question of Aboriginal land claims in the area is also, in her mind, *settled*. In Greer's reading, the country she's occupying has no valid Aboriginal land claim on it, or if it does, she is willing to negate it. When she sets out trying to discover the Aboriginal lineage of the plot of land she's acquired, her stated desires are for knowledge of the place, whether it has any

significance to the Aboriginal people. She also reveals a fantasy for a 'welcome ceremony' and a traditional name to decorate her project:

> The first thing I did, once the documents were signed and the transfer completed, before I had spent a single night…was to go in search of the traditional owners. At the Minjungbal Aboriginal Cultural Centre at Tweed Heads I thought I would find somebody who could tell me the property's true name, and whom I should approach for permission to camp there. I even dared to hope I could find someone to perform a welcome ceremony for me. I in turn would have been more than happy to let Indigenous people use the land as they wished. (114)

Greer's wording recalls the work of Aileen Moreton-Robinson. In *Talkin' Up to the White Woman* (2002), Moreton-Robinson discusses her positioning to white feminism in relation to a few experiences from her academic practice, one in particular which involves a similar request for a welcoming:

> Being asked by a university (with one day's notice) to be part of a welcoming committee to meet a white feminist professor at the International airport at 5.30am. The professor had been invited to receive an honorary doctorate from the university, but she threatened not to come to Australia unless she was met and welcomed by Indigenous women. This seemingly noble but colonial gesture by the professor was soon eroded by her questioning us on what we were going to do at the Sydney Olympics about the denial of Indigenous rights in this country. She offered her unsolicited advice about what we should do and wanted us to advise her about what we might want

> her to do. Finally I responded by asking her to tell us what the limits were to what she would do. She did not answer my question-instead she changed the subject. (xvii)

The 'welcome to country' by Aboriginal women is here positioned as a performance of both the anti-colonial and feminist values of the white woman. The colonial gesture is in the demand of such a performance on the labour, time and intellectual energy of the Aboriginal women involved. The incident forms part of Moreton-Robinson's relations with white feminism as one of extractiveness, demanding entitlement, and overall use of Aboriginality as a utility, to perform a white woman's politics of virtue. The charge of welcoming the white woman to country, when not properly performed, results in her wholesale rejection of Aboriginal sovereignty.

Greer's descriptions of Yugambeh country reflect the same problems identified in Ysola Best's critique of Eurocentric histories of Yugambeh country and culture. In 1994, Best identified the struggle to contest white narratives as "a battle with the anthropologists and the historians who seek to tell us our social and cultural history" (93). Greer's white feminist standpoint is reflected in her conceptualisation of Yugambeh country and the sites of what she surmises to be 'sacred women's business'. By doing this, she perpetuates the same erasure Best names, and within it is reflected the language of property and possessiveness outlined by Moreton-Robinson that is integral to white relationships with Indigenous lands. Blocks of land in the hinterlands of Byron Bay and the Gold Coast are frequently advertised using the same language deployed by Greer of sacred femininity, solitude, privacy, paradise, even describing individual properties as an 'Eden' where one can retreat.

Remembering Jameson's understanding of utopian thought and how it is built using Indigenous societies as inspiration, as "raw materials" from which the European imagination generates its own politics, utopia is an act of imagining which imagines settler futurity on stolen land. While it generates a political critique of aspects of the dominant settler colonial society, even critiquing colonialism, it consumes Indigenous societies as the raw materials for the envisioning of its political and social desires. Greer's thinking reflects that she is hoping to actualise her various anti-colonial and eco feminist political identities through a possessive relationship to land which is articulated through a process of white knowing. Her identity as a critical and anti-colonial eco-feminist is bound up in a belief in her own virtuous white identity in relation to Australian colonialism. As she erects fences around the freehold land she's purchased, marking it with signs declaring she will prosecute any trespassers or people who take anything from the land without permission, she confides in the reader that she believes the restoration project is "in no-man's land" , remarking:

> Whenever I look at the forest, and the creek, and the animals and the birds who live here, it seems utterly barmy that anyone could imagine that she owned all this…according to Australian law I don't own any mineral wealth that lies under the soil, but apparently I can lay claim to the rare creatures that live above it. I can certainly prosecute anyone removing materials animal or vegetable from the property without my permission. The only way I can make sense of my anomalous situation is to tell myself that I don't own the forest, the forest owns me. (141)

It is important that Greer's writing of the land, especially her fantasising about part of it as "sacred women's site" or, at another moment, a "place of demons" (141), not just her occupation of it and her practice of supposed care, becomes part of this performance. Her purchase of the land is articulated as a process of becoming responsible, of situating herself in a relation of care with land through a rewilding process. She describes having "little plastic signs made, screw[ing] them onto star pickets and ha[ving] them put up all along the unfenced boundary", (104) while attempting to evade the colonial politics of dispossession by avoiding buying land with any legally viable Aboriginal claim of native title. That the plot of forest is bought through freehold title is assumed to absolve her of responsibility to the sovereignty of the surrounding Aboriginal nations.

Greer's book targets my own family bloodline, among twelve other families, in arguing against the sovereignty of Aboriginal people to the area she has purchased. Assessing for herself the validity of Aboriginal rights to the forest, she comments that "descendants of a single small kin group can hardly lay claim to such a huge swathe of territory…it doesn't add up" (117). In order to legitimise her project to 'save' the forest, she needs to erase the Indigenous peoples who have connection to it. This example is one that I have carried with me from the early stages of writing this thesis, and has deeply informed my understanding of utopianism and its relationship to Indigenous nations. Colonialism continues to thrive on the utopian promises that settler-invaders, even self-identifying feminist and anti-racist ones, imagine in Bundjalung and Yugambeh country.

Expanding Utopia's Generic 'Borders' to Include the non-Western

The possessive investments of the utopian practice are what makes it incommensurate with Indigenous Futurism. Despite this, there have been scholarly interventions on the generic rigidity of utopia which have included emerging forms of 'postcolonial' science fiction and Indigenous dystopian writing into the category. This has presented a complex challenge to the European utopian literary conventions, like those I explore earlier, which hold utopian instincts to be a pure European form. Settler Australian linguist Jacqueline Dutton notes that the definitions of utopia have begun to shift in important ways, away from exclusively western categorisations:

> Whether we consider the dawn of utopia as the moment when Thomas More created the neologism utopia in 1516, or seek its roots further back in Plato's Republic or St Augustine's City of God, the overwhelming majority of references to the (pre-)history of utopia point to western traditions and worldviews as its foundations. If the West is deemed to be the source of utopia, it is hardly surprising that the proliferation of definitions and theories that have contributed to critical studies of the genre are also mainly produced by and adhere to western academic models. But as western scholarship has evolved, so too have the rules determining the shape of utopia. (Dutton 2010, 223)

Attempts to make genealogies of the utopian impulse beginning with More, Wells and early European travel literature, have the problematic effect of situating utopian and futuristic imagining as representative of instincts towards

ambition, exploration and social change. These instincts are then framed as 'inherently human', conclusively locating this urge exclusively within white textual and philosophic traditions. In response, critics have offered expanded or adapted definitions which opt to include 'other' utopias, but do not deeply critique the colonial practices inherent to the form. Kenneth Roemer offers a working definition of literary utopia as a "narrative description of an imaginary culture" which "invites readers to experience vicariously an alternative reality that critiques theirs by opening intellectual and emotional spaces that encourage readers to perceive the realities and potentialities of their cultures in new ways" (Roemer 2010, 79). Referencing prominent Jamaican science fiction writer Nalo Hopkinson in *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World*, Andy Sawyer argues that the science fiction "speculative drive and ability to subvert" utilised by non-western writers are turned into powerful weapons for political imagination and critique (2010, 1). Further, he problematises the tendency for theorists of utopia, dystopia, and futuristic speculation to begin with authors such as H.G. Wells and Thomas More, or even with texts such as Plato's Republic, proposing that:

> a more creative approach, perhaps, is to consider whether all cultures, at all times, have reacted to the idea that change is fuelled by both actual science and technology and the very speculation that sciences and technologies do change the world. Such an approach, perhaps, allows…a more open (and critical) examination of the nature of such change, and of what we mean by such slippery concepts as "change", "difference" and "otherness". (Sawyer 2010, 1)

The isolation of highly creative, ambitious, philosophical modes of thought and textual expression to the Euro-western tradition reproduces colonial hierarchies

of culture and intellect. However, Sawyer's notion, generated from within the framework of postcolonial science fiction, that "all cultures" and "all times" have used utopianism in the same way borders on a universalising impulse which erases the specific decolonial politics of Indigenous Futurisms.

There are debates on the spatial and temporal aspects of the genre, forming two distinct 'types' of utopia which both imagine other realities. Kumar (2003) implies a general agreement that there is a separation between the classical (deriving from Plato's Republic) and the Judeo-Christian (derived from More's Utopia) novels in the utopian tradition. He argues that the two can be separated into utopias which idealise a place (Plato's rational city) and those which emphasise an ideal time. Maria Cevasco has pointed out the critical function of utopia to envision other realities as well as point out the limits of the present is the "inherent contradiction of the form", and notes the split between 'other place' utopias and 'other time' utopias:

> it is a text that usually represents another place and another time, but its function is not to keep the future alive, even in imagination, but 'to bring home in local and determined ways our constitutional ability to imagine an Other of the system'. Hence the first function of Utopia is to give us an awareness of our limits. (2006, 57)

Corina Kesler provides contradictory categorisations of western utopias as spatial or "outward looking" (2011, 4), and utopias written by people living under repressive imperialisms as "inward"-focussed or located in an ideal time.

It is useful to refer back to the words of Mary Graham which provide the framing for this chapter when examining the significance of the outward/inward distinction. Indigenous Futurist texts rarely focus on a journey to another place in which to build an ideal society. They are rooted, as Mykaela Saunders (2009) notes, on country. The situatedness, the careful and complex consideration of Country in text, is one of the distinct qualities which separates Indigenous Futurist practice from the conventions of the utopian types outlined in utopian literary theory.

Ethnographic studies of Aboriginal 'Utopias'

For the purposes of my study, I have elected to draw only on texts which are authored by Indigenous people themselves, rather than drawing on anthropological accounts. Part of the reason for making this decision is that in utopian studies, there are limited engagements with Aboriginal utopias and dystopias, and the studies which have been done present a problematic and incomplete account of Aboriginal textuality and utopian and apocalyptic thought, instead focussing primarily on accounts of cultural practices through an anthropological frame and constructing a utopian trend within them. Some non-Indigenous authored studies of Aboriginal utopia reference the 'Dreaming' as a form of non-western utopian textuality or 'social dreaming', and extend this utopian frame to Aboriginal cultural and political nationalist movements. This forms a problematic link between Aboriginal social and political thought in text and 'noble savage' tropes common in ethnographic constructions of Aboriginal people by settlers. Settler utopian theorist Jacqueline Dutton, in her exploration of 'non-western' utopias, draws comparisons between utopian thought in texts and in religion and mythology; comparing the 'Dreaming' to "the Garden of

Eden in Judeo-Christian beliefs, datong (Great Unity) in Confucianism, [and] taiping (Great Equality) in Taoism". Dutton references ethnographic accounts of the 'Dreaming' from anthropologists F.J. Gillen and Baldwin Spencer as well as feminist eco-philosopher Deborah Bird-Rose (Dutton 2010, 246). In doing so, she constructs an idea of the 'Dreaming' as part of a patchwork of "globalized heterotopias, transcending national and western models in their fictions of the future" (229). Dutton's reading of the 'Dreaming' in this explicitly fictional and futuristic frame is intended to demonstrate a universal human instinct towards utopian thinking which can be read across cultures and temporalities, and to undermine the presumption that utopias only exist within Euro-western textual practices. She reads utopian impulses into second-hand accounts of the 'Dreaming'-explaining:

> Given that the 'Dreaming' implies the uninterrupted flow of action by individuals in collaboration with communities across all eternity, it may be possible to interpret the indigenous Australian worldview as essentially utopian through its constant expression of social dreaming. (247)

Recorded Arrente creation stories, as represented by Spencer and Gillen, are used by Dutton as a generalised account of broader Aboriginal knowledge systems. Dutton's reinterpretation of the 'Dreaming' as utopia comes as an attempt to broaden the definitions of utopia/"social dreaming", challenging the restrictive categorisation of utopia and political aspiration as exclusively the territory of western literary canon. However, her analysis references Aboriginal "social dreaming" (2010, 223) through the mediating gaze of non-Indigenous purveyors of Indigenous knowledges, reiterating a colonial dynamic by which, as Kwaymullina et al. have written, "linguists and anthropologists were coming into

the community and collecting stories and taking them away and…no-one ever knew what was happening to them.” (Kwaymullina et al. 2013, 3). No published works by Aboriginal authors are cited as authors of Aboriginal futuristic and utopian thinking. The common connotations of the motif of the 'Dreaming' are, as Aboriginal theorist Maureen Perkins writes, notable because of the ways they present Aboriginal timelessness as "part of the nature of the noble savage, in tune with the cycles of the earth and the natural world" or, serving another purpose, "about failure and inadequacy, an inability to adapt to western society's goals of diligence and productivity" (Perkins 1998, 339). The use of the ‘Dreaming' is, in the context of a study of Aboriginal utopia, "fraught with slippage and cultural appropriation" in addition to clumsy generalisations and inaccuracies, and present ethical issues on the gathering and use of data on Aboriginal knowledges (336). These representations are useful, Perkins writes, if one is trying "to understand the European cultures out of which they sprang, but neither has much to offer to an understanding of Aboriginal identities", nor do they offer much in the way of a framework for understanding Aboriginal utopian/dystopian texts (339). Instead, these accounts offer a deeply romanticised fantasy of Aboriginal life, textuality and cosmology (see Attwood and Arnold; 1992; Perkins 1998; Lattas 1992). The use of settler anthropological accounts of Aboriginal knowledge by Dutton, rather than Aboriginal-authored texts, further constructs Aboriginal utopianism as passive, as knowledge waiting for white extraction, rather than a consciously politicised mode of thinking and writing which can be engaged with on different terms. Laenui’s idea of dreaming as a form of decolonial practice contrasts with this account. Dreaming according to Laenui is a process of “debate, consultation” and exploration which is adaptive, collective and politically responsive to the context which Indigenous peoples might find themselves in (2000, 4). Rather than being an expression of an essentialised cosmology or worldview, it is creative, and intends to generate new forms of identification and “various models of nationhood” (5).

Conclusion

There are interplays between fantasy and reality which frame much of the interaction between coloniser and colonised. Settler futurity is inherent to the utopian form, and it is for this reason that, rather than adapting or updating a terminology of utopian to include Indigenous texts, I understand it as incommensurate with Indigenous Futurism altogether. Fantasy modes of representation and articulation have been used to fictionalise and organise the spatial qualities of the Australian continent, and fantasies of utopia, as shown in the work of Sargent (2010), are deeply involved with colonial expansion and white possession.

Some of the Indigenous Futurist texts identified in this thesis are focussed on ways to reimagine and restructure (or critique) contemporary Aboriginal political life and social orders. However, the Aboriginal authors I look at in this thesis are not defined solely by the utopian impulse to imagine the 'good life' or the ideal society, and definitions and histories of utopianism fail to account for the complexity of the activism which Aboriginal futurists are doing in their work.

The authors are critically engaged in questioning rationalist binaries, producing written accounts of the complexities of queer Indigenous lives, and representing stories of cultural and linguistic survival and resistance. They remain profoundly aware of the problematics of seeking out other worlds to invade and colonise with outsider notions of idyllic societies, and they are importantly rooted on country. There are failures in the European and specifically Marxist-oriented modes of analysis of utopian texts in this regard; in their conception of the various utopian generic 'types' as well as in their lack of accounting for the

dense relationship between representations and relations between colonisers and the subjects they imagine. As Dillon writes, Indigenous Futurist projects are interested in revival, recovery, and ‘returning to ourselves’, or as she puts it; “recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt…this process is often called “decolonization”, and as Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (Maori) explains, it requires changing rather than imitating Eurowestern concepts” (Tuhiwai Smith cited in Dillon 2012, p.10). The project of recovery, of survivance, which she names in Indigenous Futurist writing takes on greater meaning within the colonial context of the emergence of utopianism and sci-fi; a context in which Indigenous societies have been appropriated and reassigned meaning within European political philosophy and literature. Rather than updating or imitating a western utopian form, it is useful to understand Indigenous Futurist projects, as Dillon does, as part of a decolonising system of values and practices rooted in survivance and ongoing, complex Indigenous life, which is in direct resistance to the logics of utopia.

Chapter 3: Decoloniality as Witnessing: The Futurist Treaty of Nicole Watson

In 2019, at the Blak and Bright festival in Narrm, Wurundjeri Country, a treaty meeting was held between Gunnai and Gunditjmara woman Lydia Thorpe and members of the First Nations Australian Writers Network in the boardroom of the Wheeler Centre. Leading Indigenous writers such as Uncle Jim Everett, Ellen van Neerven, Marie Munkara, and Ali Cobby Eckermann were engaged in a discussion about the ongoing Victorian treaty negotiations between the community and the state government. Jingili Mudburra writer Bridget Caldwell-Bright and I were among a group of observers of the gathering, and were asked by Murrawarri writer Jane Harrison, the event director, to record our responses and thoughts and distribute them as we saw fit after the meeting. As observers, we reflected on the collective labours of the writers in the room, both the textual and non-textual actions that they had all taken over many decades of struggle; the interweaving of the written and the lived politics they all practiced.

The tone of the meeting was pessimistic and urgent. Most of the senior writers in the room had been involved in their own state-based activist struggles to advocate for treaty and other binding agreements to force the colonising government to commit to sharing resources and political power with Aboriginal people. Their common experience seemed to reflect that our current situation as a political Aboriginal community repeated the conversations had with government in the past, and what came out of it was not what they had wanted. The discussions they recounted had been circular and ultimately disappointing. Treaty had been advocated for by Aboriginal people for decades, so why was the state of Victoria so interested in making it happen now?

From her own position, Lydia expressed a deep fear that the treaty process on the table was a moment of opportunity, which was in danger of being wasted. The possibility that a treaty between Aboriginal communities and the state and federal governments might have another life, beyond the small change politics of parity, diversity and inclusion was present in the room that day.

Recent negotiations for a treaty in Australia have been spoken of as a movement which might create space for an equitable meeting ground for the sovereignties of Aboriginal and western laws. Clinton Benjamin (Bardi, Yawuru and Kija) has theorised the recent movements toward treaty in Australia with some enthusiasm. He is clear that the role of a treaty is not to generate Aboriginal sovereignty, however, it may enable the western law to *see* Aboriginal sovereignty:

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been calling for a treaty or treaties for decades now. As a meeting place of laws, a treaty/treaties would enable the western system to *recognise* the unceded sovereignty of the various Aboriginal nations. This is not to say that a treaty creates sovereignty, nor do we need it to, as our sovereignty is both pre-existing and continuing. (2017, n.p, emphasis mine)

Benjamin's differentiation between a treaty which *constructs* an Aboriginal sovereignty and one which *creates the space to recognise* sovereignty is an important one for my analysis in this chapter.

This chapter focuses on *In the Matter of Djappari (Re: Tukiar)*, the Alternative Feminist Legal Judgment of Nicole Watson (2014). Alternative judgments are a practice of feminist legal theorisation which are oriented towards the past, looking at historical cases and formulating feminist judgments of the outcome. In her response to the Australian feminist judgments, Nicole Watson uses Indigenous Futurism as a tool which assists her to construct a court space which is able to recognise Aboriginal women's sovereignty. In her futurist response, she writes a work set in 2035 where a treaty exists between a confederacy of First Nations people and a Republic of Australia. Watson's piece focusses on the story of a Yolngu woman, Djappari Wirrpanda, and in the process it explores how a treaty might be used to bring about real justice for Aboriginal people in a courtroom. The work does not detail how the treaty agreement was reached, but instead imagines what a treaty specifically written to address the sovereignty of Aboriginal women might do within a decolonised context in Australia. Nicole Watson uses the future as a space in which Djappari's experiences in 1935 as a sovereign Yolngu woman within the murder trial and the events surrounding it. In using the future to attempt to recover an Aboriginal woman's story in the future space of the courtroom, I argue that she interrupts linear-progress narratives of feminist history, racial justice, and civil rights as they relate to Aboriginal women.

Working critically from within a framework of alternative feminist legal judgments, Nicole Watson's work presents a sovereign First Nations women's standpoint which challenges a feminist law narrative of progress and justice which has white settler women as its central subject. It imagines a court which is able witness both the sovereignty and suffering of Aboriginal women from within a decolonised future space and open up possibilities to rethink how

justice can be done. I analyse Nicole Watson's work as an Indigenous feminist futurist text alongside the companion piece of Nunga academic Irene Watson's alternative judgment from the same volume, which adopts a different tactic to Nicole Watson's futuring work, but presents some similar challenges and standpoints within the feminist law space of the alternative judgments.

Nicole Watson's futurist treaty work was written and published in 2014, before the contemporary treaty negotiations began. In this chapter, I do not intend to use the piece to evaluate the current treaty processes which are still ongoing in Narrm and elsewhere. Instead, I want to focus on some ideas about recognition, witnessing, and seeing which are commonly raised by the treaty conversations being had in the 21st century in Australia, and show how they are operationalised in Watson's text within a specifically First Nations feminist framework in ways which could augment the treaty conversation currently happening at a national level. Watson's methods of *seeing* as an act of sovereign relation and *witnessing* as a practice of Indigenous women's law carry great significance in the treaty work done in *In the Matter of Djappari*. Bearing witness to the sovereignty of Aboriginal women, and constructing a space in which that witnessing can take place, is presented as a vital decolonial practice which is enabled by a treaty framework. I explore in this chapter how Watson's piece demands that we ask how a treaty can be made which specifically addresses the needs of Indigenous women. Watson's work is an example of how Indigenous futurism is used as an unconventional device in a specific disciplinary context to upset a linear-progress narrative of feminist justice. In Watson's hands, Indigenous Futurism is a critical methodological tool for inserting Indigenous women's standpoint, a disruptive form of what Michelle M. Wright (2015) refers to as "epiphenomenal" knowledge, into the dominant body of white Australian feminist scholarship.

In the Matter of Djappari appears in a volume of Australian Feminist Alternative Judgments. The recent emergence and the scholarly methods of Alternative Feminist Judgment writing is articulated as part of a linear progress narrative of history in feminist law and activism, and Indigenous women's contributions to the project undertake a critical interrogation of the meaning of feminist law as it relates to the sovereignty of Aboriginal women. A complex and oppositional relationship exists between white feminisms and First Nations feminisms, where what are often considered indicators of progress for 'all women' fail to account for the particular positions and experiences of Aboriginal women before the law, and the racialized power dynamics between Aboriginal women and white women (see Moreton-Robinson 2002). This tension between the conventional white feminist narrative of progress and justice, and Aboriginal women's lived experience, is at play in Watson's reading of the trial of *Tukiar v The King*, in which she focusses her judgment on the voice of an Aboriginal woman, Djappari. Djappari is overlooked as an important witness in the original trial of *Tukiar v the King*. She is silenced on the stated record of the 'facts' and evidence of the case, but for Watson, she is the central subject of work. The focus on Djappari's lived experience, on how, as Michelle Wright has mentioned, her life was "actually lived" as opposed to how it is recorded in the histories written about her, through the lens of the future produces an epiphenomenal narrative (M. Wright 2015, 37). A deeper focus on the experience of Djappari within the case encourages the reader to examine how Aboriginal women's experiences of gendered violence is inextricable from the deeply embedded racism of the colonial legal system, and how Aboriginal women's experiences may be "lost" within the project of alternative judgments where they don't "fit neatly" in the white feminist understanding of justice (M. Wright 2015, 38). The use of the future as a device illustrates these failings within the feminist judgments by illustrating an alternative space where the transformation of the justice system is totalising.

While her contribution to the Feminist Judgments Project is labelled by the project's editors as an optimistic one, it sits in an ambivalent and critical relationship with the broader movement of feminist judgment. Watson's work uses the future to reveal the limits of the settler feminist legal scholarly tradition which is being established in the successive volumes of Alternative Judgments internationally. However, in line with Dillon's observations about the role of survivance in this field, the work does more than simply respond to the problematics of that tradition. While it uses the future to illustrate the limits of white feminism, it also uses the future to provide a bold vision of how legal orders and treaties between colonising powers and Indigenous peoples can be revolutionised and decolonised in order to bear witness to the unique sovereignty of Aboriginal women. As I progress through my discussion of the case, I will return to the two themes of epiphenomenal time and survivance as they are reflected in the judgment through the actions of witnessing and contrapuntal analysis.

Nicole Watson

Munanjali and Birre Gubba writer and scholar Nicole Watson has published a large body of work in relation to legal issues which affect Indigenous communities. She is co-editor of the 2019 publication Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Relations, a former editor of the Indigenous Law Bulletin, and a former columnist with the National Indigenous Times. She is also a fiction writer, and published her first novel in 2011, a crime fiction work called *The Boundary*. The novel is set in Brisbane, where there are two roads in West End and Spring Hill named Boundary street which historically served as part of a colour line to racially segregate the city and prevent Aboriginal people from

entering the inner urban areas [4]. The late activist and poet Sam Watson, Nicole's father, has commented that "That name [Boundary Street] is written into the blood of our people" (Booth, 2016).

Alternative Feminist Judgments Projects

Alternative judgments projects first emerged in the United Kingdom and Canada in the form of the Women's Court of Canada publications of 2008 and the Feminist Judgments Project (2010). Since these first two projects were published, alternative judgment projects have appeared in the United States, Australia, and Aotearoa. The projects are an emerging mode of speculative legal criticism by feminist scholars organised around the following questions; what if a group of feminist scholars were to write the "missing" feminist judgment in key cases? Could we put theory into practice, in judgment form? What would these judgments look like? What impact would they have?" (Rackley 2012, 390). The key question across these projects is what 'feminist' judgment might look like, if it exists at all, and whether the practice of law contains space for feminist values. Alternative judgment writing interrogates the figure of the judge, the specifics of judgment as a legal practice, and the possibility of feminist values

[4] The emergence of this formal segregation was explained in *Brisbane: The Aboriginal presence 1824-1860*, edited by Rod Fischer;

"For whites in Queensland's colonial towns, the problem remained of keeping Aborigines at a sufficient distance to contain them as a perceived social and moral liability, whilst maintaining them near enough, as a cheap expendable labour force," it said.

"In solving this problem the metropolitan police became a vital ingredient – allowing Aborigines into the township for desultory and dirty labour by day, then driving them out at 'curfew' times each evening."

being expressed within existing legal structures more generally. Alternative judgment projects aim to develop a distinct feminist legal framework through which justice can be understood. Rosemary Hunter, an editor of the Australian project, sees the practice as an important tool for teaching students to think critically about the law's relationship with women (Hunter 2012, 50).

The convention of the projects is to select historical cases which have had implications for women's rights under the law. Those cases are assigned to legal scholars in the present, and the scholars are tasked with judging the case as though the judge was a feminist. They are discipline-specific within law and judgment, and by definition, their mode is not futurist, but aims to look back at the past as a speculative exercise. The alternative judgments are speculatively rewritten, within the specific legal framework of the time period in which they were originally handed down.

Alternative judgements fundamentally question the possibility of feminist theory to be practiced *through* the law and through the practice of judgment. They ask whether feminist theory can be applied in practice, given theory is not usually tasked with the responsibility of legal decision making. The editors of the Australian judgments express their desire to demonstrate how "legal formalism may be co-opted as feminist method" (Douglas et.al. 2014b, 36), and the more recent alternative feminist judgments of the United State Supreme Court argue that their rewritten decisions "reveal that previously accepted judicial outcomes were not necessary or inevitable and demonstrate that feminist reasoning increases the judicial capacity for justice" (Stanchi et al. 2016, 1). The FJP in the UK similarly sought "to demonstrate how feminist legal theory could be given practical effect in judgment form" (Hunter 2012b, 4).

The projects explicitly question whether feminist aims can be achieved through the introduction of more women to the judiciary, or through the practice of feminist ethics through judgment. Rosemary Hunter, Heather Douglas, Trish Luker and Francesca Bartlett, feminist legal scholars and editors of the Australian project, discuss a serious concern with whether a diversification of the judiciary could affect genuine feminist change in the legal system through examining the nature of judgment and the law itself. The project approaches diversity in law with some caution, noting that while there have been many 'firsts' in terms of women's inclusion, indicating a "steady" increase in women's participation, there is pronounced concern that this may not necessarily indicate a purposeful reform of law within feminist principles:

> The number of women judges is clearly of great symbolic value, and their presence and visibility enhances the democratic representativeness and legitimacy of the judiciary. However, it is important to ask whether the presence of women in the judiciary makes any difference to the practice or substance of decision-making. (Douglas et al. 2014c, 4)

This difference between the symbolism of 'numbers' and an effective feminist practice in the judiciary signals to the editors a greater concern with the diversifying of legal structures as representative of change as well as the practicability of feminist theory in legal structures.

The question of whether the judge can ever be feminist within the context of a fundamentally sexist legal structure is a nuanced sticking point within the projects. The editors of *Australian Feminist Judgments* take as their primary concern not only the insertion of a "missing" feminist analysis within individual judgments and individual

judges, but the question of whether or not feminist action is possible within the confines of particular cases and contexts at all. This is not represented in the writing as a problem with feminist theory being impossible to apply, but a problem of inherent patriarchy in legal structures which limits the possibility of feminist practice:

> the possibility or potential for feminist influence in current legal processes may be limited by law's deeply embedded structures and methods. In the context of law, theorists such as Mary-Jane Mossman and Carol Smart have also insisted upon the imperviousness of law and legal method to feminist arguments, critiques and perspectives. (Douglas et al. 2014c, 7)

Reflecting here on the process of procuring the judgments, the editors admit that attempts to establish feminist practice in law is "inherently constrained by [the] methodology" (Douglas et. al. 2014c, 7). The editors note the patriarchal nature of the "claim to neutrality" in the positivist method and accept that it troubles the possibility of a feminist judge, who may already be seen as carrying a political and personal bias (7).

As suggested by Douglas et. al in their introduction to the Australian volume, there is an inherent questioning within the projects of whether the legal methods and structures being worked with should be rejected altogether. Hunter understands that by engaging in the project of alternative judgments, there is an implicit acceptance of judging as a valid mode, "rather than attempting to open up legal forms or legal method" to a complete restructure (5). She acknowledges the work of critical feminist legal scholar Carol Smart which urges feminists to disengage with the law, which would effectively propel them into 'other' spaces. Smart argued powerfully in her 1989 work *Feminism and the Power of the Law* that "in accepting law's terms in order to challenge law, feminism always concedes

too much (Smart 1989, 5). She therefore urged women to “decentre” law, think of “non-legal strategies”, and “discourage a resort to law as if it holds the key to unlock women’s oppression” (Smart cited in Auchmuty and Van Marle 2012:, 65). While recognising the existing, ongoing feminist questioning of the legal orders within which they work, Hunter understands “the legal forms they appropriate remain largely unquestioned” by feminist judgment projects (Hunter 2012b, 5). Smart’s understanding that the wide feminist appeal to legal reform might have blinded the women’s movement to alternative means of change making remains relevant. It is understood by the editors that the inherent contradiction of feminist judgments lies in their aim of exposing the “contingency and biases of existing decisions and [disrupting] the unique authority of the courts and legal decision making” while still making use of the structures, legal materials, and reasoning methods in existing structures (Hunter 2012b, 5). The editors leave this overarching tension unresolved, and it provides productive nuance to the Australian volume.

The Linear-Progress Articulation of Feminist History

The Australian feminist judgments project (AFJP) is a space in which non-Indigenous feminists construct a genealogy within the legal system which is tied to their feminist identities as well as to a lineage of feminist legal reform. There is a relational feminist lineage established within these legal projects which is consistent with how white women establish a sense of a linear feminist ‘movement’ more generally, and the work becomes a site of settler feminist identity construction. The Hon. Sally Brown AM opens the collection of judgments with the following anecdote about her first day on the bench after being appointed to the Family Court in 1993:

> When I was welcomed to the Family Court of Australia in 1993 I joined a bench (in Victoria) of 11 men, two of whom sat with me. It had been five years since the Hon Peg Lusink, the first Victorian woman to be appointed to a court, had retired. I said (after the customary and sincere round of thanks) that at her welcome I had been cautioned against being the first judge to use the F-word – advice I had decided to ignore. The audience froze. To my right, then Chief Justice Alastair Nicholson sat, solid as a rock; he had weathered (and would again) too many storms to be worried by the prospect of profanity. But from the judge on his right came a sharp intake of breath and a stifled exclamation and to this day I am unsure whether he thought the word I then uttered – feminist – to be better or worse than the one he envisaged. (Brown 2014, v)

Brown here positions herself among the first women to serve as a judge in Australia with an explicit feminist intent. In doing so, she establishes an almost matrilineal connection between herself and her predecessor as participants in a continuous and interrelated struggle to introduce feminist ideals to the bench against claims of bias. She goes on to express pride in the critical talent of the younger female scholars making judgments in the collection, who she had worked with through their workshops in 2013 leading up to publication, noting that she "wished I had had the benefit of their scholarship and wit when I was writing judgments" (vi). Feminist judgments thus connect to a sense of ongoing feminist movement for law reform, referring back to and aiming to augment and continue the work of western non-Indigenous feminist law reform of the 1970s and 1980s. Hunter (2012b) notes that the Women's Court of Canada (WCC) had its genesis in Canada Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF),

> LEAF was established in 1985 to coincide with the coming into force of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and has focused its efforts on the implementation of the equality clause in s 15 of the Charter. It has intervened in over 150 s 15 cases and has "helped establish landmark legal victories for women on a wide range of issues from violence against women, sexual assault, workplace inequities, socio-economic rights, and reproductive freedoms". (LEAF cited in Hunter 2012b, 136)

The alternative judgments of WCC concerned themselves primarily with reviewing the equality clause of section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In this way, feminist judgments find their lineage in feminist activisms of the 1970s and 1980s which worked to secure women's rights and legal reform, and see themselves as building on the momentum of this wave of organising. The editors of *Australian Feminist Judgments* also establish their own project as part of this broader genealogy of feminist intervention into legislation and legal practice, as well as in relation to the growing number of female judges in Australian courts. They refer to Australian feminist interventions in the 1970s and 1980s which produced "no-fault divorce, anti-discrimination legislation and a swag of egalitarian policies associated with the modernisation of the Australian nation-state" as well as "institutional law reform projects [which have] led to decriminalisation of abortion in Victoria", as direct predecessors to the emergent critique of their own feminist judgments (Douglas et. al. 2014c, 3).

Here, the writers of the AFJP have articulated a particular set of feminist concerns and actions which shape a common definition of the women's movement. Questions remain with regards to how First Nations women's subjectivity and practices can exist within such a lineage.

Challenging the Colonial Basis of Feminist Legal Critique

Tanganekald, Meintangk and Boandik legal scholar Irene Watson's *First Nations Stories, Grandmother's Law: Too Many Stories to Tell* opens the volume of judgments. Her essay response to her chosen case provides important methodological provocations for an analysis of Nicole Watson's futurist work, which closes the volume. While she does not appear to have collaborated with Nicole Watson on the writing of their two judgments (and the two writers, who share a last name, are unrelated), Irene Watson's judgement provides some critical Indigenous Feminist perspective which is useful in understanding Nicole Watson's futurist project of the 2035 court.

Irene Watson responds to *Kartinyeri v The Commonwealth* (1998), a constitutional law case concerning a contestation between Nunga traditional owners and developers over a proposal to build a bridge to Hindmarsh Island in South Australia. The case was "nestled amongst an extraordinary array of related litigation and Parliamentary interventions encompassing numerous legal categories: contract, property rights, administrative law, heritage protection and specific laws affecting Aboriginal people" (Bowrey 2014, 41). It challenged the race power of the constitution and placed gendered colonial relations in relation to Aboriginal land rights under scrutiny. Specifically, through the scrutiny of 'secret women's business' relating to Hindmarsh Island before the judge, it raised the issue of how privileged Aboriginal women's knowledges are considered before the court.

In her critique of the method of the alternative judgments, Irene Watson asserts that the legal frameworks given to her in which to rewrite the case are inadequate for a feminist rereading because they do not consider, and cannot consider, Aboriginal women's law. She refuses to engage with the reasoning in the High Court decision "because the Australian legal taxonomies, associated jurisprudence and evidentiary requirements

systematically mutilate and distort Aboriginal voices. Aboriginal women's law, in particular, is degraded" (Bowrey 2014, 44). Referring to the crucial tension within the case of whether particular women's laws could be read as evidence in the Kartinyeri case, she notes that:

> The Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission found Nunga women's law to not exist in the River Murray lower lakes Coorong region, and further to have been fabricated by those who argued for its existence. The commission was established to enquire into the existence of women's law, but women's law could not be presented in the way the government wanted it to be told, that is, within a legal framework that set about to interrogate the laws of women. (Watson 2014, 51)

Irene Watson's response asserts a critical difference between Aboriginal women's law and non-Indigenous women's legal theory, arguing that the two cannot be discussed in the same legal or theoretical space at all. If the basis of the alternative judgments is to work within the confines of the law to produce a feminist outcome, yet, "from a critical Nunga perspective, the Australian legal system is without jurisdiction to determine the laws of the First Nations people", then any possible 'feminist' outcomes of cases within the volume of alternative judgments is brought under question (Watson 2014, 51). The acknowledgement by the commentary on Watson's work that its

> confinement within the legal framework and conformity with Australian legal narrative conventions imprisons Aboriginal acts of resistance to colonialism, blunting the capacity to effect legal change. (Bowrey 2014, 44).

The problem of this confinement critically underlines the complex power-nexus in which feminist legal reforms are located. Indigenous women's position within a feminist legal activism is revealed as incommensurate with feminist legal practice as it is articulated in the project. In her closing remarks, Irene Watson calls for a look towards 'another space' of law in which the case could be judged in accordance with feminist principles:

> The rewriting of the judgment of *Kartinyeri* in accordance with the methodology of this project would not prise open places for Nunga women because the rewriting needs to be done from 'another space', outside the jurisdiction of the Australian common law and the sovereignty of the Australian state. The jurisdiction of the Australian law is contestable due to its being imposed without lawful foundation beyond the unethical one of terra nullius. Therefore the option of rewriting within Australian law is not likely to return ruwe to Sovereign First Nations legal systems that are inclusive of co-existing women's and men's laws...the question of foundation [of lawful authority] still requires an answer. (Watson 2014, 51-53)

Watson's refusal, and her call for the construction of another legal space, raises questions of the implicit white feminist faith in the foundations of the postcolonising legal systems themselves. She contribution urges an understanding that all non-Indigenous laws are in a relationship of continuing colonisation to the laws and needs of Aboriginal women, in which Aboriginal women's law is expected to conform to the structures and practices of non-Indigenous law. The foundational illegitimacy of colonial law as occupier of Indigenous lands is another tension raised within the volume which remains unresolved.

In the Matter of Djappari (re Tukiar) [2035] FNCA 1

Irene Watson's argument in her judgment on the Hindmarsh Island case opens up the possibility for Nicole Watson's critical and epiphenomenal narrative to follow. Nicole Watson's alternative judgment, the final contribution in the Australian volume, is based on the case of *Tukiar v the King* (1935). Using the future as a medium, Nicole Watson gives a thorough historical account of non-Indigenous law's positioning under colonisation using the futuristic setting as a device which allows her to 'look back' at the legal present. The original judgment under her consideration was a murder trial in which the defendant, a Yolngu man Tukiar (referred to as Dhikiyarr by Watson), was accused of murdering a policeman, Constable Albert McColl on Woodah Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The murder was done in apparent retaliation for the abduction, imprisonment, and sexual assault of Djappari, Dhikiyarr's wife, by McColl. Dhikiyarr was convicted, but later acquitted after having the conviction overturned by the High Court in light of biased remarks made by the judge, Wells J, against him. After the conclusion of the case, he went missing and was never found, but is suspected to have been murdered by the Northern Territory police.

The 'Tukiar' trial's perception in historical scholarship on the development of rights in Australia embodies the "linear spacetime" model provided by Michelle Wright (2015, 38). It is framed in the literature in terms of its placement on a linear timeline of the development of civil rights and race relations in Australia, and is described in terms of the definition of entropy as cause and effect given by Wright. This is most clear in looking at how the case is framed as a contributing factor to the development of Aboriginal activist consciousness and eventually, the granting of the vote to Aboriginal people in 1967. The case was,

as Thalia Anthony notes in her commentary, carried out during a "high-water mark of protectionism, when social Darwinist ideas about the inferior status of Indigenous people prevailed"[5] (2014, 437). It has also been described as a pivotal moment where a type of 'justice' was carried out for Aboriginal people in a legal context, and established discussion around expectations of judicial impartiality, prejudicial judgment, and the lawyer's duty to the defendant, generating some discourse around the rights of Aboriginal people before the law. Australian settler historian Paul Byrne's 1990 historical study of the case, for example, positions its events as a "turning point in black/white relations", especially in relation to the activist moments that followed in the south-eastern states which precipitated a momentum towards the eventual move towards Aboriginal citizenship in the referendum of 1967 (1990, 1). The trial acted, Byrne writes, as an "impetus" for increased activity and discourse on Aboriginal affairs which he argued had continued repercussions across the decades following (39).

The idea of the "turning point" inherent in discussion of the case reflects the notion of cause and effect and forward movement which is inherent to Wright's definitions of linear spacetime and progress narratives. Byrne is himself critical of the language of the 'turning point'. He does not represent the trial as a neatly optimistic moment, especially given the disappearance and suspected murder of Tukiar by police after he was eventually acquitted due to the recognition of

[5] Protectionism, in the context of Aboriginal history, refers to the period from the late 19th and early 20th century where the colonial state "targeted Indigenous peoples as the subjects of improvement, as 'those whose conduct [fell] below the civilised norm [and] must be subjected to improvement through more or less extended periods of discipline before they [could] sensibly be left to manage their own affairs' (Hindess 2001: 104 cited in Howard-Wagner and Kelly, 2011: 107)". It was a policy and legislative framework which was carried out on a state by state basis, rooted in the logics described above. Protection legislation contained explicit provision for the removal, detention, and relocation of Aboriginal people on reserves, separation of families, and eradication of culture and language. More detail on the impacts of acts of protection in Australia can be found in the Bringing Them Home Report (1997).

prejudice against him from the bench. Byrne also acknowledges that there remain questions over the degree to which the trial influenced future policy shifts and changes in the everyday lives of Aboriginal people. However, he explains the trial and its coverage as a "general stimulus" which "acted" on and "propelled" a rising wave of momentum and movement in the development of a civil rights discourse in the southeast. This was, for him, due to the degree to which it created space to "reveal" injustice and generate debate and discussion (1). The trial of Tukiar, for him, tapped into a growing wave of discourse and "heightened" it, "providing a forum that…exposed the nation to more challenging views" (31). He does not mention Djappari, other than in reference to her possible sexual abuse by the police as a "provocation" which motivated the murder and propelled the sequence of events forward (22).

Nicole Watson's project of providing an alternative judgment for the case sets about trying to find the voice of Djappari, Tukiar's widow. She aims to make Djappari's experience and the ways she has been interpreted through subsequent historical scholarship the central focus of the case. By centering Djappari's experience as the subject as the trial, she interrupts the notion that a unified racial 'progress' was possible for Aboriginal people in the decades following the judgment. Watson provides a historical overview of the effects of protectionism and what she terms the binary of invisibility and control which persistently framed the engagement Aboriginal women have with law throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries, prior to the treaty agreement of 2028. Rather than adopt the laws of the context of 1935 in the Northern Territory in order to make sense of the case from a feminist perspective, *In the Matter of Djappari* speculatively imagines another space in a future Australia. The judgment takes place in 2035, 100 years after the original case, and is decided in a First Nations Court of Australia which is governed by a treaty

between a confederacy of First Nations and the Republic of Australia and a subsequent treaty act implemented in 2028. The decolonisation of the legal system has been made a priority under this new treaty agreement, noted in another fictional referenced decision *Mansell J Re Anderson (2030),* which also notes that the courts are "but one dimension" (N. Watson 2014, 442) of the strategy for decolonisation set out in the treaty process. By referencing this prior act, Watson indicates that there has been a whole-scale transformation of the Australian legal and political orders following the signing of the treaty. A quoted section of the fictional treaty agreement articulates a reading of the common law as both a tool of colonisation, as well as a potential arm of decolonisation in a reassembling of the constitutional and judicial structure. Under the treaty act of 2028, the courts now play a vital role in the "healing" of the nation after colonisation under section 25 of the treaty:

> The Courts function under s 25 is but one dimension of the decolonisation process that began with the enactment of the Treaty Act. Section 25 requires the Court to re-examine the histories of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose names appear in our law reports. By going beyond the relevant facts considered by the original decision-maker, and casting a light on the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this Court writes back to a legal system that was once the bulwark of colonisation. (N. Watson 2014, 442)

The Section 25 referred to in this judgment requires the court "to critique decisions that have had significant impact on the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to exercise their right to legal equality" (442). In re-examining relevant historical cases, the court is "constrained by neither the rules

of evidence, nor established doctrine", and the court's decisions "will have no legal impact upon the actual parties, some of whom may be deceased", but instead are intended to provide a "meaningful contribution to the national healing process that began with the enactment of the Treaty Act" (442). The necessary re-trying of these cases publicly, while they won't impact the deceased parties, is intended to assist in promoting healing and greater understanding in the new republic.

Nicole Watson employs postcolonial and critical race theory in the space of the court room, electing to use the theoretical tools of contrapuntal reading from Edward Said and outsider storytelling from Richard Delgado. Contrapuntal reading forms a means of engaging with the case as a historical text written in the "shadow of Empire" (N. Watson, 444). Referring to Said's notion that "reading and writing texts are never neutral activities", Watson as judge notes the importance of interrogating the histories and assumptions that provide the backdrop of court decisions. Said offers that contrapuntal reading is a method which "must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded" (Said1993, 385 cited in Watson). Watson's focus on contrapuntal reading within the trial, which was designed as a tool for use in postcolonial literary studies, prompts the reader to reflect on the law as a literary formation. Honni van Rijswijk has written on what she calls 'literary jurisprudence' and the aesthetics of Law:

> the affective, political, legal, and imaginative afterlife of narratives and figurations that are part of law, and which are not ended with each case or legislative regime but which, unresolved, are always living on. (2015, 3)

Law itself, for Van Rijswijjk, is a form of representation and narrative which tends to construct Aboriginal people as being in need of intervention and control, feeding into and legitimising the colonial possession of land. Rather than being an objective disembodied practice, law is a form of imaginary which establishes judicial authority of the state over Aboriginal bodies. Law "narrates the past and the present…itself an effect of a colonial history of loss and repression, an effect that is not usually transparent in law" (3).

In positioning her reading as contrapuntal, focussing on the racist narratives embodied within the original judgment, Watson shifts focus from the bare 'facts' of the case and reorients her judgment towards an analysis of its historical context. In doing so, she understands the context of the case to be inherently inhospitable to any possible feminist outcome for Aboriginal women. She writes that racism was "firmly embedded" in the early laws of the Northern Territory (N. Watson, 444). Police officers on the frontier at the time were largely concerned with protecting the property of settlers, and frequently took part in "punitive expeditions", massacre, abduction and rape of Aboriginal women (445). Additionally, officers frequently humiliated Aboriginal men with the use of chains, flogging, and other degrading treatments "as a matter of practice" (445). Instituted into the law was a perception of Aboriginal peoples both as threats "in need of control" and simultaneously unworthy of the protection of the law (445). Watson details how a belief in Aboriginal people as "childlike", "savage (see Byrne 1990, 13) and inferior permeated the judiciary as well as being a part of everyday life in the territory; "at the time of the events in question, the Aboriginals Ordinance 1918 (Cth) (The Ordinance) comprehensively deprived Aboriginal people of personal autonomy" (Watson 2014, 445). Her reflection on the historical context of the law demonstrates the comprehensive relationship between the 'everyday life' of colonisation and the law's practices; showing the

law of the time of the trial as embedded into genocidal and dispossessive social and political processes. Watson notes that Dhikiyarr, as defendant, was not only the subject of extreme prejudice from Wells J as judge (who, it is noted, attended McColl's funeral) and WJP Fitzgerald, who was the defence counsel for Dhikiyarr, who both expressed their desire to protect the reputation of McColl from "what they considered to be a grave slur" (443). Dhikiyarr was also excluded from giving evidence by the conceptualisation of him by the judge and court as an "uncivilised" man, and the disadvantage stemming from the fact that "He neither understood nor spoke English" (443). Thalia Anthony, giving opening commentary on the case, notes that,

> In relation to the inference to be made from Tukiar's silence, Wells J commented that the jury could draw any inference: "for some reason Tukiar has not gone into the box and told you [which] story is true, and that is a fact which you are entitled to take into consideration. You can draw from it any inference you like". (Anthony 2014, 440)

The urging by Wells J to draw "any inference" from Dhikiyarr's silence is what Watson calls a calculated move to explicitly prejudice the court against Dhikiyarr, obscuring the importance of his own witness testimony.

Watson's use of contrapuntal reading reveals the particular forms of violence experienced by Aboriginal women and the narratives about Aboriginal womanhood held in Australian law. She situates this in terms of its ongoing legacy in other legal formations and historical events in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. While Djappari was also perhaps the most important key witness in the trial, given that "with the exception of Dhikiyarr, Djappari was possibly the

only person who witnessed the killing of McColl" (N. Watson, 447) she was referred to only as a 'lubra'[6] in the case and was "denied the respect of a name" (N. Watson, 447). In fact, Djappari is even represented within historical sources analysing the case as a "calculating jezebel" figure who had lured Constable McColl into the jungle to be speared (450). Her testimony is never brought into the consideration of the court, and Watson also notes that the possibility that she had been the "victim of sexual assault appeared to be of concern to no one", including in subsequent historical work on the significance of the trial (449). Djappari's treatment in the court is given greater significance by Watson's analysis of the broader context of Aboriginal women's treatment under the law into the late 1990s and early 21st century. Referring to the daily experiences of Aboriginal women in the protectionist era, Watson notes that "Djappari's experiences of the law fell within the 'binary of invisibility and control'" (450). This binary is expressed in the exceptional status of Aboriginal women as unworthy of protection under the law, while also living under "exceptional control" of the state (Watson and Hunter 2014, 450).

The invisibility/control binary, which Watson names as a contemporary legacy of protectionism which continues in the 21st century, has continued to have powerful influence in Aboriginal women's relationship with the law and with policing. The 2035 judgment notes that the Royal Commission into Aboriginal

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[6] This word is an offensive racial slur referring to Aboriginal women, as settler historian Liz Conor has helpfully explained: "The term 'Lubra' is a primary term in the lexicon of Australian racism. In 1992 Gamilaraay/Wailwan artist, r e a, created a composite media image drawing on an archive of studio portraits of Aboriginal domestic indentures from the Aboriginal Welfare Board, titled 'Look Who's Calling the Kettle Black', in which she directly challenged the pervasive use of 'Lubra' to designate Aboriginal women, and its associations with domestic servitude… By 1963 Northern Territory Welfare Officers were banned from using 'Lubra'" yet, "Despite Macquarie's Dictionary of Australian Colloquial Language listing lubra as 'sometimes offensive' – though it does not specify Aboriginal women – there remain twenty-two Australian place names for 'Lubra'" (2013: 230)

Deaths in Custody of 1991 and the Northern Territory Intervention are two more recent examples of this binary, and are named as part of its ongoing legacy in our 'present' which the future court looks back on. While the Royal Commission investigated the deaths of 11 Aboriginal women in its inquiry, Watson notes that it neglected to make any specific recommendations about Aboriginal women (N. Watson, 450). The Northern Territory Intervention, beginning in 2007, functioned through a construction of Aboriginal women as victims of Aboriginal men, while also instituting profound controls over their movement and autonomy (N. Watson 2011). Ambelin Kwaymullina has offered her own articulation of this naming western law as inadequate as a means of properly giving justice to Aboriginal women;

> I therefore understand myself to be vulnerable in that the protection purportedly offered by the rule of law may not be extended to me. Further, whatever equality Indigenous women possess under the laws of the settler state, I do not believe it to be sufficient to allow us to fully realise our humanity as sovereign Indigenous women. My initial motivation to study the law therefore persists: I was/am seeking justice. (2018, 142-143)

Kwaymullina's words are reflected in the treatment of Djappari and other Yolngu women under colonial rule in the context of the judgment. Watson notes that Djappari was imprisoned by McColl unlawfully, yet this "aroused no real controversy" (2014, 447). In order to form an adequate response to this binary and its colonial function, Watson reconceptualises the legal function of the court to enable it to witness the sovereignty of Djappari.

Sovereignty is an Act of Seeing

By centering the voice and agency of Djappari as a sovereign Aboriginal woman, Nicole Watson uses the future to produce a disruptive and epiphenomenal account of feminist values and progress where the task of properly seeing Djappari's life and finding her voice is made central. Michelle Wright's understanding of epiphenomenal time, as it relates to the hidden and silenced narratives of Black women in linear progress narratives of history, is useful here to understand Watson's attempt to find the voice of Djappari. Wright's epiphenomenal time, as I've explored, uncovers the

> horizontal negotiations [which] deeply inform everything from how lives are actually lived (versus the historical records left by the oppressors) to how laws are inaugurated and how some historical events occur and conclude…they are often lost in linear progress narratives unless they fit neatly on the timeline. (2015, 37-38)

Nicole Watson's alternative judgment does the work of asserting a multiplicity of relationships to justice within a larger feminist project which attempts to construct a practice of feminist law within a colonial value system. By attempting to find out more about Djappari's experiences, Nicole Watson problematises the speculative project of exploring how feminist justice can be achieved. Her judgment gives Djappari's lived experience significant meaning in the courtroom as well as the nation as a whole. By historicising Djappari's life through a contrapuntal lens, she also puts forward an implied understanding that a practice of feminist theory in the courtroom is not possible without a full-scale decolonisation of the system of colonial law. That system, as Irene Watson

notes, could only see and know Aboriginal women from inside "the frame of their own experiences and knowledge systems" which are founded and dependent upon a denial of Aboriginal women's sovereignty and can never truly hear or see Aboriginal women's law (I. Watson 2014, 48). As Nicole Watson points out, the historical narratives around the case perpetuate that same silence and denial in their conceptualisation of Djappari.

What Nicole Watson does instead is to imagine a practice of law which incorporates an Indigenous women's standpoint and can adequately bear witness to Aboriginal women's sovereign being and experience. I want to explore the operation of this process of witnessing more deeply. In an essay printed in the 2018 edition of *The Blak Brow (The Blak Women's edition)*, Ngugi and Wakka Wakka scholar Tracey Bunda ends with the following passage:

> SEEING THE SOVEREIGN ABORIGINAL WARRIOR WOMAN shifts the gaze, directs attention and brings into focus a different being. There is potential for her to be found in each Aboriginal woman. Her sovereignty is born of this land, of our ancestors, of the stories that connect our people to our countries. See her. She is tenacious, comical, strong, frail, hopeful, hurt, pained, determined and considered. See her. SEE HER. (2018, 5)

Bunda's conceptualisation of Aboriginal women's sovereignty demands seeing, and reflects on the effects of connection, remembering, and personal complexity. Mutual recognition is part of this project of sovereign relation. It is this sentiment which I believe best characterises the treatment of Djappari by Watson as judge, and it is reflective of Dillon's understanding of survivance as a

term which allows nuance and agency, and forms “active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (2012, 6). Djappari is recognised by the First Nations Court as a victim of violence at the hands of McColl and other trespassers on Yolngu country throughout her life. However, she is also seen as an authoritative voice and a survivor, and is allowed complexity. The court notes that “Far from being a seemingly powerless 'lubra', Djappari was a sovereign Yolngu woman” (N. Watson 2014, 446). The specificities of her sovereignty as a Yolngu woman are recognised as made up from Yolngu law systems and relationships structures:

> According to Yolngu history, the world was created when the Great Creator Spirit sent women to make the physical features of the land and the Yolngu people. Those deities also gave the people a comprehensive code of existence, called Madayin. It is inferred that Djappari’s early life was governed by this system. (446)

Djappari’s voice is treated as authoritative evidence by Watson as judge. The colonial record where it is kept, however, is treated with a degree of wariness. Engaging with some of the written and historical investigations of Djappari and her encounters with McColl, Watson notes that accounts are written primarily by white male historians, and they vary in their accounts of the events. Further, she makes mention of the fact that the few interviews of Djappari conducted before her death were conducted by men, and that it is possible Djappari may not have wanted to reveal details of the assault in such a context. In presenting her contrapuntal reading of the case, Watson also seeks to recognise the sovereignty of Dhikiyarr. Discussing Dhikiyarr’s treatment by the court, Watson notes that "Chief Justice Gavan Duffy and his brother judges described 'Tukiar' as a 'completely uncivilised aboriginal native'. In reality, however, this Yolngu

man was properly called Dhakiyarr. Our of respect for him and his family, this Court will refer to the prisoner by his real name" (443). This is a gesture of respect to Dhikiyarr and his community, as well as an assertion of an Aboriginal reality which holds authority in the court space. In recognising Dhikiyarr and Djappari as sovereign, knowledgeable and dignified people who were brutalised by a racist law system, she enacts within the court space a practice of sovereignty as an act of relational and collective witnessing, into which the whole future nation is invited.

Witnessing as a Decolonial Practice: Futurist Survivance

Watson's text recognises that there is power in collectively witnessing events of the past with the intent to decolonise the present. Witnessing functions in multiple ways in Nicole Watson's alternative judgment. Witnessing, or a denial of witnessing, firstly has implications for how the original trial was decided, where Aboriginal testimony was selectively dismissed as valid evidence and the Aboriginal witnesses were dehumanised as a matter of ordinary practice. In the historical setting of the original trial, the authority of witness testimony is constructed in the legal context of the protectionist legislative framework of the *Aboriginals Ordinance 1918* in the Northern Territory. During this time, Watson notes, Aboriginal people had suffered the continual violence of police in the form of punitive expeditions and massacres in defence of the pastoralists occupying the frontier, and while they were living under strict control under the Ordinance in practice they were afforded no protection from violence under the law. The court does not recognise Aboriginal witnesses in the case.

In constructing a space in which to adequately address Djappari's experiences, the methodology of "Outsider storytelling" from Richard Delgado is used by Watson as a framework for restoring dignity to the Aboriginal participants in the case and privileging their experiences and voices. Delgado describes his technique from critical Race theory of outsider storytelling as the storytelling practices of groups of people "whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective- whose consciousness- has been suppressed" (1989, 2412). These "stories, parable, chronicles and narratives are powerful means for destroying...the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place" (1989, 2413). Ambelin Kwaymullina has also written critically on the ways in which story and narrative enable and inform colonial legal practices, and therefore, being attentive to the law as a form of representation is critical:

> The laws and policies that created the Stolen Generations, like all forms of violence enacted by the colonial project, were sustained by the denial of Indigenous humanity that was also the source of the settler claim to our land. As someone trained in the Western knowledge-discipline of law, I possess the understanding required to locate and analyse the multiplicity of Anglo-Australian laws that shape the lives of First Nations women...I also understand that while law can regulate behaviour, it is often far less successful at changing attitudes. But attitudes can certainly subvert the law and especially the principle of equality before the law. And representation—or rather misrepresentation—in story is not separate from discrimination; it is part of what enables it. In the crucial moments when others are making choices that will influence our fate, it is the stories they know

> about us that can alter perception and displace empathy (Kwaymullina 2018, 142).

The understanding of story as a methodological tool is applied consciously here as a method of achieving justice for Aboriginal women, as well as questioning the basis of justice as it is understood in Australia more wholly.

The role of watching and witnessing in an Aboriginal legal worldview is interpreted by Yugambeh legal scholar Christine Black as part of a widely held value of Indigenous people's law systems. For Black, Indigenous jurisprudence is underpinned by the dual concepts of *sharing* and *watching,* concepts which she draws from David Mowaljarlai and the late Bill Neidjie, and Indigenous people should "ponder and use innovatively" these concepts (2011, 359):

> Mowaljarlai states that the law was called the Wunnan system, the law of sharing—that is, a jurisprudence of relationship and witnessing each other's behavior. This model reflects many of the basic legal principles and values found across Australia and in other Indigenous legal systems across the world. (2011, 358)

Acts of watching and witnessing in Aboriginal legal systems, Black argues, are differentiated from the function of witnessing and monitoring in western law, wherein governance models are structured in a binary system, and one party's function is to act as a constructed witness of the other, to monitor and critique them "on behalf of the people" (Black 2011, 359). Instead, Aboriginal people watch the land in order to ensure that survival of both the land's energies and

law systems, and therefore human survival, can be preserved; "one of the fundamental roles of Aborigines can be said to 'watch' the land. The law of sharing and the concept of watching the land are both principles found in Indigenous jurisprudence" (358-359). Watching and witnessing in Black's understanding, drawn from her study of a range of Aboriginal philosophical texts as well as her own understandings as a Munanjali woman, are powerful modalities through which Aboriginal people relate lawfully to land and to each other.

Conversely, a refusal to see and witness is a weapon of colonial epistemology. Colonial power in Australia has depended upon an explicit *denial* of witnessing and a construction of Aboriginal people as a false witness. In Australia, there are parts of Aboriginal history which are subject to complete public denial in national discourse; a *refusal of witnessing*. This is epitomised in denials of frontier massacres and stolen generations which Worimi woman Genevieve Grieves (2018) has called a "doubled violence". The denial of witnessing in the colonial relation between Indigenous and non-indigenous functions as a means of denying the lawful sovereignty of Indigenous peoples and Torres Strait Islanders.

The Ethics of 'Re-enacting' *Tukiar v the King*

The futurist First Nations Court intends to construct a space in which Aboriginal women can bear witness to each other's lived experiences, sovereignty and law outside of the violent space of the western court room. Nicole Watson seeks to use it to privilege 'lived experience' within judgment in line with Delgado's

'outsider storytelling'. She makes an effort to engage with, as Said has said, the things which are forcefully excluded from the original judgment, and aims to create a "medium for the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander narratives within law" (N. Watson 2014, 442). This mode of judicial enquiry rejects the "rules of evidence, [and] established doctrine", moving away from the interrogative mode of "opening up" Indigenous women's experiences and laws for examination in a western court (Watson and Hunter 2014, 443; Bowrey 2014, 44).

Despite the powerful acts of witnessing within the text, the imagining of Djappari's case within the future space of the First Nations Court of Australia raises complex questions on what Julie Gough (Trawlwoolway) has termed the ethics of re-enactment. Gough notes that "the slippery path of re-enactment is fragile in terms of ethical responsibility towards previous generations unable to present their own case" (Gough 2007, 7). This politics of voice is important. What are the ethics of Watson's choice to speculatively 're-enact' this case as a gesture towards sovereignty, when as she puts it, justice is positioned as an action taken within the future court to serve the interests of the treatied future nation, and will have no material effect on Tukiar and Djappari? More broadly, how can we justly relate to our women ancestors who have experienced violence, do this with care and love, when they aren't able to speak back?

The ethics of such archival projects which pertain to colonial violence and the personal suffering of Aboriginal women is something which has been carefully developed by writers such as Gough and Narrunga poet Natalie Harkin. In her work Remapping the archive, Harkin describes the process of reading her grandmother's records in the state archives:

> Her State-filed-life was replete with lies and colonial-construct misrepresentations essentialising everyone she loved. She was rarely named, but was quite simply their Girl: their State-Child-half-caste-quadroon-octoroon-true-to-type-of-her-own-kind-native-liar-nice-type-obedient-on-probation-difficult-tidy-looking-most-polite-well-spoken-careless-destitute-inmate-consorter (Harkin 2014, 2).

She describes the painful process of returning these files to her grandmother once they have been retrieved and allowing her grandmother a chance to see them. She then speaks to the ambivalent act of utilising those archival materials in her own poetry and art works as a form of literary activism when the violence they carry is so dense and harmful, and her own grandmother, the subject of those records, has actually torn them up and hidden them at the bottom of the wardrobe. By contrast, Harkin describes her own personal yearning for the truths held in the state archive records on her family:

> I longed to go right back to that beginning place . . . to those first colonial-recordings of my family, to the frontier-violence-contact-zone, and trace my blood from there...I needed what was beyond the so-called-official record, to enter those hidden in-between places full of mystery, pain and possibility...that space where my critical Aboriginal-sovereign-woman's voice might be heard (Harkin 2014, 3).

In attempting to 'honour' her grandmother through this process, Harkin's own desire is positioned alongside her grandmother's pain and anger. Where Harkin wants to embrace the archive as an artist, her grandmother wants to reject it. This reflects the complexities of many of my own generation of Aboriginal

writers and artists who wish to uncover the horrors of the protectionist era in the archive while also attempting to act respectfully to our ancestors who lived it, both living and passed on. We want to be able to inhabit the archives and connect to the past, to assist us in understanding our own belonging and identity and politics, and we want to use the archive to assist us to process and to form our critical responses. However, we are confronted with the potential harm of doing just that.

While she sets out to find the voice of Djappari, and to address the demeaning treatment of Djappari in the court, Watson importantly does not presume to construct her experiences or to neatly resolve the uncertainties within her story. She recognises that while fragments of Djappari's life can be seen through what archives exist, the truth of her experience in her own words is not accessible to the court, and ponders why

> the many other people who have written about these events did not see that she was the most important person of all...however, little else is known, at least on the public record, about Djappari. Crucially, we do not know what she thought of her treatment at her hands of the police in August 1933. (N. Watson 2014, 446-447)

This statement is important in that it acknowledges both the importance of Djappari's voice, and the fact that the courts, archivists, or historians, even if those actors are First Nations themselves, are unable to determine it. Irene Watson has noted on the treatment of Aboriginal knowledges within the court room that,

> The invaders and the missionaries could only see and know us in the frame of their own experiences and knowledge systems…The Australian legal order insists that Aboriginal male and female bodies, souls, laws and lands be opened up for general inspection. (2014, 48)

While Nicole Watson's acknowledgement from the bench that "we do not know" Djappari's perspective is not a neat resolution to the problems raised by Gough in her questioning of the ethics of re-enactment, it is a significant decolonial gesture within the court space to admit unknowing in a structure which has often claimed ultimate knowledge and objectivity.

Conclusion: Treaty, First Nations Feminism, and Aboriginal Futurist Pessimism

The critical finding of this chapter is that Indigenous Futurist work is being used to pose a challenge to the modern efforts of the state governments currently working to construct a legal relationship between Aboriginal people and themselves through treaty models. *In the Matter of Djappari* raises questions about the meanings of future treaties which might be made between Indigenous governance structures and settler Australia. It examines how future legal structures could be made which are capable of witnessing Aboriginal sovereignty in meaningful ways. Nicole Watson's text examines what other life might be possible for a treaty to bring about, but it does not leave readers with instructions on how the treaty is to be negotiated, and it stops short of detailing the future treaty in full. Instead, Watson imagines part of this treaty's possible effects and afterlife. It imagines how a treaty may assist in restructuring the way

we experience and practice decolonial justice through generating the space in the space to witness the lived experiences of Aboriginal women. *In the Matter of Djappari* focuses on just one section, the 25th, of the treaty, detailing the court's function. She leaves the remaining sections of the treaty act still out of sight and up to the reader to consider. We cannot yet imagine the rest.

The following chapters will consider some of the critical discussions of treaty and other forms of state recognition in Aboriginal Futurist texts. Much of what is offered in these texts expresses a deep pessimism towards treaties and their failures as a continuation of what has come before. In Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*, which I discuss in the next chapter, the fictional Brolga Nation are able secure a treaty with the colonising government which is achieved through a series of trade-offs and compromises which disenfranchise the other Aboriginal clans in the neighbouring area. Wright makes clear that the treaty agreement is secured with the necessary dispensation of the rights of the Aboriginal people in the neighbouring Swan Lake community. While the Brolga Nation are fixated on treaty, the novel illustrates how the treaty operates as a part of the state apparatus which acts to deepen inequalities rather than address them.

The suspicion in the work of Alexis Wright is reflected in First Nations women's critical work on treaty and other forms of state interventions which claim to address colonial harm. Internationally, Indigenous feminists such as Andrea Landry (2014) have argued for a rejection of state intervention to help Indigenous women, in relation to the activist movements to address missing and murdered Indigenous women in North America. Lena Palacios attributes a distinct anti-recognition politics to Indigenous and women of colour feminism, which she terms:

> an analytic to clearly demarcate a radical and revolutionary tradition and standpoint that is separate from, and oppositional to, one that embraces hegemonic feminism and a liberal politics of recognition (Palacios 2016, 141).

Landry states unequivocally that any Indigenous activism seeking a type of justice which is "established by a structure meant to murder, rape, and annihilate the Indigenous self", such as legal recourse, Royal Commission, or public inquiry, allows the "colonial government…to put the dollars in to 'fix' an issue that they continuously create and justify, and if we were to agree to work together, we would be shaking hands with and embodying the oppressor" (Landry 2014). This problematisation of Indigenous investments in government-based solutions to racial oppression is shared by Quandamooka scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson. Following Foucault's critique of rights as a mode of regulation, Moreton-Robinson argues that native title rights, human rights, and treaty rights are "used strategically to circumscribe, contain, enable, or seduce citizens" (Moreton-Robinson 2015a). The identification of treaty rights operating as a form of seduction resonates with Carol Smart's call, referenced in the opening pages of the Australian Feminist Judgements volume, for feminist activists to "avoid the siren call of law", where law as an avenue is seen not only as harmlessly ineffective, but as a strategic and malicious form of containment, distraction, and entrapment (Smart 1989, 160).

These theorisations of law firmly establish a mandate to work in the 'outside' space for Indigenous women, and to seek out modes beyond the justice system for feminist recourse. Irene Watson has joined this critique in some of her earlier works, posing an understanding of treaty as cautionary. She urges readers to "consider the reality of the unequal power of Nunga communities in contrast to

the state and powerful corporations" (I. Watson 2002 8). She also urges a consideration of the ways in which legal mechanisms allow for a reconfiguration of power relations, noting that native title is one such tool. For example, she perceives that the colonising power declared the "death" of *terra nullius* through the Mabo decision, while simultaneously reconfiguring its own power in the "power of extinguishment" which gave it power to nullify native title (2002, 8). Through law reforms which enable the coloniser to award native title to Indigenous peoples, "A colonising theory is not only renewed by the High Court, but also justified and purified; once more made good as an act of god - an act of state by which the Australian state constituted/s sovereignty" (2002, 28).

Similarly, treaty movements are implicated in a power structure in which there are many examples of the "power of the state to construct consent", to the extent that the state has constructed Aboriginal peoples as legally consenting to acts of genocide (I. Watson 2002: 8). Any acts of agreement between Indigenous peoples and the state should thus be viewed as highly suspect, and treaty appears as only one mechanism which will ensure a restoration of power to Indigenous legal orders. Critically relevant to Nicole Watson's articulation of treaty in *In the Matter of Djappari* is Irene Watson's identification of a necessary shift in the "power context" under which agreements should be made:

> So this treaty speak has many dimensions to it. One is: until we reach a place of the fullness of equality, we will remain in the business of burying the dead and struggling to save Nunga lives from the ongoing struggle against genocide. Agreements entered into that are not based on equal recognition of our international identities as sovereign peoples, will be agreements that are contained by the

> 'domestic paradigm', that is: they will be agreed to within the power context of the state. (2002, 6-7)

What this shift in paradigm, this recognition of the "international identities" of Aboriginal nations might look like, is not defined within the text. However, it is resolutely clear that treaty alone, without what Irene Watson terms "equality" under an international lens, should not be considered a utopian remedy from which all other reforms will naturally flow. The politics of recognition, native title and treaty in settler terms is differentiated from a state of "equality" in which the pre-colonial legal status of Indigenous nations is restored:

> Will there be a treaty agreement that is negotiated from a place of equality? For a place of equality to exist first we need to be returned to who we were before the coming of Cook. We must reclaim our being as independent nations, in control of our territories where we live under our laws of respect for all things with our relationship to the natural world. (I. Watson 2002, 5)

Where Irene Watson questions the legitimacy of treaties which are pursued by colonising powers who "construct" consent, equality in Nicole Watson's treatied future is well established, enshrined in law, and provides a basis for a treaty which functions as socially and politically transformative rather than as a mechanism of dispossession or containment.

Irene Watson's understanding of the construction of consent in treaty agreements holds true in the recent words of Aboriginal women currently

negotiating with the state government in Victoria. Sissy Austin, Djab Wurrung woman and member of the Treaty Assembly in Victoria, echoed the language of constructing consent in a recent article naming the Victorian Government's relationship with Aboriginal women as "abusive":

> In my analysis of this complex abusive relationship where consent is being manufactured through other related parties, I have also identified the honeymoon period, which is the Andrews Labor government's current treaty agenda. The spoken words within treaty negotiations do not mirror the actions of this government, and this forces you to question the legitimacy of treaty negotiations and the government's controlled self-determination agenda (Austin, 2019).

While Douglas et. al. frame the key tension within feminist judgments as the possible rehabilitation of the judge or the legal structure as it exists, Indigenous feminisms have persistently identified, within white feminisms of the present day, a rehabilitative instinct which seeks to work *through* the law as in itself maintaining an inherently dispossessive and genocidal legal order, naming the law as in itself carceral, and forming strong critiques of what Lena Palacios (2016) has called "carceral feminism". This deep division between First Nations feminism and white feminism remains unresolved, as do the questions of treaty between the Victorian State government and First Nations people at this time.

Highlighted by the words of Lydia Thorpe and Sissy Austin on this topic, Indigenous women's relationships to treaty in the contemporary setting continue to be fraught and distrustful. Nicole Watson is able to use Indigenous Futurism to provide an example of a treaty which address the sovereignty of

Aboriginal women from within a survivance framework. By saying that the 2035 treaty is practiced in this way, I mean that it recognises the ancient and ongoing sovereignty, complexity, and agency of Aboriginal women, and holds a critical lens to the historical conditions which have produced the binary of invisibility and control which shapes the lives of Aboriginal women in the 20th and early 21st century. Djappari is, crucially, recognised for the complexity of both her suffering under this regime of governance and also celebrated for her intelligence, for the relationships she holds in her community, and for her survival and resistance.

Chapter 4: The Dystopianism of Governance in the Works of Alexis Wright and Ellen Van Neerven

> Usually in this tiny era of history, it was common in the Brolga Country and right down to Canberra to see people sitting around all day long thinking about what was utopia and what was peace. And to question what could have been the most peaceful era known in the existence of the world. Where had it all gone wrong? (105)
>
> Well! Utopian dreaming was either too much or too little. (14)
>
> Welcome to the dystopia of dysfunction. (140)
>
> Alexis Wright, *The Swan Book*, 2013

So far in this thesis I have posed two research questions about how Indigenous people use the future as a critical tool. The project of this research is to understand how the representation of an Indigenous future is used to articulate the political experiences of Indigenous people, to contest settler futurity, and to provide a space for imagining otherwise. My chapter on Nicole Watson's use of a futurist method in the discipline of law examined how Indigenous Futurist imagining can function at once as a criticism of settler futurity, as a tool for recovering and witnessing the sovereignty of Aboriginal women by centering lived experience, and as a space to imagine a new law system.

In this chapter, I extend on this analysis in a consideration of two fiction works which use the future to critically interrogate treaty and other mechanisms for

bestowing rights. I argue that rights bestowals in culture, representation, and policy change are represented as dystopian conditions of colonialism in the 21st century in Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* (2013) and Ellen Van Neerven's *Water* (2014). In these texts, policy masquerading as caring, benevolent, and anti-racist operates to establish what Moreton-Robinson calls the virtuosity of whiteness (2015b). The securing of what she calls the ground of moral virtue enables the state to continue the work of prior legal formations like protectionism through dispossession, threats to land, child removal through moralising and carceral discourses, and imprisonment.

Native title, land rights, self-determination, and treaty rights are bestowed selectively in these two texts. They work by establishing within Aboriginal populations degrees of differentiation in worthiness and proximity to humanness while constructing white governance as well-meaning and progressive. *Water* and *The Swan Book* leave Aboriginal readers with cautionary and critical instruction on progressive political personalities and the bestowal of rights by white governments which can be useful for negotiating our own complex relationships with the state in the present. They reflect on treaties, land rights, and other progressive measures purporting to bestow self-determination and land justice to Aboriginal people and examine how those reforms and rights bestowals might serve to further colonial agendas.

Both of these books show readers futures where settler futurity is secured through rights bestowals, and where it is subsequently contested by Indigenous communities in nuanced and multiplicitous ways. This is demonstrated through the behaviours of governments who change and tweak the language of policy and governmentality here and there, and even deploy language around land rights, treaty and sovereignty to sustain colonial power over Aboriginal lives.

Treaty, land rights, native title, surface level accommodations, and acts of recognition and inclusion, are all represented as continuations of colonisation and dispossession which solidify and enable ongoing and intensifying violence against Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands.

This chapter continues my examination in this thesis of how Indigenous Futurist texts criticise the dual narratives of linear progress and the virtuous state, with particular interest in the idea of a future treaty. These two creative and imaginative works offer visions for the future which can be used as critical tools for understanding how governments may deploy progressive policy in order to maintain power. In offering this philosophical and reflective contribution to the ways that progressive policy is used, they contribute to the project named by Poka Laenui (2000) of dreaming on treaty and land rights in a cautionary tone. They also exercise Indigenous Futurist survivance narratives against the grain of readings of them as Anthropocene fiction, offering visions of military resistance and opportunistic acts of revenge against the colonial state. To revisit the two key concepts of linear progress and the virtuous state, a linear progress epistemology emerges where, as Michelle M. Wright has written, cultures utilise linear progress narrative to "assert their progressive nature", especially in relation to women, Black people, and LGBTIQ people (2015, 14). She notes how in dominant discourses, "we use post to indicate how far we have come" (16). Moreton-Robinson (2015b) has observed that settler colonial nation states use markers of progress, such as bestowals of rights, to establish their own modernisation, civilisation, and benevolence. I explore these two ideas in this chapter, using examples from the texts on how land rights, treaty rights, and other forms of 'inclusion' into the nation operate to oppress Aboriginal people and lands. I address some of the claims made in literary theory that both texts are examples of the genres of Anthropocene fiction and eco-dystopia, and

argue that instead, the texts use white governance itself as the dystopian feature.

The Virtuous State of Queensland

The tyranny of the Aborigines Protection and the Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897 are well known to most Aboriginal people from Queensland. The Act is a part of what is referred to as the 'era' of protectionism in Australian history, the legacy of which is touched on by Nicole Watson's (2014) 2035 court in its acknowledgement of the binary of invisibility and control. Watson's commentary on the operation of that binary with regards to Aboriginal women across the 20th and early 21st centuries highlights the problematics of periodising the discourse of protectionism as contained within an era of policy, rather than acknowledging that its logics are visible and continuous across subsequent waves of policy and discourse.

Protectionism is named so because it claimed to be invested in preserving the welfare of Aboriginal people. It is an ironic misnomer. The protectionist era is characterised by racial segregation, applied racial 'science', missions, reserves, indentured labour, and domestic servitude. During the late 1800s and well into the 1900s, protection acts in most Australian states were legislated to govern and control the lives of Aboriginal people, to criminalise and displace, to remove children, and to separate families. Protection is known for its destructive and devastating effects on families and communities. It is characterised by its formalisation of the management of Aboriginal people's lives, movements, consumption of alcohol, childcare, sexual behaviours, kinship structures, and

labour by the state appointed board of protection and the Chief Protector. During this time, Aboriginal women in particular were afforded no protection from the exploitation and sexual violence of white employers.

The Queensland act, excluding the specific attention paid to the criminalisation of opium, finds comparison in most other states across Australia. Though each of the state-based protection acts had implications for the criminalisation of alcohol consumption by Aboriginal people, the Queensland Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act (1897) is set apart from other state legislations of the protectionist era by its focus on opium, the legal consumption of which had been used until that time to generate profit for the state. After being smoked, opium ashes were used as a form of payment for Aboriginal indentured labour. In the 1970s, Lakota professor Beatrice Medicine (1983) wrote on the colonial utility of alcohol and legislation relating to addiction. Drugs of addiction, she writes, are used by invaders firstly as a means of dispossession, to coerce Aboriginal people into giving up land and labour to the invaders. Then, they are utilized as a means of regulation and criminalisation to further disperse and incarcerate Aboriginal populations through discourses of addiction and immorality. Fiona Foley similarly describes the uses of opium legislation in Queensland as a 'Trojan Horse' in her 2017 doctoral thesis. In most states, all Aboriginal people were subject to the Act, except where exemption certificates could be applied for, usually to the Protection boards. Exemption from the act, granted on an individual basis by application, allowed a little more freedom of movement for those exempt, but in effect still did not confer the status of whiteness. Exempt Aboriginal people were not permitted to vote or use public space in the manner of a white person and were not permitted to have contact with other non-exempt Aboriginal people.

The language of some of my Aboriginal ancestor's applications for exemption emphasise the applicant's education, literacy, and respectability as proof of worthiness. Examples of applications for exemption made by my ancestors and relatives in Beaudesert, Southport, and Brisbane in the early 1900s detail to the Protector how they should be made exempt from the Act due to their respectability, literacy, religious practice, and education, and the fact that a white man of social standing was able to vouch for them. Kombumerri woman Matilda Drumley in 1913 wrote her application with the assistance of a white employer for whom she was doing domestic service. Once granted exemption, she left his employ very quickly and joined her aunt, Jenny Graham, at the lighthouse in Southport. Katherine Ellinghaus, giving a presentation on Matilda in 2019, noted her own suspicion that this application was motivated by a desire to escape this white employer, and that it was probable that Matilda experienced abuse in his employ (Pers. Comm 2019) [7]. Abuse, especially sexual abuse of Aboriginal women employed as domestic servants, was common in the era of protectionism, as noted in the Bringing them Home Report (2007), influencing Aboriginal women to seek exemption as a means of escaping domestic servitude. I understand the act of obtaining exemption certificates through their strategic value for this reason. I am fully aware of the fact that within the context of the Act and the violence of colonial rule in Queensland, that without many of my family members gaining exemption, they would have been further separated from children and other family, be more vulnerable to harm and violence, have less social and physical mobility, and would have less control over the direction of their lives. I cannot help but also imagine the price of achieving this status, and the subsequent psychological effects on Aboriginal people who sought and gained exemption from the Act. I wonder about the mental cost of identifying oneself as a respectable Aboriginal who deserves to

[7] For more information on the effects of the Queensland Protection act's on Aboriginal women see Ellinghaus and Wickes, 2020

be treated differently to the rest, and what forms of what Du Bois (1903) calls 'double consciousness' it would give rise to. If being exempt also meant that one would not be allowed to socialise with other Aboriginal people unless they were also exempt, I wonder what types of social hierarchies would have been established, and how such hierarchies of legal and social standing were essential to the colonial project.

Archibald Meston was appointed to the position of the Protector of Aborigines in Queensland from 1897-1902 and was the major architect of the Act. The Yugambeh Museum in Beenleigh contains photographs of Meston sitting with Yugambeh camps, Aboriginal men and women posed all around him. He is recorded as an eccentric 'showman' and was a killer of Aboriginal people on the frontier turned ethnologist with an interest in studying Aboriginal people. In 'Staged Savagery: Archibald Meston and his Indigenous exhibits' (2016), Judith McKay and Paul Memmott wrote of Meston that he was known to deliver public lectures on Aboriginal ethnology on a stage surrounded with live animals, artefacts and live Aboriginal people, "elaborately 'made up' with paint, feathers, etc. and bearing weapons to emphasise their savagery" (2016, 185). Prior to his appointment as Protector, he was also the director of a perverse stage production, *The Wild Australia Show*, which was intended to tour Australia and then the world as an exhibit of Aboriginal savagery and exoticism. Thirty Aboriginal men were recruited for the show, before being abandoned by Meston in Victoria when the show failed financially. That Meston could occupy the roles of killer, exhibitor and, eventually, Protector of Aboriginal people, illuminates the true dystopian horror of the 1897 Act. It should be noted that the Protection acts in most states were the first pieces of legislation which dealt specifically with Aboriginal people as subjects of governance. Protectionism is characterised by notions of governmental benevolence, welfare, care; and a

regulatory attitude towards Aboriginal people of moralism, carcerality, and exceptionalism. Protectionism established a relationship between Aboriginal people and policy which continues today.

Alexis Wright's futuristic novel *The Swan Book* and Ellen Van Neerven's short story *Water* are two texts which represent policy-driven dystopias in the near future with this vision of governance in mind. I have previously explored the significance of utopianism and dystopianism in producing our experiences as Aboriginal people in postcolonising contexts. Criticisms of utopian thinking are at play in Alexis Wright and Ellen Van Neerven's work. The texts both actively engage with a politics of utopianism and the utopianism of politics in relation to histories of Aboriginal Affairs and policy relating to Aboriginal people in Australia. They both provide a profoundly dystopian view of bureaucracy and governance of Aboriginal people which reflects on past histories of protectionism and dispossession, where, as I've previously outlined, the creation of a settler utopia predicated on settler futurity generates a dystopian experience for Aboriginal peoples.

The way governance is represented in these two works reflects on Aileen Moreton-Robinson's understanding of the virtuous state. Moreton-Robinson asserts that colonial states bestow rights as a means of securing their own sovereignty, writing that rights in colonising contexts are bestowed as a means of ensuring the benevolent and virtuous status of the state (2015b). Her argument suggests that we must remain critical of any legal measure claiming to include or bestow rights upon Indigenous peoples, ask what their lived effects are, if any, and enquire whether the bestowal of such laws addresses colonial dispossession, or enables it to go on untroubled. Providing a close examination of this idea, Hawaiian scholar Poka Laenui writes that the final two

stages of colonisation are surface accommodation/tokenism and transformation/exploitation. The appropriation of the surface elements of the colonised culture are incorporated into the culture and economy of the coloniser:

> Indigenous art which has survived may gain in popularity and now the basis for economic exploitation. Indigenous symbols in print may decorate modern dress…A christian church may now use an Indigenous priest. (2000, 154)

Indigenous languages, previously having been denigrated and belittled, may even now be used to an extent within the dominant frameworks of meaning. This is done with the intent to, Laenui notes, demonstrate the coloniser's leniency. Throughout my discussion in this chapter, I will identify the ways in which *Water* and *The Swan Book* critically interrogate the function of this virtuosity.

Treaty Now

> He had forged the only treaty of its kind in Australia after three centuries of denial..he had gone to the World Court as mad as a run over dog to do that. This old man got his treaty between Australia and the other traditional owners of this piece of Brolga country alright, and pinned the bloody thing up on the door of his house. The words on the paper were faded by the sun, but that did not matter because the man could recite what had been written on it, word for hard-forged word. (104)

- Alexis Wright, *The Swan Book*, 2013

On January 26th 2018, I am in Redfern for the Invasion Day rally. I have never experienced the rally in Warrung before, most of my protest experiences for January 26th have been in Melbourne. Like Melbourne, there are thousands of people here. The same solidarity contingents emerge; Asians, Pasifika, Palestinian. It's hot. We are not in the CBD, marching to occupy the Flinders Street intersection, instead, we gather and flow around the Block in the inner west. Riot police exit the Redfern police station and casually stroll down around us. The Block, which has been the hub of community social life for decades, housing Aboriginal people coming in from the violence of the frontier, was the site of the Redfern tent embassy to protest development. Now, the embassy has been evicted, erased, and the square is walled off with construction fencing, keeping people off the grass. Protestors run like water through the streets to form a square around it. The blue fencing keeps us from seeing each other. Through the plastic, you can see the grass block inside, empty. The speeches refer to a second rally which has been organised in collaboration with the New South Wales state government, taking place in the CBD. The second rally is focussed on promoting treaty, and from what I hear in the crowd, it has been funded and endorsed by the state government, not organised by the grassroots. It started at the same time as the Redfern rally, seeming to undercut the grassroots organised march by attempting to draw crowds away. I am not sure if it is well attended, but I hear that it was quiet. Much of the city's activity seems to be concentrated in the Block today. The riot police are making their presence felt.

Treaty has been a hot topic for the Andrews Government since its election to the Victorian state government in 2014. Treaty is being used as a political tool

which can bolster the government's progressive platform. Premier Daniel Andrews committed to the establishment of a Treaty process in 2016, and since, the government has formed an Aboriginal Treaty working group, appointed a treaty commissioner, and has established an elected First Peoples assembly. The terms of the Treaty, at the time of writing this thesis, have not yet been fully established. A few unaddressed questions still hang over the process. On what basis will the Victorian government be asked to legitimise its occupation of Aboriginal lands? What will it be asked to give in return? What, if anything, will shift in the larger way white governance relates to Aboriginal people?

The Andrews government, for its part, has consistently marketed itself in Victoria on a progressive and equality-based platform, defining itself in opposition to other states in its seeming commitments to LGBTIQ and Aboriginal interests. After his reelection in 2018, Andrews commented that Victoria was the "most progressive state". One of the first changes his government made to Victorian governance structures was to establish what was named the Equality Branch in the department of premier and cabinet to service the needs of minorities outside of the Health and Human Services area, with specific focus on LGBTIQ and Aboriginal peoples, and the equality branch has been particularly excited to work with Aboriginal queer people. In early 2016, I was asked to assist them in running a national retreat for Sistergirls and Brotherboys called Kunghah alongside Peter Waples Crowe, Kai Clancy and Todd Fernando. The experience of working on this project with a group of white LGBTs in suits working out of a corner office high up on Spring street illuminated to me some of the uncomfortable schisms within the LGBT community across race and class lines. However, we saw their willingness and their funding as an opportunity to do something for the community. The retreat that eventuated was stunning, the

first of its kind to be held on a national level since the gathering of sistergirls in Magnetic Island in the 1990s.

The successes and possibilities of the retreat, however, became a bitter tradeoff for me. Firstly, the Housing minister at the time, Martin Foley, who had been closely following the progress of the retreat, asked us to be present for a photo opportunity with him to promote it. His face and name were to appear on our printed materials and advertising, as if claiming our work as his own project as minister, despite him having no direct hand in our consultation processes. Unbeknownst to me at the time, his photo shoot with us occurred during the same week he fervently and publicly spearheaded the eviction of the Bendigo street occupation in Collingwood. Bendigo street had been the site of a First Nations occupation of government owned houses, led by Robbie Thorpe and Uncle Larry Walsh with a view to establish grassroots treaty discussions. This was taking place just at the same time as these treaty discussions had begun to be initiated in government structures. At this photoshoot, I remember noticing that all the government workers were wearing department issued rainbow lapel pins, which they said were for International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) week, and had to be returned after. Martin Foley's attitude towards squatting protestors had been vicious. He stated publicly, not a few weeks before Kunghah began; "These people who think they are advocating for homeless people are in fact just thugs...They are intimidating the local Bendigo Street community. They have a right to live in a safe peaceful environment"[8]. The following year, I received a call from the commissioner for Gender and Sexuality, asking me to assist with running Kunghah again, but this time with the collaboration of the Department of Health and Human Services. I

[8] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-02/bendigo-street-collingwood-squatters-evicted-by-police/7990608

objected to having to work with this team, not wanting to necessarily subsume the program into the language of health, social welfare, and disease prevention, and didn't want to run it given my experience of working in the department last time. The commissioner tried to reason with me, saying it was important for the DHHS staff to get a bit of 'practice' working in this area, so I should give them a go.

This conversation revealed something to me about how people involved in governance are encouraged to use Aboriginal work as their career, and as their political platform. Such processes are seen as an opportunity for the government worker to market themselves as community minded, progressive, and benevolent people in power, when in fact they are bureaucrats invested in building their own political capital. Aboriginal transgender and queer people, the main community in attendance at the Kunghah retreat, are very likely to suffer the threats of homelessness, social violence and criminalisation. Institutionalisation, isolation, and poverty are real and normalised threats to life for our community. In the weeks following the retreat, having watched the eviction of Bendigo street unfold, I was highly aware that those people being evicted from the houses by Martin Foley and Victoria Police very easily could have been myself, Todd, Kai, or Peter, had we not represented an opportunity for gaining political capital to the Equality Branch at the time. I realised that making agreements and deals with the government, even ones which provide benefit to the community, usually demands a cost.

The tension between the grassroots and the institutional continues in treaty discussions across NSW and Victoria. In the last three years, discussions on treaty have been initiated in New South Wales and Victoria at the state level, and have been hotly debated amongst Indigenous community. At a national

level, the discourse has shifted from the government funded campaign for Constitutional Recognition into a focus on the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the ongoing treaty negotiations taking place at state levels.

At the Blak and Bright festival in Narrm in 2019, when I was invited to observe the small closed discussion on Treaty facilitated by Lidia Thorpe, Uncle Jim Everett from Tasmania asked her to consider shifting the terms of the discussion to remind the government that they are the ones here illegitimately. This should be done, he said, to remind them that they are the ones who must make serious concessions and prove that they are here in good faith. Lidia replied, "When I have done that, they say nothing". She remarked on the disturbing progress of the treaty discussions in Victoria away from land rights, sovereignty, justice, issues of incarceration and over policing, and racism, towards tokenistic gestures of inclusion, commenting that "if it keeps going the way it's going, what we'll have is university scholarships", highlighting in a subtle but very deliberate way here the disparity between frameworks for inclusion within western institutions and substantial justice.

Whether or not the Victorian Aboriginal community collectively decides to accept treaty as part of the new political reality of its relationship with the government, it is clear that treaty and other inclusion measures serve a different purpose for 'progressive' Daniel Andrews and his government than it does for the community at large. At the time I write this chapter in 2019, there is a camp that has been established in Western Victoria, on the highway out to the city of Ararat, to defend hundreds of culturally significant trees and the surrounding landscape from destruction by the western highway upgrade on Djap Wurrung country. The trees are sacred women's birthing sites and have been defended by Aboriginal people and allies for over eighteen months and counting. The

highway upgrade project, led by Daniel Andrews and his cabinet, seems to have exploited a lack of community consensus on the issue of the trees and pressed on with the highway construction. While I cannot personally speak to what has gone on amongst Djap Wurrung community on the issue of the trees and the highway, the act of 'selective hearing' on such issues is commonplace across such contexts where the government has a desire and a will to act on issues on the basis of its own interest. Djap Wurrung woman Sissy Austin refers to this as "manufactured consent", relating the Andrews government's behaviour on the issue to that of an abuser in an unhealthy relationship (Austin 2019). In her analysis, she identifies treaty as part of a "honeymoon period", alluding to a romanticised, unrealistic and fantasy-driven period in which the abuser constructs an image of themselves as caring (Austin 2019). This benevolence can then be weaponised against the abuse victim should they ever complain. Dissent between community members, an important and healthy part of decision-making processes, is used to the government's advantage. One response from Jacinta Allen, a Labor MP who is directly involved in the process of construction, states the following on the issue of the protection of the trees:

> The Andrews Labor Government passed legislation through the Victorian Parliament which formally commits the Government to a treaty process with Aboriginal people – the first legislation of its kind in Australia. It's vital this process – and the establishment of the Aboriginal Representative Body – continues to be guided by Aboriginal voices. (pers. comm 2019)

Amongst her justifications for the actions of the government on the road and the trees, this comment stands out. Is treaty intended to offset the problem of the destruction of sacred lands, and to justify the Andrews government's

authority over this issue? Would a treaty in Victoria enable the work of land desecration, or would it stand in the way?

The two works I study in this chapter show the differences between treaties and other forms of rights bestowals, and sovereignty over lands, bodies, and ways of life. Both works narrate how demonstrations of progressiveness happen alongside state and social violence, dispossession and especially carceral systems and detention camps. That the destruction of sacred lands and a criminalising, moralising, carcerality towards Aboriginal people not considered worthy, could sit alongside the use of treaty to show a commitment to self-determination, is a dystopian situation in and of itself.

The Swan Book takes place in the year 2088, 300 years since occupation began. We are introduced to Oblivia, the central character of the story, a young girl with a "virus" in her brain, who took up residence in a tree after being gang raped by a group of petrol sniffing young boys (A. Wright 2013,1). She belongs to a group of traditional owners whose ancestral country is a lake, which has, over years of colonisation, pollution, and dust storms driven by climate change, become a swamp known as Swan Lake. These traditional owners, referred to in the text as the "swamp people", have been scared off their country by the arrival of violent and unpleasant settlers and an imposed military threat. Their homeland has become a dumping ground for junk and trash from all around, and has been contaminated with toxic materials. The Army uses it as 'target practice' for their bombs.

Two forms of benevolent rights bestowal operate in *The Swan Book*, a treaty, and the 'Close the Gap' policy. The policy program of Close the Gap, a national

campaign and set of policy reforms initiated by a coalition of Australian governments in 2007, has taken root in the governance structure of Aboriginal affairs in the future world of *The Swan Book*. 'Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory' was one initiative which formed part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) under John Howard when it was also first introduced in 2007. In the novel, 'Close the Gap' is repeated like a religious incantation in the swamp, and organises much of the bureaucracy suffered by the Swan Lake community. It operates in the work as a device which demonstrates how Laenui's idea of surface accommodation is at work in the 2088 government. While the Army are carelessly bombing the swamp and the people imprisoned there, the office of the Aboriginal government of Swan Lake has a table "dedicated to the ancestors", and an "ancestral anthem song" is sung alongside Advance Australia Fair to "show some interest in closing the gap" (139).

The way the book uses Close the Gap illustrates its moralising qualities around education, ideas of proper health behaviours, and childcare. Aboriginal people in the swamp are criticised for alcohol and drug use, for the ways they take care of their children, their level of education, and other markers of social respectability. Oblivia's parents are described in the following terms:

> The bewildered parents were not interested in the mysteries at that stage of their life, and were still fearful of the welfare people like the Army coming back to plague them over their failure-to-thrive baby, and poking around with accusing fingers at their families' histories for evidence of grog harm on the little girl's brain-as if they didn't already know what happens to the inheritors of oppression and

> dispossession…it's the eternal reality of a legacy in brokenness that was the problem. (86)

The moralising language around parenting and properly loving children particularly echoes the criminalising discourse associated with Aboriginal people at the time the Northern Territory Emergency Response was first brought into law. The idea that Aboriginal people were neglecting their children was necessary to the implementation of the NTER, which precipitated a range of restrictive policy measures designed to punish and control, such as income management. The Army being represented by Wright as 'welfare people' reflects on the scenes of army vehicles and police rolling into communities with the stated goal of 'saving' Aboriginal children from their parents during the NTER. Income management, first trialled in Aboriginal communities during the intervention, is consequently now being applied to non-Aboriginal welfare recipients to manage and control their spending. Upon review some 12 years after income management was first introduced, it has been shown to lower birth weights and school attendance in Aboriginal communities in a recent inquiry, a fact highlighted by Yanyuwa parliamentarian Malarndirri McCarthy (Stayner 2019).

The Swan Book explores the nature of political careerism in relation to Aboriginal politics in Australia. In its presentation of the imprisoned Swan Lake community, it shows how Aboriginal trauma, oppression, harm and damage may be exploited for the benefit of career politicians who make claims to be acting in their welfare. The work explores the nature of political careerism in relation to Aboriginal politics in Australia. There is a character in Wright's *The Swan Book* referred to as Mr Weisenheimer. He is a "Canberra imposed controller of the Swan Lake Aboriginal Government turned Army-controlled

asylum" who has built a "long, distinguished career in Aboriginal affairs" (136, 137). As an "experienced career man of Aboriginal Affairs", Weisenheimer is written by Wright as an academic who knows Aboriginal people "better than they knew themselves, but that was okay. That was how he earned his bread and butter" (137). Weisenheimer, an expert academic with a reputation for the development of successful policy in managing Indigenous communities, is at a loss as to what to do with the people of Swan Lake. He sees his role at Swan Lake, which he mentally refers to as a "human farm", as attempting to shape the Aboriginal people there into "good, decent, Australian citizen[s]" through several generations of education and assimilation (138). The lives of the Swan Lake traditional owners are characterised by discourses of damage and intensifying regimes of surveillance which are reminiscent of the Northern Territory Intervention implemented in 2007 and continuing in the present under ever evolving languages of policy and control:

> A soft yellow beam of light fell over the polluted swamp at night. It was the torchlight of armed men flying in the skies like Marvin Gaye's ghost looking about the place, to see what was going on…the Army men sent by the government in Canberra to save babies from their parents said that they were guarding the sleep of little children now…this was the history of the swamp ever since the wave of conservative thinking began spreading like wildfire across the twenty-first century, when among the mix of political theories and arguments about how to preserve and care for the world's environment and people, the Army was being used in this country to intervene and control the will, mind and soul of the Aboriginal people…by tweaking it ever so little this way and that, the intervention of the Army never ended for the swamp people, and for other Aboriginal people like

> themselves who were sent to detention camps like the swamp to live in until the end of their lives. (47-48)

The NTER of 2007, an act of conservative government, was made possible by a suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA), and Wright's novel imagines a suspension of rights which is then extended over a period of another eighty years. She shows here how extreme regimes of governmental terror, violence, and control become normalised over time, precipitating further cycles of harm and trauma. Any reform or change happens in the form of small 'tweaks' and adjustments, sometimes to make it seem as though power is being relaxed or modernised, but in effect, to keep its hold. The intense surveillance and military control creates a hellish view of life in the swamp. The idea of an Aboriginal government in such a situation is a clearly contradictory one, with Wright having already established the utter powerlessness of the Swan Lake community in view of the Army's complete grip on their lands and regime of terror over their daily lives, in which they are subject to experience at any moment the dropping of

> an accidental bomb…on a regular basis from the Army, or your spiritual ancestor dug up by miners and turning spiteful on you, or Army surveillances protecting your little children as though they were the parents who loved them. (68)

In placing this scenario alongside the language of self-determination and close the gap, Wright highlights the disturbing ways in which tokenistic displays of Aboriginal autonomy may be animated by governments for political ends. Weisenheimer comes into this picture as an example of how white political and

bureaucratic careers may be made from exploiting notions of Aboriginal self-determination. At a community meeting, Weisenheimer's internal voice is narrated thus:

> Mr Weisenheimer looked around the room at his people-the worst basket case he had ever had to work with…all he could see were the innocent faces of the Aboriginal Government representatives who were his charges, still arriving late and sitting down at the table whenever they were ready. They were doing what he had already assumed they would do-just sitting there and staring at the table and not saying a word (A. Wright 2013, 123).

Weisenheimer seems to have assembled this Aboriginal government body like a macabre dollhouse. The Aboriginal people under his rule are in his view passive, childlike, and unworthy of admission into the category of human. The office of the Aboriginal government exists in a literal concentration camp-cum-toxic rubbish dump for dispossessed and dehumanised Aboriginal people from all over the surrounding areas, and it is managed and overseen by a white academic from Canberra who believes that his subjects are not intelligent or civilised enough to deserve self-governance at all.

A treaty is negotiated in the future world of *The Swan Book* as another form of surface accommodation which acts to illustrate the white government's benevolence and continue Aboriginal dispossession. There is a grading system in place by which Aboriginal people are categorised according to "whether anything could be done for them, and the treaty agreement only applies to those deemed to possess a particular degree of worthiness"; "Upper scale-they

could actually be educated. Lower scale-just needed some dying pillow place to die" (49). The Aboriginal people occupying the Swan Lake detention centre have been classified as 'lower scale', but their neighbouring relations the Brolga Nation have managed to make a treaty agreement with Canberra at their expense. The relationship of the Swan Lake inhabitants to their land is defined through repeated dispossessions, invasions, loss of control, grief and trauma. They inhabit the land in an alienated, ghost-like state. The Brolga Nation, though they are of the same blood and ancestry, are defined as cultural leaders. They have remained on country and retained culture, education, and sovereign presence. They model themselves as leaders of both modern and traditional education and politics, and market themselves to the government on this basis. Wright notes that they are defined as 'anti people'; "They prided themselves on being the anti-brigade, take what you want people" (96);

> Anti-culture, anti-sovereignty, anti-human rights, anti-black-armband-history for remembering the past, anti-United Nations or Amnesty International…anti-pornography, anti-paedophiles, anti-grog, anti-dope, anti-littering…anti-poverty, anti-anyone not living like a white person in their houses, anti-having their own people building their proper houses unless the white government says it's okay-they can do it for a bit of training money. They wanted to be good black people, not seen as troublemakers, radicals, or people who made Australians feel uneasy…and if it meant being anti all these things to prove that they loved their children, and could get on, and if this is what it meant to be reconciled-Well! So be it…They were anti about whatever there was to be anti about if white people say so, and even if they seemed to be just a bunch of negative people, or Uncle Toms, or coconuts, the

> upshot was that their highly successful and self-defined Aboriginal Nation Government was designed from such, and was as such. (96-97)

The Brolga Nation has performed a politically strategic and opportunistic act of acquiescence to the dominant culture. In turn it has gained a degree of political authority and power over its own destiny, and is recognised as a superior form of blackness. Brolga Nation have established themselves as cultural and political authorities, and capitalising on climate change wars, have negotiated a treaty for themselves and "deleted" the Swamp people from it completely. They establish their own power in this new context of violence and imprisonment through dispossessing and disenfranchising other Aboriginal people and constructing themselves as virtuous enough to be worthy:

> Brolga people had been opportunistic. They had made sure they were in the right place at the right time. They blamed themselves and others like the swamp people for their troubles so that rich people would give them plenty of money. (105)

The Brolga Nation's agreement with the state echoes the logic of exemption that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, wherein the gaining of small pieces of personal autonomy in a colonial situation requires arguing how you, as an Aboriginal person, are more respectable, more worthy, and more deserving than other Aboriginal people. This is the dystopianism of policy in relation to Aboriginal people in Australia; that in order to escape horror, you are forced to leave behind and renounce pieces of yourself. The Brolga Nation have had to denounce their own kinspeople to secure an exceptional degree of land rights and political autonomy. The swamp people, having left their country under

threat of violence, are unprotected by treaty rights. Their native title has been extinguished under colonial rule. They are marked as helpless, childlike, and criminally dysfunctional by the government. Having lost much of their bargaining powers with the state over land and been dispossessed many times, they are subject to the governance of the Army and whatever bureaucrats are sent their way to try to construct some law and order over their lives.

The Brolga Nation's securing of treaty rights occurs in the chaos of law and order and general political violence generated by climate change. The colonial government is interested in treaty for its own reasons; because it is invested in constructing itself as a virtuous nation state:

> Canberra bosses wanted to see treaties given out like Christmas presents-they really did, because they wanted to explore the better angels of their nature, to explore what angels of fairness and justice for all meant. (105)

Wright here touches on what Aileen Moreton-Robinson has explained in depth; that the desire for settler-colonial nation states to use Aboriginal rights as platform building, constructing themselves as benevolent through the bestowal of rights in order to secure their status as virtuous. Australia, Canada, the United States and New Zealand, she writes,

> want the world to think highly of them, to admire their humanity, their sense of international responsibility, and their acceptance of all races and religions. This is how virtue functions discursively within the

> possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty to dispossess Indigenous peoples from the ground of moral value, enabling racism to be exercised with the best of intentions. (2015b, 189)

This exploration of the state's own virtuosity constructs deep hierarchies between Aboriginal people, and acts to bolster the white sovereign claims to land in *The Swan Book*. The treaty which has been negotiated acts to secure settler futurity while it makes a claim to act in Aboriginal self-determination.

The Virtuous State and Land Rights in *Water*

The performance of colonial virtue through the surface-level support of Aboriginal land rights and self-determination is demonstrated in Ellen Van Neerven's character President Tanya Sparkle in *Water*. *Water* is a dystopian Indigenous Futurist novella which sits between two short story phases in *Heat and Light* (Van Neerven 2014). Van Neerven writes a relationship between a young queer Yugambeh "cultural liaison worker" and an Yugambeh ancestral being. Their relationship takes place on Yugambeh country, on the islands of Moreton Bay, in the context of a destruction of country in the area under the new 'progressive' regime of President Tanya Sparkle. The fictional future President Sparkle is intent on solving the problem of Indigenous land rights by islandising the waters of Moreton Bay to create 'Australia2', a new country which dispossessed Aboriginal people can live on. This work does not represent a treatied future, but a republic in which native title, land rights, and cultural recognition have become hot topics. Sparkle's determination to make her legacy through Aboriginal land rights and self-determination drives the creation of Australia2.

President Sparkle is a white woman, the second female leader of Australia after Julia Gillard. She is invested in building her legacy on issues of native title and cultural recognition, much like the career politicians described in *The Swan Book* who are obsessed with their own reputations as Aboriginal Affairs specialists. Where Wright prophesises that the historical moment we live in is situated on the edge of a wave of conservatism which began in the late 20th century, and which, driven by climate crisis, continues to dig in all the way until 2088, Van Neerven's much nearer future is a more left-leaning progressive one, which has some familiarity with the "most progressive" promise of Daniel Andrews' Labor government in Victoria.

Surface accommodation is a key feature of Sparkle's Australian republic. Sparkle is the President of an Australia which is peppered by bastardised and cringeworthy symbolic nods to Indigenous cultures. Aboriginal spirituality is "on its way" to becoming the most popular Australian religion, one of Jessica Mauboy's songs is the new national anthem, and the new Australian flag is a "horrible mash-up job" of the old flag with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags (73). Language place names have been haphazardly introduced to the map and the public transport system, causing disarray and confusion. The use of these symbols in *Water* causes some feelings of "displacement" and secondhand embarrassment for the Aboriginal protagonist, Kaden (73).

President Sparkle's 'big idea' for bestowing land justice to Aboriginal people is in the Australia2 project. Australia2 is an islandising project taking place in Moreton Bay under the direction of Sparkle's government to give Aboriginal people their own autonomous country. She takes the idea from a conversation had with Murri artist Hugh Ngo at an art gallery:

> In August 2012, a young Tanya Sparkle went to see Hugh Ngo speak at the Gallery of Modern Art. Julie saw Tanya sitting across from her. She could tell, even with the distance between them, that Tanya was slipping out of her skin to ask a question, and sure enough when the audience was called Tanya announced herself, a long, wielded introduction. She gave a spiel about reconciliation, which she stylised to 'recon' and then she said to Hugh, 'I am an optimist. I believe one day Aboriginal people will get back what they lost and more'…Hugh raised an eyebrow. 'What?' he said. 'Are you mob gonna give us two countries?'. (71-72)

Following this, Sparkle becomes "determined to leave her legacy on native title. A second country is being built" (73). A private company is contracted to reform the islands of southern Moreton Bay to create this new country which will be available for Aboriginal people to apply to live on, with higher priority given to those who don't know where they come from; "In the application criteria they are required to show how they have been removed or disconnected from their country" (74). This is a deliberate inversion of the legal processes used to authenticate native title applicants, which has been criticised by Indigenous legal activists and scholars for its problematics of forcing applicants to prove ongoing cultural ties in the face of colonial removal (see Atkinson 2001). This process of islandising a new country, which will involve an autonomous and self-governed Aboriginal government of displaced people, ironically displaces the remaining Aboriginal residents living on the twenty or so islands off the coast of southeast Queensland, in addition to the displacement and planned killing off of the race of humanlike plantpeople or 'sandplants' that have also been discovered there. Australia2 is revealed as deeply dispossessive.

Beyond the more symbolic acts of re-naming as a gesture of advancing Aboriginal rights, *Water* also notes advances in anti-racism law. In a gesture towards the common dystopian feature of totalitarian censorship and intensified surveillance, Van Neerven's future setting has also banned social media (the text implies this is to end online expressions of racism). Citizens have their text messages scoured for racial offenses; indicating that one can't enact racism in speech, even in formerly private settings. This surveillance on the population is done by the curiously named 'the freedom of speech' department. By including this detail, Van Neerven refers to public debates around section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act in the way that they constructed a dichotomy between protection of civil liberties and protections against racial vilification. Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act in Australia has been under public debate in high profile court cases both before and since the publication of *Heat and Light*. Notably, a case in which a non-Indigenous student was asked to leave a computer lab which is a dedicated space for Indigenous students at Queensland University of Technology was the trigger point for a senate enquiry on section 18C in 2017. During this and other public debates around such court cases, freedom of speech is repeatedly invoked as a political counterpoint to protection from racial vilification in the law, as summed up by Ron Merkel's 1994 essay on the Racial Discrimination Amendment Bill (1992):

> [The bill] as presently proposed by the Commonwealth government, is a carefully considered and well-intentioned endeavour to combat the undoubted cancer of racial intolerance. It has given rise to concern and unease as it brings into conflict the understandable expectation of protection from racism and the right to freedom of speech and expression. The bill uses the law to prohibit the expression of

> statements, ideas and emotions which were previously lawful. Does it create one problem without solving another? (n.p)

The sentiments contained in Merkel's essay are continually referred to in the media on subsequent cases and debates on section 18C. The conservative fear that is invoked by the opponents of 18C is parodied by Van Neerven:

> Julie tells stories from working at the Freedom of Speech office. I have a friend who actually went to jail over a text message-they search your phone at random any number of times a year for any sort of provocative material, particularly what they call racial violation. It has been three years since the social media ban. (2014, 73)

Tanya Sparkle's anti-racism and cultural recognition measures in the text take on the form of a diversity-driven and politically progressive dystopia; a *political correctness gone mad*.

This complex satire of anti-racist politics draws on other public commentary and theorisation on anti-racism in law that are at play in Australia in the contemporary setting. Aboriginal women have criticised the Racial Discrimination Act for its failure to adequately protect Aboriginal people in practice. Munanjali South Sea Islander professor Dr. Chelsea Bond argued in 2019 at a debate at La Trobe University on Wurundjeri country that while the RDA's implementation in the 1970s is seen historically as a turning point to represent the end of racism in modern Australia, in practice has been suspended three times since being legislated, and each time this has been in relation to Aboriginal people. Essayist Lorelei Lee has added that "Laws

do not develop their full meaning until they are used" (2019, n.p), and Bond importantly reflects on the distance between the implementation of such acts which claim to eradicate racism in the mainstream and white culture's wholesale refusal to "meaningfully negotiate co-existence across this continent" (Bond 2019, n.p). Ambelin Kwaymullina provides her own reflection on the role of legal study in her learning, noting the critical gaps between western understandings of justice and those offered by Aboriginal epistemological practices:

> I…understand myself to be vulnerable in that the protection purportedly offered by the rule of law may not be extended to me. Further, whatever equality Indigenous women possess under the laws of the settler state, I do not believe it to be sufficient to allow us to fully realise our humanity *as* sovereign Indigenous women. (Kwaymullina 2018, 142)

Both Bond and Kwaymullina's responses centre co-existence, land and sovereignty as contradictions to western legal measures towards equality and inclusion. Just as the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Swan Lake detention camp are seen as people to whom the laws of anti-racism and human rights do not and should not apply due to political constructions of their unworthiness, indecency, and unAustralianness; Kwaymullina underlines how Aboriginal women and Aboriginal people live in exception to the rule of law and are routinely not afforded its protection. Sparkle's Australia2 project, in its violent disposessiveness, enacts racism while she acts to 'ban' and prosecute racism on the other hand. In such a setting, the hyperfocus on 'anti-racism' and cultural recognition focussing on the level of individual speech and what Laenui terms surface accommodation, obscures dispossession and solidifies the virtuousity of the state.

Tanya Sparkle's obsession with eradicating racist speech and enshrining cultural recognition in the Republic are positioned alongside the Australia2 project, the dispossessive effects of which presents a stubborn contradiction to her anti-racist interests. The material effects of colonialism, primarily, dispossession of Aboriginal people, remains the strongest contradiction to the other progressive measure enacted by Sparkle's government. Moreton-Robinson draws on this contradiction between rights under law and lived realities in her discussion of virtuous nation states, wherein she notes the need to examine not only the degree of rights which the state has bestowed to Aboriginal people in the law, but the social indicators of Indigenous life in regards to life expectancy, participation, education, economic status, and health. She points out that this material reality persists despite a linear progress narrative of rights bestowals and successive changes in government:

> Since 1967, Indigenous people have continued to live in poverty regardless of the level of economic prosperity of the nation or whether there are Labor or Liberal Federal and State governments in power, implementing their "different" Indigenous affairs policies. There are still large gaps in outcomes between Indigenous people and other Australian citizens on all social indicators. Our life expectancy rates are seventeen years less than the rest of the population, our health is the worst in the country, we live in overcrowded houses, we have the highest unemployment rates, are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, and our education outcomes are well below the Australian average. These differential outcomes and their history raise a question: Do citizenship rights enable or constrain Indigenous people within society? (2015a, 155)

In *Water*, it is clear that while the symbolic and discursive or surface level expressions of racism and inclusion are being obsessively attended to, colonialism's material effects are ongoing. They are visible in the continued dispossession of land, destruction of islands, and the oppression and planned genocide of the sandplants. They are also clear in the suicide of Kaden's father and ill health of her uncle, who has contracted cancer from inhaling toxic paint fumes in an Aboriginal art gallery which is described as more of a "factory" (111). Kaden's father's suicide is an event which hangs over the narrative as an ominous and brutally realistic indicator of the cultural, spiritual, and psychological trauma of colonialism and exploitation. His death provides a strong commentary on the role of the art world and other cultural fields in solidifying this trauma.

In this thesis, I have underlined the importance of the participation of artists in the production of utopian imaginations of the Australian landscape and the broader engagement of the art world in producing colonial Australian Utopianism. Artistic works and aesthetic culture were vital in the production of Australian identity through landscape, as settler theorist of art history Kate Rigby explains with relation to the late romantic aesthetics of the competition for the design of Canberra, the Federal capitol. She explains how the art world produces "utopian moments" through which it constructs relationships to land and politics (Rigby 2006, 155). I explored in chapter two how the manufacturing of progressive (even anti-colonial) white identities takes place through utopian textual and artistic productions which establish settler futurity and the disappearance of Aboriginal people while they also use borrowed Aboriginal aesthetics, languages, artworks, and labour to bring itself into the world. Poka Laenui has also noted the role of the arts in the surface accommodation and transformation stages of colonialism, wherein Aboriginal art is incorporated into the dominant economy for exploitative purposes while appearing to include and accept.

Van Neerven's attentiveness to the situation of Aboriginal artists in the production of the colonial dystopia also outlines the particularly colonial position of the art world in Australia. President Sparkle has extracted her idea for Australia2 from an antagonistic and sarcastic conversation with Hugh Ngo, without acknowledging him as the source or comprehending the meaning of his criticism. Under her government, Kaden as narrator of the story explains that Aboriginal art has "almost wiped out all other Australian art", signalling that Aboriginal people are experiencing high cultural status and capital. This has a damaging effect on the psyche of the artists, however, and Kaden notes that "the sad thing is, most Aboriginal artists crack under the enormous pressure and celebrity, from the commodification of their work" (73). Kaden's father was "tapped…on the shoulder" at one of his exhibitions and guided into the art world where he made a lot of money and garnered a lot of attention (110). The industry, while lucrative, didn't afford him proper rights over his work. The money rolls in, his art is wanted "in parliament house, on planes and footy shirts", but the process of being flown all over the country to talk "about art he had no passion for, art that was supposedly his cultural expression" had eaten at him, leading to his suicide (110). Kaden also notes how the children of this generation of Aboriginal artists are "worth a lot, like the offspring of racehorse", giving a disturbing and dehumanising quality to this cult of Aboriginal celebrity (110). These younger Aboriginal artists are encouraged to enlist in the art world as if it is the military, and are highly aware of the destructive effect it has had on the physical, mental, and spiritual health of their fathers.

Genre Readings of the Texts as 'Anthropocene' Fictions

Wright's and Van Neerven's texts address ecological destruction and climate change from distinctly Aboriginal perspectives. In response, there is a trend in the literature on the works of theorists addressing both as examples of eco-dystopias, eco-fictions, and prominently, as 'Anthropocene fictions'. This is an example of what I've called a genre reading, where the label of a particular western literary format is used in an oversimplified way to try to make sense of the work. It is also reflective of the tendency Evelyn Araluen (2019) has named in literary criticism to apply concepts from western theory as tools to apprehend and analyse the meaning of the work without approaching the lived experience, or the cultural and material realities, of Aboriginal people.

Both works relate to climate change in nuanced ways that demonstrate the Indigenous Futurist quality of survivance and show a deep complexity. Although they both deal with environmental destruction, climate change is not presented as a simplistic or totalising disaster. In both, climate change presents a moment of political opportunity, giving the Brolga Nation the chance to take Australia to the world court and bring it to its "illegal, colonising knees"(A. Wright 2013, 91) in an act which leads to their securing a treaty. The Brolga Nation's actions have been described by critics like settler Australian literary scholar Adelle Sefton-Rowston as "controlled" by mainstream politics and driven by logics of assimilation and acquiescence (2016, 366). However problematic the consequences of that treaty might be, the language used to describe the act of taking Australia to the world court represents it as a nuanced act of revenge which demonstrates power and contempt towards the colonising power.

In *Water*, what is read by critics as a straightforward representation of climate disaster and ecological precarity is nuanced in its effect on community and their relation to country. The rising of the sea levels has the unforeseen effect of

allowing the Yugambeh nation to reconnect with their ancestors, to learn language and initiate military action against the colonisers. *The Swan Book* opens with the narrative of Bella Donna, a white climate change refugee from Europe, who arrives in Swan Lake full of stories of how the social effects of climate change divided and destroyed Europe. Climate change causes chaos, border violence, terror and misery:

> She had been asked to describe the inexplicable, of what happened to people affected by the climate changing…Peace, she said, it was called peace by the governments that called on their people to fight land wars. She had seen its kind rampaging across the gentle lands of her country, destroying everything in its path, and leaving those who survived with a terrible story to tell. Listen to what I say: cities, towns, homes, land, as well as animals and crops, were flattened and could be no more It was bad weather that made fanatics like this…The killing of people was without reason, fruitless and endless. (A. Wright 2013, 25-27)

Critics frequently apply the language of the Anthropocene to these two works as if the genre label needs no justification. Both Wright and Van Neerven's work are mentioned in settler critic and author of Anthropocene fiction James Bradley's review of ecocritical and Anthropocene writing, in which he declares that "all fiction is Anthropocene fiction now, some of it just hasn't realised it yet" (2017 n.p.). Settler critic Philip Mead (2018) addresses Wright's body of work through its relationship to the evolution of sovereignty discourse, and its many messianic and revolutionary characters across time, in the last forty years in Australia. For Mead, the 'Anthropocene' and subsequent ecological warfare represented in the novel is the driving force which troubles the boundaries of

sovereignty discourse, complicating the limits of the way Aboriginal homelands are constructed in the political thinking of the sovereignty movement by introducing climate-driven dissolution of nation-states as the newest threat. It seems that the Anthropocene in literary theory, as in other areas of social sciences, philosophy, and cultural studies, is for many non-Indigenous writers, simply 'our new' reality. Another settler literary scholar Jane Gleeson White narrativises *The Swan Book* in terms of its relation to the Anthropocene genre, noting in her interpretation of the genre of the Anthropocene novel that "we need new stories for our new age, the Anthropocene" (2013 n.p.).

The 'Anthropocene' reading is not just a tendency that critics in Australia exhibit. Adeline Johns-Putra (2018), professor of literature in Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, confidently applies the logic of the Anthropocene novel to the text alongside another "climate change fiction" work, as does Kylie Crane, a German comparative linguistics scholar, in a recent 2019 study. Marco Caracciolo noted in his 2020 comparative study of *The Swan Book* with another novel, explored the ways animal minds are used to reflect uncertainty in climate change fiction, mirroring "the distressing precariousness of our own future as a species teetering, with many other life forms, on the brink of a global disaster" (126). In his study, the idea of humans as a universal species sharing a relationship to disaster, chaos and precarity, is uncritically repeated, and obscures the specific ways in which Aboriginal people experience precarity and disaster in the work as a function of race and colonialism.

It is the understanding of human as a universalised 'we' that is troubling for Indigenous and Black critics of the Anthropocene in eco-philosophy. The Anthropocene, or the 'era of the earth as defined by human action', is weighed down by the colonial baggage attached to the racialised and universalised

category of human. Metis scholar Zoe Todd has made a critique of the prevalence of the term in the humanities as a “narrative tool” to explain climate crisis in the west, noting that “it is precisely because the term has colonized and infiltrated many intellectual contexts throughout the academy at the moment that I view it with caution” (2015a, 244). She criticises its use of a universal human subject as the sole driver of environmental destruction:

> the current framing of the Anthropocene blunts the distinctions between the people, nations, and collectives who drive the fossil-fuel economy and those who do not. The complex and paradoxical experiences of diverse people as humans-in-the-world, including the ongoing damage of colonial and imperialist agendas, can be lost when the narrative is collapsed to a universalizing species paradigm…Not all humans are equally implicated in the forces that created the disasters driving contemporary human-environmental crises, and I argue that not all humans are equally invited into the conceptual spaces where these disasters are theorized or responses to disaster formulated. (244)

Along the same lines, Koori author Tony Birch criticises the lack of rigour in the definition of both the date and the social factors in theoretical assumptions of the Anthropocene. He writes that it is important to note that “not all societies and not all humans ‘came to dominate the earth’”, and that the so-called Anthropocene came about as a result of “rapid industrialisation coupled with the rise of capitalism and global colonisation”, and was dependent upon the exploitation of Indigenous communities (2015 n.p.).

Interpretation of *The Swan Book* and *Water* as Anthropocene fiction uncritically repeats the same error found in the work of the original authors and proponents of the term in social science, philosophy, and anthropology. It relies on an interpretation of the 'human' as a universal experience in referring to both environmental harm and sociality, as if Aboriginal people occupy the same philosophical, social and legal category of human that the colonists do, and are equally implicated in the harm to the earth. Humanness is, and has been since the advent of colonialism, an exclusive, carefully constructed, and controlled category to which Black people globally have not been extended membership. Weheliye (2014), following Sylvia Wynter's work on the racialised category of the human in texts such as *No Humans Involved*, notes how posthumanist and other poststructuralist theories of power operate on the faulty basis that the rationalist conception of humanity was ever a condition shared by colonised and black peoples. An assumption of shared humanity, key to the concept of Anthropocene, prevents an analysis from, as Evelyn Araluen writes, "directly approaching lived experiences" (2019, 507), and blunts its capacity to examine "our material realities and processes of cultural production" (510-511).

The Anthropocene, as a concept applied to *The Swan Book*, suffers from the same theoretical assumption of shared humanity. This is significant in the case of both *The Swan Book* and the short story *Water,* because while one of the key tenets inherent to the dominant understandings of the Anthropocene in eco-criticism and elsewhere is the idea of human exceptionalism, both of these texts show how Aboriginal people and other subjects deemed to be outside of the criteria for worthiness are exempt from the protections of humanity and considered to be outside the reaches of humanism altogether in a colonial state.

Wright's text clearly notes how the Aboriginal people of Swan Lake are excluded from rights discourse and even from the category of humanness, and identifies the processes (such as the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act in application to Aboriginal people) present in our contemporary context which have contributed to this state. Their dehumanisation is allowed, achieved and solidified through their internment at Swan Lake:

> The internment excluded the swamp people from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the control proliferated until there was full traction over what their people believed and permeance over their ability to win back their souls and even to define what it meant to be human. (A. Wright 2013, 48)

The logics of dehumanisation and exceptionalism suffered by the residents of swan lake are historically fundamental to the use of detention camps and detainment in the colonial context. Both the Swan Lake prison camp and the Australia2 project reference the Australian history of putting displaced and traumatised people in prison camps on Aboriginal lands. Australia2 is constructed in order to house displaced Aboriginal people with dubious consent processes, but in doing so, disrupts the sovereignty of the traditional owners of Moreton Bay. In Kaden's mind, for example, the ways that the plantpeople of Australia2 are spoken about in media is reflective of the ways asylum seekers were treated "in the naughties", reflecting on the demonisation of refugees in the contemporary setting (Van Neerven 2014, 75). Swan Lake is full of Aboriginal people who are dispossessed from all over Australia and forced to live on the traditional lands of the Swan Lake traditional owners; "overcrowded kind of people living in the world's most unknown detention camp right in Australia that still liked to call itself a first world country. The traditional owners of the land locked up forever. Key thrown away" (A. Wright 2013,

40). *The Swan Book's* detention camps are for imprisoning not only Indigenous people, but other "un-assimilables", non-white people, people deemed terrorists, criminals, or illegal immigrants, displaced immigrants from Europe and so on:

> This was the place where they kept faces plucked from the World Wide Web by Army intelligence looking at computers all day long, searching for brown- and black-coloured criminals, un-assimilables, illegal immigrants, terrorists-all the undesirables; those kind of people. (55)

The complex system of racialised dehumanisation and exceptionalism referred to in *The Swan Book* is integral to the way that Wright's future is structured. However, problematic conceptions of the work as an Anthropocene text persist.

Climate change in both texts is a driver of extreme social and political violence between people, but it also provides the possibility of reconnection, power, and subversion. Survival in *The Swan Book* is enabled by the miraculous arrival of swans at the lake, who despite the chaos of climate change, dust storms, and pollution, come to reside in the swamp. For this reason, neither text can neatly fall into the category of Anthropocene fiction, although they both deal with environmental destruction. They tell of the intense grief, rage, and deep distress of Aboriginal people whose lands have been attacked by destructive white people in the name of progress or, in the case of President Sparkle's native title agenda, in the name of Aboriginal self-determination. In *The Swan Book*, after Oblivia is recovered from the ancestor tree, the keeper of knowledge where she has been sleeping, the Army destroys it in order "to close the gap between Aboriginal people and white people" (79). The violent destruction of this tree,

which is again justified in the language of protection and 'Closing the Gap' sends the Swan Lake people into a state of deep misery and traumatic disassociation:

> It made us strong and gave us hope, that tree. The kinspeople of the tree had believed this since time immemorial…they were too speechless to talk about a loss that was so great, it made them feel unhinged from their own bodies, unmoored, vulnerable, separated from eternity. They had been cut off. They called themselves damned people who felt like strangers walking around on their country. (79)

This is one of the ways *The Swan Book* illustrates the estrangement from country felt by colonised Aboriginal people living in Australia. The traditional owners of Swan Lake have been dispossessed; "the real owners hidden in the throng could not count the number of times their land had been ripped from under their feet" (52). When Kaden, protagonist of Van Neerven's *Water*, experiences visiting Ki Island, where her father is from, for the first time, she is confronted by the dissonance between the logic of the project and the reality of its outcome. The destruction of sacred lands and waters around Moreton Bay provokes intense internal distress and confusion for Kaden:

> I find a vantage point where I can see most of the island and the sea stretched around it. I stay there as long as I can, but what can I do? It's a dying place, more or less. The beauty is dying-all around-the industry is strangling it. The wires they are putting under the sea and the water they will pump away will destroy all of this. There is a groping sense of relief that I feel something: for this place, in this

> place. My country. My Dad's country. But this relief quickly turns into a bitter sense of loss and regret, almost self-loathing in despair. (107)

Kaden has previously reflected on the troubled position of Aboriginal people who are disconnected and don't know who they are. The experience of coming home for her has been interrupted by grief and anger. Here, she experiences the full weight of this connection with the realisation of the hurt and trauma associated with the loss of one's country. This narration is reflective of the complex and multifaceted ways Aboriginal people experience a relationship to country, which can't be neatly understood within the language of the Anthropocene as a theoretical framework.

Conclusion

The dystopian qualities of both these texts come from the relationship between Aboriginal communities and governance, which acts to dehumanise Aboriginal people, intensify regimes of incarceration and control, and solidify the land claims of the colonial state. The bestowal of rights and other gestures of inclusion function in these two works to strategically construct the virtuousity of settler colonial governance in a way that reflects critically on the contemporary relations held between states and Indigenous communities. Moreton-Robinson reflects on the history of how rights and dehumanisation operate in tandem to produce the dystopias that these two authors narrate when she writes that governments "dehumanized Indigenous peoples in order to legitimize their actions and then sought to make us fully human by exercising benevolence and virtue" (2015b, 173). This is shown in the destruction of the ancestor tree in *The*

Swan Book by the army which is done 'to close the gap'. In *Water*, it is in Tanya Sparkle's optimistic and utopian ideal of giving Aboriginal people back what they lost "and more" and how this is achieved through the further destruction of lands close to the heart of the disconnected protagonist and her community as part of a project to establish her own legacy. The simultaneity of the bestowals of land rights and treaty rights and the destruction, grief, and alienation experienced by Aboriginal people on country provides a strong critique of the contemporary context in which Aboriginal people experience our relationships with the state. How the characters in these works experience dehumanisation and actively question the limits of being human is a specific feature of, and response to, the dystopianism of racist policy and governance in the texts, and it highlights the ability for both texts to operate as, in the words of Evelyn Araluen, methodological and philosophical tools in their own right.

It is useful to consider the Indigenous Futurist quality of survivance in the works as an answer to the notion of linear progress outlined by Michelle Wright. Women, queer people, children, and the non-human world are not often considered as the subjects of history. In Indigenous Futurist narrative, these voices, as demonstrated by Nicole Watson's project to find the voice of Djappari Wirrpanda, are made central. By telling the story of the future with the perspective of children, non-human relations, and queer characters as the starting point, Indigenous Futurist works interrupt claims to progressive governance and linear progress. They reinforce survivance by complicating images of Indigenous country, people, and non-human actors as damaged, broken, and victimised; without agency, hope, or capacity to resist.

Chapter 5: Contact, Rationalism, and Indigenous Queer Natures in *Water*

> Colonisation distanced us from nature… in the sovereign apocalypse native plants are a part of our lives. We've removed the colonial barriers to our relationship with nature and native plants. We relearnt native plant knowledge and shared it because we knew that culture shouldn't be exclusive.
>
> Nayuka and Paul Gorrie, Sovereign Apocalypse 2 (2016, 16)

> Unreadable and irrational, wronging wrongs is the work of now and future ghosts and monsters, the supply of which is ever-growing. You'll have to find someone to pull on your ears to bring you out of the nightmares, to call you home and help you remember who you are, and to hope that the ghosts will be willing to let you go. (Tuck and Ree 2013, 654)

In the previous chapter, I read *Water* as a commentary on reformist, progressive and recolonising left-wing systems of governance, and reflected on the actions of President Tanya Sparkle in relation to Moreton-Robinson's explanation of the virtuous racial state. In this chapter, I engage more closely with *Water* as a "contact" (Dillon 2012, 5) narrative, focussing on the relationship between Kaden and the plantperson Larapinta, which serves as both an incitement to political action and a generative restorying of queer, gendered and interspecies relations in Indigenous communities. The contact narrative in the story establishes queer Yugambeh survivance in a postcolonising future, interrupting and complicating the colonising actions of Tanya Sparkle's virtuous racial state.

This chapter contributes to my overall thesis project by informing my understanding of "survivance" (Dillon 2012, 6), and particularly queer survivance, in my definition of Indigenous Futurism. I have argued that one of the key concerns of Indigenous Futurism is the imagining of an Indigenous politics in the future, and another is the representation of the stories of women and queer people in Indigenous Futures. This is done in Indigenous Futurisms through a lens of survivance. Van Neerven's short story *Water* engages with a critical practice which Dillon refers to as Contact to write a queer Indigenous story. Survivance, to return to Dillon's definition, is "more than survival, more than endurance or mere response…survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (Vizenor cited in Dillon 2012, 6). Indigenous Futurisms, in Dillon's understanding, establish narrative survivance through 'returning to ourselves' or Biskaabiiyang. This 'returning' emerges in Indigenous science fiction narrative as a process of "discovering":

> How personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in out post-native Apocalypse world. This process is often called "decolonization". (Dillon 2012, 10)

I argue in this chapter that Kaden, Van Neerven's queer narrator, goes through the process of "returning to [her]self" (Dillon 2012, 10) described by Dillon. The meeting between Kaden and her own ancestor spirits, and the complex erotics of the romantic relationship which follows, prompts her to examine her internalised "emotional and psychological baggage" (Dillon 2012, 10) which is the effect of colonisation, and to rethink her positioning within her community in a context which is marked by racialised violence, dispossession, surveillance

and regulation. Queer sex is highly important to the narrative as a generative site of personal and political transformation which importantly reconnects Kaden with her ancestors and her human family. Her sexual contact with those ancestor spirits incites her to participate in land defence on her country alongside the rest of her family and wider Murri community in southeast Queensland. Contact with her ancestors in the form of plantpeople prompts her into a return and a commitment to a purpose, itself facilitating self-reflection, investigation, and return to oneself. Queer acts of sex and seduction are integral to this process of transformation.

In this chapter, I will also argue that this contact story, and Kaden's subsequent reorientation back to country and community, is a representation of what Dr. Alex Wilson has termed coming in (2015, 1), a process through which queer First Nations people are welcomed back into their communities as their full selves in recognition of the fact that our sexual and gendered diversities are integrally tied to our sovereignties, our political commitments, and our belonging. Coming in, in a queer Indigenous setting, brings an awareness of how our sexualities and gendered experiences are integral to the project of decolonisation. The story also provides a literary critique of western epistemological rationalism and humanism, confronting western assumptions about species, ethics, and the philosophical binaries between mind/body and human/nonhuman which Moreton-Robinson has argued so firmly constitute the colonial possessive logics of whiteness, and challenging western notions of queerness itself.

Theorising Contact

> Soon it is dark and she pulls on my arm and asks if she can follow me home. I ask for a reason and she answers: 'I want to be with you so we can do what is private'. Then she leans close to my ear and utters '*private*' again. (102)

> I tell her to turn around and look at the window as I take off my clothes. The blinds are open and there is only darkness outside. (117)
>
> - Ellen Van Neerven, *Water*, 2014

Contact is a mode of story which critically relates to stories of otherness represented in fantasy and science fiction genres, often through racialised tropes of aliens, invaders, discovery and conquest. Historically, as both Dillon (2012) and Adare (2005) have noted, these 'contact' tropes in sci-fi have exploited images of the Native to construct often racialised narrative binaries in which white characters are empathetic saviours. They also often operate on the basis of a construction of *terra nullius* or "hollow earth" fantasies of exploration of unknown lands (Dillon 2012, 6). Encounters with otherness in the alien/other field generate terror, fear, uncertainty, and are sometimes also the occasion for the self (positioned as the human) to develop a degree of empathy for the racialised or subhuman 'other' alien race. Dillon notes that the contact narrative in the hands of Indigenous writers is repurposed with the intent of complicating self/other binaries and emphasising Indigenous survivance.

Another dimension of the alien/other contact trope in science fiction is it's function as a narrative which critically interrogates the nature of humanism and provides ethical considerations for relating to the other-than-human. These narratives frequently produce ambivalently anti-colonial sentiments while centralising the empathetic perspective of the white narrator. The foreword to a 2005 reprint of H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds, for example, reads:

> The inspiration for The War of the Worlds came one day when Wells and his brother Frank were strolling through the peaceful countryside in Surrey, south of London. They were discussing the invasion of the Australian island of Tasmania in the early 1800s by European settlers, who hunted down and killed most of the primitive people who lived there. To emphasise the reaction of those people, Frank said, "suppose some beings from another planet were to drop out of the sky suddenly and begin taking over Surrey and then all of England!" (Vogel cited in Pearson 2014, 1).

A more recent science fiction work, *District Nine* (Blomkamp 2009), draws on events that occurred in Cape Town's District Six during the apartheid era in South Africa to construct its alien contact story. Wikus ve der Merwe is a human appointed to lead the liquidation and relocation of the District 9 alien settlement. His attitudes towards the aliens, which at first are casually violent and dehumanising, change after he is exposed to a substance that transforms his DNA and initiates Wikus' mutation into a human/alien hybrid. As a result, he is detained for the purpose of medical experimentation and vivisection, and when he escapes, he is subjected to a smear campaign alleging he has had sex with the aliens. His employers, wife and family abandon him, and he goes on the run. Contact with the alien race produces an empathetic and politicising

response in the white protagonist, and signals public humiliation and social degradation by association of the human who has fraternised with the alien race in secret.

The idea of contact takes on other shapes of meaning in western queer writing, but remains focussed on issues of taxonomy, definition, and the politics of difference within communities. Jewish American lesbian writer and activist Joan Nestle, has noted that white LGBT cultures, at their worst, are deeply invested in forms of internal border policing and the creations of rigid taxonomical vocabularies in relation to the diversity of gendered and sexual identities, citing the ever shifting uses of LGBT acronyms across political history. She voiced her concern that western white queer cultures are deeply invested in upholding borders and defining difference within the community, leading to heated contestations around who is allowed to participate in what types of queer spaces, who is allowed to identify as one thing or another, what kinds of behaviour codes a person is expected to exhibit in order to signal their belonging (pers. comm 2017). An anonymous author from the queer culture magazine Archer in 2020 noted that LGBT communities are, however, at their healthiest when "deeply intermixed", and their sexual and gendered borders not clearly defined (Anonymous 2020, n.p.). Afro-Futurist writer Samuel Delaney noted in his two part essay *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* that *contact* with people who are different to yourself is generative of a healthy sense of self, a healthy city, and, it is implied, a healthy gay community:

> Life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will…in the name of "safety," society dismantles the various institutions that

> promote interclass communication, attempts to critique the way such institutions functioned in the past to promote their happier sides are often seen as, at best, nostalgia for an outmoded past and, at worst, a pernicious glorification of everything dangerous: unsafe sex, neighborhoods filled with undesirables (read "unsafe characters"), promiscuity, an attack on the family and the stable social structure, and dangerous, noncommitted, "unsafe" relationships— that is, psychologically "dangerous" relations. (1999, 121-122)

Much of Delaney's writing on the subject of contact relates back to his experiences of criminalised public sex in hyper-regulated New York city spaces, recalling instances where his own expectations and ideas about himself and other 'types' of people have come undone through contact encounters.

Anonymous sex in Delaney's understanding is a productive site of politicisation. It is important for learning, knowledge production, and deconstruction for Delaney, because it is a site of "interclass" contact through which he is able to come into contact with "types" he would not otherwise (127). Delaney notes that the introduction of laws to limit public sex and promote public safety act to push social and sexual life further inside the privacy of the home, further emphasising the distinction between public and private. Along with the advent of the internet, which allows one to more thoroughly screen for 'undesirable' types, this constructs hierarchies of worthiness and introduces a damaging kind of distance in the gay community specifically, and a hyper regulation of opportunities for contact across social strata; "if every sexual encounter involves bringing someone back to your house, the general sexual activity in a city becomes anxiety-filled, class-bound, and choosy" (127). For Delaney, so-called 'casual' sexual encounters in queer culture are never sincerely casual,

anonymous, or trivial, but connective, an unexpected site of freedom and of often, of learning.

Contact is theorised by Delaney as an experience which destabilises boundaries of self/other. The gendered and raced self undergoes a continual process of reconstruction and reorientation in contact encounters. This is explored in theorisations of self/other relations between human and nonhuman. Donna Haraway, writing on the power relations between humans and animals, has theorised these encounters as the “contact zone” (2008, 219), a space of intimate encounter where we ‘become’ through relationship with each other. She writes that lines of power are profoundly confused by the messy, unexpected, and multidirectional workings of contact:

> I comforted myself with the reassurance that most of the transformative things in life happen in contact zones…I learned much of what I know about contact zones from science fiction, in which aliens meet up in bars off-planet and redo one another molecule by molecule. The most interesting encounters happen when Star Trek’s universal translator is on the blink, and communication takes unexpected, prosaic turns…contact zones are full of the complexities of different kinds of unequal power that do not always go in expected directions. (Haraway 2008, 219).

Here she emphasises that mutual transformation through contact is generative of possibility and the subversions of expected norms and power lines, noting that we become through contact.

It is both contact's capacity to be transformative, confusing, and consciousness raising, that I am most interested in with relation to this text. Van Neerven's work in *Water* is a contact story with multiple layers of self/other exploration. Theorisations of contact by queer writers outside of sci-fi produce a notion of contact as a generative force for community politics, disruption of norms, activism, and healthy social life. I explore this story as a queer contact narrative as well as a posthumanist contact narrative which interrogates the cartesian rationalist human/nonhuman and mind/body dichotomies.

Contact and Queer Seduction in Water

> 'Are you menstruating now?' Larapinta asks.
>
> 'I am due to.'
>
> 'Does it affect your sexual activity?'
>
> 'No, not really.' 'Good', she says, and she *winks.*
>
> She's letting me know she wants to try something out (Van Neerven 2014, 99).

> 'We'll get a bottle of nice wine'.
>
> 'Are you talking about seduction?' A thought comes into my head. I'm being seduced by a plant". (Van Neerven 2014, 100)

Contact functions in multiple ways in *Water to* provide an exploration of humanism, colonialism, and gender relations. As Dillon notes, the Indigenous

futurist tactic of contact is in productive tension with the generic trope of the alien in sci-fi as much as it is with the colonial self/other binaries under interrogation. Indigenous writers utilising the blueprints of the science fiction formula of contact "confront the possibility of internal colonisation", although they represent such scenarios from an Indigenous perspective (2012, 5). The contact trope in *Water* is used as a form of defamiliarisation, which could also be called narrative seduction, by using the familiar markers of the alien contact narrative of science fiction as a racial metaphor. Instead of this contact producing a transformation of Kaden as the human subject through infection or contamination, Kaden's internal transformation is provoked by the understanding that the Jangigir are, and have always been, her ancestor spirits.

In calling Van Neerven's use of the alien/other contact trope a type of seduction, I refer to Cree artist Kent Monkman's description of his own painting work as "seduction" (2013). Monkman utilises reproductions of 18th century American landscape painting as a form of seduction which draws the audience's eye to the scene through presenting a familiar kind of colonial visual rhetoric before subverting the expectations of the white gaze with the scenes he's painted in the foreground. Usually, these scenes involve depictions of vivid and strange queer First Nations lives; lives which disrupt settler colonial heteronormative understandings. This 'seduction' tactic involves the conscious use of the familiar aesthetic conventions of a colonial art movement to re-present what is unfamiliar or disruptive to the viewer. He describes this as a conscious "strategy", remarking that,

> it's a process to draw people in. They see something-they have preconceived ideas about what that painting might be when they see it from a distance and they think it's a 19th century painting. But when

> they're up close to it and they see the narratives…they realise they're seeing something else (Monkman 2013).

Monkman's seduction operates as a powerful and conscious tool of audience manipulation, complicating both the perspective of the reader or viewer.

Initially the Jangigir are represented in othering and racialising terms. Kaden narrates encountering them using the stereotyped and sensationalised language of the media; initially noting "I don't want to call them 'sandplants'- 'sandpeople' or 'plantpeople' seems more sensitive, but I don't know which to use", and compares their situation to that of "asylum seekers in the naughties" (75). Despite these empathetic thought processes, upon first encounter, she observes the Jangigir using the same language that she has signalled to the reader as racialised and insensitive:

> there are two sandplants standing outside the exam room. I walk past quickly. Seeing them for the first time, I am struck both by how startlingly human-like they are, and how alarmingly unhuman they are. Green, like something you would see in a comic strip, but they are real. (78)

The ambivalence, distancing, and fear of Kaden's language positions the Jangigir using both the normalised racial slurs of the universe of *Water*, and the familiar disempowering and bureaucratic language of colonial governance which designates populations as obstructions to progress, or as *problems.* Kaden narrates:

> Basically, they present a problem for the Project at this stage, as all the southern Moreton Bay islands are being evacuated. This means everyone has to leave their homes and businesses for an indeterminate amount of time while the engineers work on the re-forming. These plantpeople, who divide their time between the water, Russell Island and the edges of some of the smaller unoccupied islands, must cooperate during the process, for the safety of all. (76)

Like Wikus in *District 9*, Kaden is co-opted to do the dirty work of displacement and eventually, of killing on behalf the government. She is invested in a colonial logic which determines the Jangigir as nomadic occupants with no connection to land, rights, or freedom of movement, but rather as a "problem" (76). Part of Kaden's role as cultural liaison worker to the Jangigir is to deliver buckets of toxic formula from the lab to the Jangigir and supervise to make sure they all take it. Killing is enabled in the story first through the dehumanisation of the Jangigir, including reference to them as a problem, and the application of scientific, institutional and utilitarian language; multiple characters refer to them as specimens or plants. Haraway, drawing on Judith Butler, describes this discursive turn towards dehumanisation and expendability as "making beings killable" (2008, 78). The bureaucratic language of safety and 'public good', along with establishing the inhumanity of the population, generates a scenario where killing is permitted or even necessitated by the islandising Project.

Similar to the white male archetypes of alien/other narratives, Kaden lives in a social world where sexual desire for the 'other' is forbidden, stigmatised, and ridiculed, but simultaneously, also expected. Her desire is mediated through and negated by her position as part of the project. As liaison worker, negotiator, and handler of the Jangigir, she is in a position of power over them, and her

knowledge about them has been carefully curated. Sexual desire for the Jangigir is framed in hushed, euphemistic language. Consider this passage, in which Kaden speculates on the possibility for her to have a sexual relationship with Larapinta after episodes of persistent flirting between them:

> I remember a conversation I had with Milligan, early on. He cleared his throat and I looked seriously at him. 'Kaden, it's come to my attention, through research, that as these sandplants can closely resemble us and mimic our behaviour-well, some people in close proximity can find themselves getting attached. Now that's fine, in the same way that of course we get attached to our cat or dog, maybe even to our mango tree that's been in our backyard for a few generations. But there have been cases of sexual attraction. Some lost souls. Now, strictly off the record here, as a male I find, say, Larapinta, slightly of an attractive quality, it's natural, she's more human-like than the others in the way she looks. And females may feel the same way about Hinter. But it is unnatural if you take it that couple of steps further. The government has recognised the danger-it is, of course, illegal to be in any way romantically involved with them. There was a fellow who, I won't go into details, he got himself engaged with one of them, and hurt himself quite badly. It was unnatural and not possible. (97)

Sex between the species is spoken of using discourses of danger, illegality, unsafety, and unspeakability, and done in such a way that emphasises both a constructed human superiority (through the comparisons of the Jangigir to a dog or a tree, referring to the language of flora and fauna), and human vulnerability and innocence. Humans, rather than being positioned as

researchers with ethical duties to uphold towards their charges, are named as the "lost souls" who are vulnerable to getting themselves hurt in the process of pursuing sex with the subjects. Milligan's words express the way that discourses of sexuality enforce a compulsory heterosexuality and position queer sexuality as "unnatural". The discourse of compulsory heterosexuality persists even in discourses of cross-species contact where the Jangigir are marked as plants whose genders are undetermined and socially adapted.

While she initially complies with Milligan's instructions on how to approach the Jangigir as research subjects, Kaden gradually becomes more and more aware of the sinister nature of the feeding schedule during conversations with the scientists working on the project. She discovers that the formula is changing in stages, firstly to make the Jangigir more and more docile, then to ultimately kill them. Upon questioning this process in conversation with another worker, Kaden comes up against the same dehumanising rhetoric she had initially been reproducing:

> 'Are the plantpeople aware of this? This changed formula?' He shrugs and looks across as Milligan. 'Not entirely. I don't think you should be discussing it with them'. 'I feel it's part of my job. It's ethical.' He snorts. 'We're talking about plants here.' 'They're not just plants, you must know that.' 'They're not entirely human, though, are they? Not close. We've been having these debates for years. About scientific testing on animals for medical research. At the end of the day, we have to put humans first.' 'So that's science? Science is biased to the human race? This is sounding like social Darwinism, like the twisted justification of treating black people worse because of their skin colour.' 'He's looking pained. 'I'd keep it quiet if I were you. Milligan's

> just over there'… He continues in a reasoned voice. 'Look, obviously we're from different schools of thought. But as long as we do our individual jobs, we'll be fine'. (94)

Since coming into increasing contact with the Jangigir, especially working closely with Larapinta, Kaden has come to humanise the Jangigir and experiences increasing alarm towards the same discourses she was using at first to describe her encounters with them. Her encounters with the Jangigir have led her to doubt some of what Dillon calls the colonial psychological and emotional "baggage" (2012, 10) she had previously used to make sense of the situation. She increasingly questions her previously held assumptions about the ethics of the scientific work she is doing. She begins to compare their treatment to the treatment of Aboriginal people, and relates her own role to the harms of scientific racism, connecting it to the ethics of science in relating to Indigenous communities, and the individualism of the discourse employed by the scientist, whose main concern is to maintain the imperative to simply do one's *job*. This designates dissent or ethical imperative in this situation as disobedient, disruptive and irrational. The discursive function of 'making-killable', the designation of a population as subhuman, specifically through scientific discourse, is one which has historically functioned in Australia to enable the killing of Aboriginal people (F. Foley 2017, 40).

The conversation with the scientist represents one of several turning points for Kaden. Similar to the moment in *District 9* where the infected and hybridised Wikus is imprisoned in the lab about to be vivisected, and has the sudden realisation that he is no longer protected by virtue of his privileged humanness, Kaden comes to an understanding that *if they are willing to do it to the alien, they would probably do it to me too*. Later, she observes that "the more

switched-on I become, the more I am uncomfortable. I realise how naive I was before coming here" (103). Unlike Wikus, emblematic as he is for the common science fiction trope of the white male who loses privilege through contact with the other, Kaden's empathetic response is not based on a threat to her status as human. Kaden has not been *infected* in the literal sense from contact with the Jangigir, nor has she been subjected to an invasive physical or chemical hybridisation process, but instead holds the knowledge that violence stemming from scientific work has already eventuated and has impacted her community, generating a natural empathic response. She is consciously noting during the story how what is happening to the Jangigir has already taken place in relation to Aboriginal people and asylum seekers.

Scientific racism's impact on Indigenous communities is deeply felt. The University of Melbourne, for example, was considered to be the home of eugenicist science at the peak of the movement in the 1930s, the legacy of which is still felt today on campus through the naming of buildings. The building I work in, for example, is named after John Medley, a prominent member of the Eugenics Society of Victoria and a former Vice Chancellor. The work *Power and the Passion: Our Ancestors Return Home* (2010) by Shannon Faulkhead and Uncle Jim Berg details the struggle to repatriate a significant amount of stolen Aboriginal ancestral remains from the University of Melbourne. Notably, they acknowledge that the debates between collectors and Indigenous communities over the stolen ancestral remains which made up the materials of study for eugenicist science

> are simplified and represented as a battle between Western-based research or science and the cultural beliefs of Indigenous peoples…The main argument was that continued research will benefit

> society as a whole; that the research of Aboriginal skeletal remains would benefit humankind. (xxi)

The debate between Indigenous peoples and science continues to be represented in these terms. The struggle for Hawaiian sovereignty over the site of Mauna Kea, where a thirty metre telescope has been planned, is further evidence of the ways in which Indigenous peoples and lands are made disposable, seemingly in the interests of science, knowledge and progress. Similarly, Kaden's struggle here is positioned as a conflict between her ethics, her family, and her progress and productive output as a member of a scientific community with investments in territoriality and dispossession. If Kaden has been experiencing a type of dissonant "internal colonisation" (Dillon 2010, 10) about working on the project as an assistant to the science project, as Dillon calls it, the passage where she is drawn into an argument about ethics with this scientist is one of a few key moments where her increasing dissent to that colonisation is heightened.

There are multiple confused and dissonant moments that Kaden experiences in her position at the science centre. They are usually provoked by some type of contact, and her two sexual encounters with Larapinta are extremely tense in this respect. The two scenes of sex between them provoke intense episodes of questioning for Kaden, as she grapples with layers of political and personal meaning. The first time they have sex, Kaden's internal monologue narrates her struggle to make sense of Larapinta as other-than-human:

> What will this experiment hold for her…What will I discover in this uncharted experience? How much of what it means to be human will

> sway deep in my mind like a ship. I see her eyes are open, those green unhuman eyes. (102)

The language of scientific *discovery,* experimentation and uncharted knowledge permeates Kaden's thinking. The more intimate they become, the more frequently Kaden reaches for humanistic language to rationalise their encounters, repeating to herself that Larapinta is not human, and that she is human herself. The language of humanness functions to distance her from Larapinta through reinforcing a human/non-human distinction between them. Kaden fearfully maintains that she believes Larapinta cannot truly *see* or judge her because, as she almost compulsively repeats to herself, Larapinta is not human; "I'm glad she can't judge me. I'm afraid she can see into my soul" (100). She repeats to herself that Larapinta has none of the sentience or moral judgments of a human, maintaining an ambivalent relationship with her intelligence. When Larapinta confesses she's been thinking of them together, Kaden snaps; "'You don't think…It's just processes" (95). Despite the fact that Larapinta is clearly intelligent and observant about Kaden, Kaden's inner monologue repeats that Larapinta "can't judge me" because she's not human; "If she was human, she would tell me I'm an idiot…but she's not human, so I feel better" (87). During sex, Kaden distances herself from the knowledge of who or what Larapinta is, noting that "In the dark of the room, her shadow enclosed into mine, she could be anything" (103).

Kaden's repetition that Larapinta is not human hopes to establish some certainty, representing a hopeful disavowal of Kaden's responsibility towards Larapinta as both a liaison worker and a human actor with power over her. By comparison, Larapinta, who is secretly knowledgeable about Kaden and their shared history, never embarrasses or exposes her for either her ignorance, her

desires, or her sometimes rude behaviour. Larapinta's initial interactions with Kaden, conversely, involve her caring and providing for Kaden, as well as questioning and probing her to speak about her own position and identity in a way that brings her into accountability. When they meet for the first time in the meeting room at the science centre, the first thing Larapinta does is offer Kaden a drink of fresh water, extracted from her own body:

> 'Water?'
>
> I realise I am still holding the styrofoam cup, which is empty.
>
> She tops up my cup with her hand. She holds three of her fingers together and a small flow of clear water squeezes out and into the cup. (78-79)

This gesture is laden with both eroticism and care. On another occasion, Kaden is stung by a bluebottle alone on the beach, and while she is panicking and trying to think of what to do, Larapinta appears and treats her wound, again, using water from her own body:

> She comes by me. She's an awkward tangle of roots and limbs and when she walks she creaks like an old stair railing. 'You need fresh water. Which foot is it?'…My breathing slows. She does her trick again. I haven't been able to believe it. She extracts the saltwater out of my skin with her middle fingertip then releases a flow of freshwater; just the first drop makes it better. The saltiness is out. (86-87)

Both of these encounters with Larapinta involve physical but non-sexual intimacy, the provision of care and nourishment, and episodes of gentle but direct questioning between them in which Kaden is asked to account for herself. When she first comes into conversation with Larapinta, Kaden is surprised when Larapinta asks her directly whether she's Aboriginal:

> 'Yes.'
>
> 'Where is your ancestral home?'
>
> 'The islands here, actually…Ki Island, I think. I've never been there. My father died, see.'
>
> 'I see.' She says….'Doesn't this upset you?'
>
> 'My dad? Of course…'
>
> 'The mining. The islandising. Australia2.' She's blunt.
>
> 'Oh I don't know. Like I said, I've never been there. How can you have an attachment to a place you've never been?' (79)

This questioning interrupts the flow of Kaden's thinking in relation to the Jangigir. In this exchange during their first meeting, Kaden reveals her understanding of herself as not responsible to her father's country, which is immediately placed in an uncomfortable position under direct questioning. Her perspective is disturbed by the conversation, and afterwards, while travelling by ferry back to the mainland, she looks out into the darkness and wonders where Ki Island is:

> My father and his brothers were raised by my grandmother on Ki. I wonder if the island is anything like Russell, or the smaller, overgrown, brown isles I've passed. Remembering the stories my father told me about growing up is like walking on glass stairs in my mind. (80)

As Kaden's relationship with Larapinta deepens, she becomes more in tune with her own family and the community of Murris that she lives in. Her dissonance is again heightened when, following her first sexual encounter with Larapinta, she walks down George street in Brisbane and encounters a protest against Australia2 with "lots of Murris around" (104). She looks around for her uncle, feeling foolish and uncomfortable as she occupies her dual position of Murri and cultural liaison worker on the Australia2 project. Kaden struggles to place herself, becoming confronted by the reality of the project she is working for and suddenly desperate to connect to the people around her:

> It had come up so many times in the office, but I was used to hearing it from the other end, the guvvie buzzwords and contractions. What I was feeling from the crowd was so…*raw*…I wanted to go up to them, introduce myself, feel their feeling. Tell them I'm Murri too. (104-105)

She is eventually identified, however, and claimed by Hugh Ngo, the artist, who recognises her as her father's daughter. This experience further highlights the problematics of being involved in the islandising for Kaden, and forces her into questioning her identity and position. On the occasion where she has her bluebottle injury healed by Larapinta, they have the following exchange:

'Larapinta?'

She looks up.

I don't want to be rude but I say, 'What would you say you are? And where do you come from?'

She looks at me. 'Can you answer that about yourself?'

'I guess not.'

'For us it is the same.'

'Have you always been here?'

'Yes.'

Coming into intimate contact with Larapinta, being both nourished and questioned by her, immediately shifts Kaden's understanding of her position in the world as an Indigenous person. Eventually, through a slow process of conversation and gentle questioning, it transforms her politics and drives her to join a collective community action to take the islands back. These episodes of questioning bring Kaden's identity, feelings, knowledge, and political positions to the surface and force her to carefully examine them, perhaps for the first time. Her perspective changes over the course of a few weeks of working with Larapinta, to the point that she begins to visibly withdraw from her work at the project, and is told by her boss Milligan that she is no longer progressing and may not have a future there. By her second sexual encounter with Larapinta, a profound shift has occurred in Kaden's thinking. She is no longer invested in distance between them, or establishing a shield of deniability. She also looks differently at the country around her, commenting; "I know the ocean now. I know Ki…from the beginning I'd known there was something more, and now I know the truth" (115).

As I've explored, the language used by Kaden and the scientists to refer to the Jangigir constructs them in a way that is initially consistent with an alien other. The official narrative on their existence is that they have been "formed" and "discovered" with the beginning of human interference in Moreton Bay, studied as specimens, and conceptualised as non-human and non-agentic. However, the story eventually reveals that the Jangigir are neither recent occurrences nor a product of human intervention, but rather, they are ancient beings who hold ancestral knowledge and Yugambeh language. The way this narrative unfolds underlines the dissonance between the languages of scientific knowledge, governance, and community memory, as Kaden operates at the borders of her dual position as an insider to governance structures and Indigenous community. Contact with both the Jangigir and the human Murri community around her produces an incitement to activist politics in Kaden, and reorients her towards a consideration of her relationship with and responsibility to the country she's working on. The reorientation of Kaden's politics in response to coming into contact with her nation as embodied in Larapinta mirrors the trajectory of a host of other human characters in the science fiction canon who are dislodged from the privileged category of human through contact which transforms them into an alien or a hybrid, with a significant difference; Kaden is not only dislodged from the category of human, she is reinstated into a position within her Aboriginal nation through an acceptance of her responsibility to country. Through the progression of her sexual relationship with Larapinta, she begins to see herself as part of her nation's struggle for freedom and survival in threatened Moreton Bay; noting that "any loyalty I had to Milligan or the corporation has long ceased" (115).

Indigenous Humanism and 'Coming in'

> "It's only due to the generosity of the Plant peoples that we've managed to survive to this point" (Daniel Heath Justice 2018, 39)

Daniel Heath Justice's notion of Indigenous humanism as a form of coming into responsibility is useful for understanding Kaden's evolution in *Water*. Justice's ideas of humanism are bound up in his notions of the good Indigenous civilian. Justice notes that biology alone is inadequate for the full realisation of Indigenous citizenship, which is not inborn, but practised and learned through relating to others, including the non-human world. Notably, institutional processes of recognition and regulation are not part of this making of an Indigenous citizen. Rather, responsibility to one's nation and kinship systems is integral to this *practice* of becoming. Justice's chapter titled 'How Do We Learn to be Human?' begins with a quote from Lee Maracle on transformation and the ability to find freedom in the context you find yourself in. Justice understands the self as a raw material, which only becomes human through story. For Justice, humanity is a practice; "To be human is to be a good relative", and conversely, "To be isolated from social accountability is to be something less than human" (43, 47). This mode of social accountability is "learned":

> they're not inborn, nor do they ride the currents of blood or sit upon the rungs of the DNA ladder, but are instead a complex and deliberate but entirely learnable process of cross-generational education and social exchange. (47)

In Justice's view, the Eurowestern white supremacist ideologies which drive exclusionary notions of the human and the citizen as a rationalist category are set aside in favour of the models of humanisation and civilisation (these are taken together) set out by Ella Cara Deloria; in which to be a Dakota human and civilian is to

> 'keep the rules imposed by kinship for achieving civility, good manners, and a sense of responsibility towards every individual dealt with.' To be human is to be a good relative, and in so doing to be respectable and dignified. This is a very different mode of "civilisation" that was imposed by Eurowestern missionaries, militaries, teachers, and policy-makers (Deloria cited in Justice 2018, 43)

This is how we become. In *Water,* Kaden is already Indigenous, but has not yet learned fully how to be an Indigenous person in relation to her human and non-human relations. This must come about through a process of learning and socialisation, of coming into a deeper sense of relation and responsibility to both her immediate family and her country, along with the non-human relations living on it. As she states in her first meeting with Larapinta, Kaden does not clearly understand how she is connected to her homeland, believing that she has no connection to it because she has never been there. For Justice, kinship and intergenerational education is the site of learning this human practice, and if one is cut off from this education, they cannot learn properly how to belong:

> How do they learn to be human after centuries of settler colonial assaults on the health and well-being of the very Indigenous kinship

> structures and social values that have determined our distinctive humanity? (48)

The colonial powers of the "corporation" led by President Sparkle's government in *Water* depend upon the maintenance of this discontinuity, and Justice points out that white possession is enabled by it. As Justice writes:

> The contemporary nation state depends upon people understanding themselves in this way to ensure they privilege their obligations to country and commerce above those to kin and relation to territory. (2018, 58)

Kaden's transition from a state of self-described naivety, and loyalty towards her role in the science centre's project, into a place of connectivity, relationality, and responsibility can be described using Cree scholar Alex Wilson's (2015) term 'coming in'. Coming in, for Wilson, describes the process through which Two-Spirit and queer First Nations people reclaim their positions within their communities and families and cease to be seen as outside of Indigenous social, political and cultural worlds. She notes that given the history of colonialism and its impact on queer and gender diverse First Nations people:

> There is much work to be done, then, to undo the work that has been done upon us…Coming in does not centre on the declaration of independence that characterizes 'coming out' in mainstream depictions of the lives of LGBTQI people. Rather, coming in is an act of returning, fully present in ourselves, to resume our place as a valued

> part of our families, cultures, communities, and lands, in connection with all our relations. (Wilson 2015, 3)

Kaden initially negates her own relationship to both country and family, both of which she feels disconnected from following her father's death. By the end of the story, she has reoriented her perspective and embraced her ties to place and her responsibilities to both her country and the community of relations connected to it. There are three parts to this transition. The first stage has Kaden coming into contact with and establishing connectedness to both country and her non-human relations in the Jangigir. Her sexual relationship with Larapinta in particular acts on her at the level of feeling and intuition to disrupt her attachment to the logics of the colonial science project which she has internalised, and the intimacy of their relationship deeply challenges Kaden's normative understandings of reality and reorients her perspective. The second stage is in Kaden doing her own internal questioning and becoming informed of the true nature of the Jangigir, and her role in a movement to reclaim the country from Australia2. She is brought into this knowledge when the Jangigir and her family judge it to be the right time, and her cousin Julie has Kaden come and see her dying uncle. When she enters the house, he is seated on the couch watching *Alien,* a canonical film in the alien/other genre in science fiction. It is this moment where Kaden becomes informed about the true nature of the Jangigir, as the old people of the Yugambeh nation:

> Something happened when the dugai brought the sea up. They rose with it…their knowledge goes back, big time, bub. They've helped us piece back our language. And they're going to help us stop this. (113)

The knowledge that the Jangigir are powerful Yugambeh ancestral spirits who carry language and memory who are to be used as an army in a struggle for country is at first shattering for Kaden, who withdraws to her mothers home; "They had this perfect plan, with me as the pawn. My own family. Why didn't they show interest in me before? Only when they wanted something" (114). The third stage of Kaden's transformation or "coming in" comes through a process of self-definition, a purposeful and voluntary reorientation of perspective and role.

Where she is at first angry and hurt that her family have deliberately manipulated her into place within the science project with the aim of utilising her in the struggle for land, she eventually reflects on her role with a greater degree of agency and willingness; "I know the ocean now. I know Ki. I take a breath, shut my eyes" (115). At this point, Kaden has come into greater relation with her family and her country in a way that is both healing for her on a personal level and compels her into political action where she had previously been willing to participate in the destruction of lands. Where previously her encounters with country had been marked with grief and self-loathing, after making these discoveries, she watches her family gathering on the Cleveland foreshore with Julie and experiences an increasing sense of purpose:

> 'This is for them.' She points at the ceremony by the water. I look at Uncle Ron and the others. I see that they are holding petals of native orchids. They are dropping them into the sea…I know what I have to do…How can I go back? How can I unknow what I know now? I've been in the dark for far too long. I know who I am now. (117)

For Kaden, her commitment is now unquestionable, brought about through an important network of relationships and an increasing sense of belonging. She has been gently maneuvered into place by her family and Larapinta, questioned and redirected, but her actions are her own. She is given knowledge, but must make her own commitments and decisions.

The trajectory of Kaden's 'coming in' can be explained to an extent using Hawaiian scholar Poka Laenui's (2000) five stages of decolonisation, the final stages of which are commitment and action. Laenui argues that in order to decolonise in action, an individual or community must first go through rediscovery/recovery to reclaim knowledge and pride, mourning, dreaming, and commitment. Commitment comes about when one has gone through all the necessary introspection, learning, and weighing up in collaboration with family and community. Laenui emphasises that action requires consensus, not coercion.

Kaden's eventual transition towards a decolonial commitment is based in her relationships to her nation, which is strong, unified, and organised, but it comes about primarily through her relationship with Larapinta, who has brought her into a place of self-acceptance and desire:

> For so long I'd been alone with all these questions about who I was and I hadn't even realised how much I was hurting. I was empty. Not able to connect with anyone. And then…I was drawn to Larapinta; somehow she had understood me, she made me want more for myself. (114-115)

For both Wilson (2015) and Cherokee scholar Qwo-Li Driskill (2011), queer sexual relationships are an integral part of reclaiming sovereign relationships with land, underlining the critical importance of including the erotics and experiences of the queer body in decolonial projects. Driskill comments, drawing on Audre Lorde's uses of the erotic, that within the project of generating a "sovereign erotics" is a "decolonial potential in Native two-spirit/queer people healing from heteropatriarchal gender regimes", and notes that "a return to our bodies as whole human beings can disrupt colonial gender regimes" (Driskill 2011, 3). *Water* reaffirms this through the central role of the experiences of the body. Sex in *Water* helps to establish a return to familial relationships which are dangerous to the colonial frameworks they exist within, and reaffirm selfhood. Sex and eroticism, not usually so emphasised in writing on decolonial work, are at the centre of Kaden's journey to return to her nation and to do the work necessary to oppose the islandising of Australia2. Sexual encounter, *contact*, is what moves the story, instigating a personal process of politicisation.

The second time Kaden has sex with Larapinta, having undergone the process of learning and commitment, the language of her internal narration has shifted away from anxious rationalisations. She is aware of the importance of their connection, and feels the presence of country and history within it. She is also sensitive to the centrality of what Moreton-Robinson has called "relationality" (2014, 337) as the basis for knowing:

> Now, without me, without her, without us, there is no ancestral country, there is no Ki, there is no Moreton Bay. But we have rooted here, in this room, because anything outside means loss, and losing one another is like the cutting of history, the shredding of

> encyclopedias...I feel like all I can hear in my head is a speedboat travelling through water. (118-119)

This sex scene is a testament to Kaden's connectedness to the land, to her family, and to her ancestors. In the context of an escalating and militarised struggle for land defence, moments of sensuality, however beautiful, might be read as distracting or indulgent. However, in the context of queer Indigenous writing, where the reclamation of eroticism and bodily autonomy are indivisible from our sovereignties, this narrative underlines the importance of sex and pleasure in reclaiming and reasserting connection to land.

Justice's work is significant for the way he engages with Indigenous literatures as tools to help us to understand and unpack important questions about who we are. I am interested in the ways in which Larapinta's expression of gender affirms a notion of gender as socially constructed and learned, dependent upon social relationships, and how the way she negotiates gender and sexuality reflects on the lived realities and histories of queer and trans Indigeneity. Larrakia and Kungkarrakan writer and activist Laniyuk (2015) gives an account of queer Indigeneity in relation to sacred sites and land defence, arguing that as Indigenous peoples, gendered and sexual forms of performativity and becoming are inherently tied to place and country and deeply connected to our sovereignties. This is particularly significant in light of the fact that western queer theory has not only failed to account for both the workings of settler colonial power on Indigenous bodies, but has also failed to account meaningfully for place and Indigenous sovereignty in its analysis of power and performativity in settler colonial contexts. Kaden notes that gender relations within Jangigir society seem arbitrary, and acquire their genders in adaptive and socially responsive ways:

> Both the males and females are identical. She has no breasts. I understand they are ungendered; see, their gender is not predetermined and is only communicated…They are a community with no hierarchy of age or gender. They stand in a row in long and thin figures. They make the sky seem pale and the individual seem insignificant. (78, 88)

The Jangigir, anti-hierarchical and anti-individualist, hold gender as value-neutral. Larapinta's relationship with Kaden and her persistent curiosity about Kaden's self-definitions and understandings of gender and sexuality is entirely without value judgment. Given that the Jangigir are the old people of the Yugambeh nation, holders of great cultural authority which stretches back far beyond the arrival of European colonists, this is an affirmation of a normalised status of non-heterosexual behaviours in Indigenous life, affirming what other Indigenous feminists and queer theorists have already noted; that many Indigenous societies prior to colonisation held places for complex gendered embodiments which live beyond established Euro-western gender norms and did not exercise violent moralising forms of social control over gendered expression (see Wilson 2015). Further, Kaden and Larapinta's conversations about the useability of the word 'queer' indicate the word's failure to adequately describe lived realities:

> We find ourselves talking about gender. We are of two different societies. She asks me if I feel like a woman, even though I have short hair. I tell her that hair is the least of it…'And your sexual identity?' she

> is really in the mood for grilling me. 'Queer, I guess.' I say. 'I know it's an old-fashioned word…'
>
> 'That is fine. I do not know the common usage of words. They are bricks, aren't they?'
>
> 'Some words are loaded,' I continue. 'Will always be loaded.' (95)

To position the word 'queer' as old-fashioned and also as a 'brick' displaces it from the cultural centrality it has enjoyed as a marker of non-normative sexualities, and the question of Kaden's sexuality remains unresolved. Bricks are objects that are heavy, functional, replicable, mass produced, impersonal, and useable. They can be a building block or a weapon, and they are objects which houses and buildings are often made from. They require labour to produce, animate and shape them. They make walls. Walls are rarely more noticeable than the things which they contain, the things they keep inside and the things and people they keep outside. Similarly, queerness is in its own way an exclusive and institutionalised definition, criticised for its tendency to centre a white Euro-western protagonist as its main subject of inquiry and ignore the culturally specific ways in which gender and sexuality are experienced beyond white understandings.

Van Neerven's mode of engaging with histories of queer and trans embodiment in Indigenous communities reflects a shared sensibility across trans First Nations literature. This sensibility is premised on the recognition of Indigenous trans and queer people as being a part of the community both past and present; as Qwo-Li Driskill notes, "from time immemorial" (2011, 1). For Indigenous people living in Australia, terminologies of self-definition have adapted to account for how our identities are shaped in relation to our sovereignties as Aboriginal people.

These words have been consciously and collaboratively chosen within the community to be our words, as shown in the formal adoption of the term 'Sistergirl' at a community gathering on Magnetic island in 1999 after intensive discussion about the appropriateness of different terminologies to refer to diverse groups of Indigenous people with "transgender qualities" (Costello and Nannup 1999, 6). Terms like Sistergirl and Brotherboy are intended to signal that we are transgender people, but also to refer to our sovereign relationships with country and community and our cultural identities (Brown 2004). Brie Ngala Curtis tells how in Warlpiri culture, for example, that "Sistergirls do understand and carry the culture, and they know about things. I think it's important that we do", noting both how Sistergirls in her community play an important and valued role in cultural and social life (Ngala Curtis 2015, 42). She goes on to note the following about her experience of negotiating gender roles in social and family life:

> My grandmother…she said that there were always sistergirls in Aboriginal culture and there always were trans people long before European settlement in Australia…I believe her for that because she didn't come into contact with a white person until she was a teenager…I've had family members saying, 'Oh, you're reaching puberty now. You're almost ready to go through men's ceremony,' and all that. But my father being a tribal law man himself, he sat down-because obviously he could see that I was different-and he said: 'No it's your decision, you can go through it, but nobody's going to touch your body unless you say so.' Yeah, he's very strong and he gave me that option. I've never been through men's ceremony and I'm not intending to. (38)

Curtis' experience, recorded in the 2015 anthology *Colouring the Rainbow: Blak Queer and Trans Perspectives*, indicates continuity with pre-colonial understandings of gender in Aboriginal cultures prior to colonial intervention. Her grandmother, a very Christian woman, continues to hold space for Sistergirls in Warlpiri culture and maintain memory of pre-contact times. For her, Sistergirls are normalised, not excluded from social and family life. Curtis' story shows firstly the affirmation of Sistergirls as holders of cultural knowledge and as an important and included part of Aboriginal community life both before and after contact with European colonisers has occurred. Secondly, it demonstrates the importance of intergenerational learning and memory in the contact and guidance she receives from her close family members in establishing her identity, and the indivisibility of her cultural identity and relationships as an Aboriginal person and her gendered identity. Thirdly, the deep importance of self-determination in relation to the bestowal and performance of gendered social roles. The decision of whether Brie's body will be physically, culturally, and socially marked and treated as male rests solely with her, emphasising the place of bodily autonomy.

In the same way, adaptation, observation, and relating are key to Larapinta's ways of being and doing gender, sexuality, and love. Much like the physical markers of her gender, everything is adaptation for Larapinta, including love; she learns to feel love in relation with Kaden. While they are in bed together, Larapinta explains:

> 'Everything is new for me,' she says. 'I am renewal.'
>
> Surprised by her response, I look at her.
>
> 'I was made to adapt,' she says.

> 'Adapt? Can you adapt to love?'
>
> 'I already have,' she says. She shows me her flowers, one of each fingertip of her right hand. Red, with a bit of yellow. No more than a millimetre. (103)

Emotional and social adaptations are reflected and inscribed on Larapinta's body, achieved through contact, conversation, curiosity and intimacy rather than the exercise of disciplinary power. Conscious, informed, relational and consensual modes of being and doing are adapted in the Aboriginal trans and gender diverse community. Community terms, identifiers and symbols are both deeply felt, as well as purposefully self-selected through discussion and negotiation on their suitability and utility. In 2016, at the Kungkah gathering in Melbourne, the community decided collectively to use the purple hibiscus and the grass tree as the symbols to represent Sistergirls and Brotherboys, recognising that while the Sistergirls had been using the hibiscus for years, Brotherboys needed a complementary plant to identify and represent them. While the camp was organised with set aside spaces just for Brotherboys, Sistergirls, and non-binary people, those spaces were constructed as gathering places in the interests of peer support, and no part was exclusive or subject to surveillance. No space was policed to keep people out who did not 'belong' there. The logics of white feminism and white queerness are internalised, they can intrude into our self-constructions, our narratives, and our ways of relating to each other. But there are also spaces of transformation and healing. I experienced another such moment when Eve Tuck, chairing a panel at the NAISA 2017 meeting in Vancouver stated unequivocally that Rematriation projects will always include gender diverse and two-spirit people in their political organising. Critical First Nations theoretical interventions signal that the politicised practices of Indigenous feminisms include gender diverse people in

their scope of care, responsibility, and solidarity, without requiring the neat subsuming all these identities within a discourse of womanhood. This was emphasised as a given, a premise upon which our meeting was built. This was accepted by everyone present. While the term ‘rematriation’ served a purpose, the organisers and speakers were aware of the trouble presented by the gendered English languages we were using, and made it clear to the audience that we must recognise the failures of those languages. Gendered languages used in the trans and queer Aboriginal community are generated within community in response to changing social and cultural needs in the present, and while we refer to our pre-existing cultural understandings in creating them, they do not rely on exclusion, boundary policing, nor rely on expectations that they will reflect pre-colonial understandings of Aboriginal sex and gender. They are largely adaptive, caring, and welcoming, resisting the systems of gatekeeping and territoriality which mark much of the ways white LGBT communities define themselves.

Relationality and Standpoint in the Text

Through the way Kaden makes sense of her encounters with Larapinta and her experiences at the science centre through feeling, the text provides a critical theorisation of rationalism and the mind-body split. I understand this through Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s writing on Indigenous women’s standpoint theory. Standpoint theory is, for Moreton-Robinson (2014), defined by a rejection of Cartesian rationalism and the *a priori* status of whiteness which is she argues remains uninterrogated in white feminist thought. It challenges the status of white knowledge as neutral or impartial, invested in the idea of universalism and objectivity itself. Drawing on both feminist and Indigenous standpoint theory,

she critiques western epistemology and objectivity as colonial and patriarchal structures, arguing for situated knowledge practices, as feminist theorist of standpoint theory have previously done. However, she extends on this by asserting an ontologically distinct knowledge position which is held and practiced by Aboriginal women. This knowledge position is defined by relationality, distinct spirituality, and connectedness to country, ancestors, and the non-human world.

Significantly, the knowledge practice proposed by Moreton-Robinson necessitates a rejection of Cartesian rationalism and the mind/body split, the legacy which she argues continues in feminist standpoint theory. As she recognises, this attachment to rationalism is still evident in emerging feminist posthumanist theorisations. Black posthumanist thinker Zakiyyah Iman Jackson has, for example, cautioned that a refusal of posthumanists to engage with a critique of reason may leave it incomplete:

> posthumanism remained committed to a specific order of rationality…the field has yet to sufficiently distance itself from Enlightenment's hierarchies of rationality: "Reason" was still, in effect, equated with Western and specifically Eurocentric structures of rationality. Thus, the very operations of rationality used to evaluate the truth claims of the Enlightenment subject remained committed to its racial, gendered, and colonial hierarchies of "Reason" and its "absence”. Posthumanism's past and, arguably, ongoing investment in Europe as standard-bearer of "Reason" and "Culture" circumscribes its critique of humanism and anthropocentricism because it continues to equate humanism with Enlightenment rationality and its peculiar

> representation of humanity, "as if it were the human itself." (2013, 672)

The Xenofeminist Manifesto (Laboria Cuboniks 2018), written by an anonymous collective of European and Australian white feminist philosophers, provides an explicit expression of this rationalist attachment in an emerging context of feminist thought. The manifesto expresses an explicitly stated desire to recentre universalism as a practice and to rescue and rehabilitate rationalism from its previously patriarchal roots, declaring that "Rationalism must itself be a feminism. XF...names reason as an engine of feminist emancipation, and declares the right of everyone to speak as no one in particular (0.04)". The idea that rationalism and universalism should become an integral part of feminist desires and knowledge practices is clearly still alive, and for Moreton-Robinson, it excludes Aboriginal women entirely as a foundational knowledge practice underpinning colonialism. That the manifesto declares disembodiment itself as a feminist ideal, declaring it necessary to be free to speak by right as "noone in particular", is, as Moreton-Robinson states, completely incommensurate with Aboriginal ways of being and doing wherein it is essential and useful to state who you are and where you come from, what country you are connected to, who your ancestors and relations are, and to understand how they shape your own knowledge practices and understandings.

Water asserts an Indigenous queer standpoint which is incommensurate with the white feminist and posthumanist epistemological frameworks. Rationalist explanations of the phenomena around Kaden frequently fail. As shown in the short conversation about the word 'queer' between Kaden and Larapinta, the languages and definitions Kaden has to explain what's going on around her and within her also fail. She repeatedly attempts to make sense of things using

scientific language, but this language cannot provide her with a firm understanding of what's going on around her:

> To understand, I give myself the first question. What is a plant? A plant is a living organism. A plant has cell walls with cellulose and characteristically they obtain most of their energy through sunlight. Plants provide most of the world's molecular energy and are the basis of most of the world's ecologies, especially on land. Plants are one of the two main groups into which all living things have been traditionally divided; the other is animals. The division goes back at least as far as Aristotle…the second question is harder. What is a human? (97)

The division referenced here begins notably with Aristotle, rather than with plants, animals and humans themselves. The human/non-human distinction in the dominant western culture is rooted in Judeo-Christian moral frameworks, the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and the rationalist and enlightenment beliefs in the higher rational capacities of European man. Kaden comes to increasingly rely on feeling to navigate her experiences, establishing emotional knowledge as a primary way of knowing and relating, as she narrates in key moments; "I feel a misplaced sense of grief" (69); "I feel a strong sense of displacement" (73). Feeling is Kaden's way of making sense of the world, and is deliberately contrasted with the western scientific discourses she works within. When she first travels to the island her father is from, her language shifts again into feeling; she has the following experience:

> I make my way up a small hill and reach the treeline. It is a strange feeling. Other people may see the she-oaks and the sandy coloured boulder with the skink on it. They might notice the air as quiet and crisp and the female magpie hopping on the grass, but I see something else, I feel something else. (106)

Having previously told Larapinta she felt she couldn't be connected to the country she was ancestrally connected to ("How can you have an attachment to a place you've never been? (79)), this moment represents a momentous shift in her understanding. Rationalist explanations and language fail to capture what she's coming to know. Kaden's connection to non-human life is expressed not only in relationship to plantpeople, but other animals as well. Country speaks to her, and this connection is happening despite the human intervention on the islands. Her connection to country is not interrupted by the fact she has not grown up there, nor the construction taking place, it supersedes the processes of colonial intervention and continue beyond it.

Conclusion

This thesis is interested in how Indigenous people use the future to reflect on how to live well and how to act responsibly. It argues that Indigenous Futurisms are activist texts which can generate critical consciousness and contribute towards a reimagined future politics. Indigenous Futurisms imagine visions of our communities organising for freedom and resistance. They also allow for the complexity of queer and non-human life and agency in a way that resists narratives of victimhood and passivity. In this chapter, I have demonstrated how

this work participates in storying a queer and non-human Indigenous survivance narrative in the future. *Water* participates in the decolonising project of imagining and dreaming other ways of relating responsibly to each other, to land, language, and to our ancestors through a queer Yugambeh standpoint. The power of this story is in how it understands the importance of relationality and eroticism to movements to reclaim land.

In this chapter, I have shown how the story *Water* demonstrates a contact narrative through which an Indigenous queer person learns to become a responsible relation to their community, country, and non-human relations. Both Justice (2018) and Moreton-Robinson (2014) have outlined their understandings of Indigenous ontology as achieved not only through inheritance, but through learning and connectedness. Indigenous standpoints are "ascribed through inheritance and achieved through struggle. It is constituted by our sovereignty and constitutive of the interconnectedness of our ontology (our way of being); our epistemology (our way of knowing) and our axiology (our way of doing)" (Moreton-Robinson 2014, 340). One must be connected by descent and shared experiences, intergenerational learning, "co-operation and social memory" (343). Intergenerational learning is vital, as is the comprehension of communal sovereignties. These things are learned, for Kaden, through the exceptional and unexpected vehicle of *contact* and sex with an ancestor being in the form of a plant/animal other.

I have also shown how the story interrogates rationalist frameworks of humanism and the presumed split between human and nature, which also speaks to issues of gender and race. Through the course of her time in the science centre, Kaden wrestles with a crisis of rationalism and humanness both in her relationship with Larapinta as well as in her relationship with the country

she is working on. In addition to being racially othered, the Jangigir are categorised in the science centre as non-human, though neither the scientists nor Kaden are able to conclude whether they are plant or animal. Their presence is a crisis moment for a rationalist and colonialist model of human-non-human relationships which is never completely resolved, and the story does not neatly resolve those questions of human/non-human relationships, but asserts persistent complexity and eroticism, even in the face of violence and the exercise of power by the state to control the lands and bodies of Yugambeh people living on their ancestral country.

The complexity and eroticism of the relationship between Kaden and Larapinta is the essence of the work's sensibility of survivance and what Dillon terms "returning to ourselves". Kaden's struggle to categorise the Jangigir according to the philosophical and scientific taxonomies of language are displaced, and eventually, it does not matter to Kaden whether Larapinta is a human; "I must be with who she is" (102). The Jangigir exceed the colonial discourses and binaries of human/nonhuman and man/woman, and they are leaders in the regeneration of Yugambeh language, the reclamation of the islands and the political struggles of the Aboriginal nations involved. Van Neerven places the non-human world in an active role in the politicised sphere of Aboriginal activism, disrupting the human/nonhuman binaries which organise the world of the text and asserting a survivance narrative which goes beyond victimhood and tragedy, embraces queer pleasure and curiosity, and acknowledges a queer and trans Indigenous history which is deeply rooted on Yugambeh Country.

Chapter 6: Progressive White Nationhood and War

> What he wanted to do was create the groundwork for implementing a visionary roadmap-the way to fight a deadly serious war. He always called it a war. The future for Aboriginal people in this country was the war.
>
> -Alexis Wright, *Tracker*, page 9

> Next year's celebration of 200 years of European occupation of Australia, as it stands, spits in the face of every Aboriginal and Islander person. You are asking us to stand by while you congratulate yourselves of having stolen our land. You want us to keep quiet while you celebrate the raising of the first British flag in 1788. for us, this was an act of war which led to genocide. (Yunupingu cited in Allen 2015, 52)

> *THE HEART HAS ITS OWN MEMORY. In honour of the spirit of the people murdered in the Downtown Eastside. Many were women and many were Native Aboriginal women. Many of these cases remain unsolved. All my relations.*
>
> -Memorial in CRAB park, Vancouver BC. Dedicated July 29, 1996

In this thesis I have frequently returned to the stage of decolonisation referred to as "dreaming" in Poka Laenui's understanding in order to situate Indigenous Futurist works. Laenui describes 'action' as the final stage of a decolonial process. Action against the coloniser can come in many forms, including armed warfare, and he

notes the important role of “the rifle” in historical struggles for independence against colonial power (2000, 6). Action for Laenui is taken after lengthy processes of consensus-based decision making forming a “consensus of commitment” to movement in a direction dictated by the people’s will (6). For him, however, it is important to distinguish between an action rooted in the need to survive: responding to an immediate need to defend the community against physical attack; and a more thoughtful application of action which is “methodical, patient, [and] time consuming”, not reactive, but “pro-active” (6).

Ellen Van Neerven’s *Water* ends with the beginning of a war of resistance by Yugambeh community against the progressive President Sparkle’s Australia2. In this war, everyone in the community has a role to play, including the Jangigir ancestors who live in Moreton Bay. While there is a need for an urgent response to prevent the damage being done to the land, the process of initiating the action is patient and unified, and does not proceed until Kaden is ready to accept a role for herself within it. She infiltrates the science centre, and steals the weapons that its employees might use against them:

> I will hear the Jangigir overcoming the guards on Ki and ripping up the underwater wires and machinery. They will form a circle protecting Ki island. And the people aboard the ferry will enter that threshold, holding the guns, just in case. I want to be alongside them. (122)

Armed battle is, in the world of President Sparkle’s Australia2, a necessary response to the violence and ongoing dispossession perpetuated by a government which positions itself as virtuous and benevolent.

This chapter more directly examines the representation of war as part of a decolonial process and as a critical response to white virtuosity in another work, the Indigenous futurist virtual reality film *The Hunt* (2017). Made in Canada, Danis Goulet's *The Hunt* is part of a virtual reality film project *2167* made in response to the 2017 celebrations of 'Canada150'. It situates itself in a North America after a civil war, and in doing so, it unsettles a persistent representation of Canada in its sesquicentenary as a 'nice' nation founded in progressive values of fairness and inclusion. I explore this in relation to the concept of "race war", which, as Moreton-Robinson (2015a, 155) has written, is the foundation of settler nation states, who represent themselves in the contradictory terms of being both democratic and benevolent. It is no surprise then, that the discourse of war emerges in First Nations responses to the 'birthday' celebrations of the Canadian settler nation-state. Following Evelyn Araluen (2019) understanding of texts as a method or means for understanding the cultural and material realities faced by us as First Nations people, my central concern in this chapter is how to engage with this virtual reality text as a mode of criticality to interrogate narratives of progressive white nationhood and civility on Canada's national 'birthday'. *The Hunt* achieves this through positioning First Nations people in a state of ongoing war of resistance in the future. By representing acts of war on the part of the state, and also imagining a future militarised First Nations resistance, the makers of *The Hunt* interrupt beliefs in anti-racist progress and liberal democratic values which position the nation state as benevolent and virtuous.

Before writing about Goulet's film *The Hunt* in detail, I will address some necessary questions around its inclusion as material in this thesis alongside the work of First Nations Australian writers, and some of the broader concerns with global comparative studies of Indigenous literature. In its format and medium as a virtual reality film, *The Hunt* differs from the written textual works I previously felt

committed to in my research. The political specificities of Canada also felt far away from the texts I had chosen, and I was unsure of how appropriate it was to make the connection between this work and the Australian context. At the same time, I felt certain that the events surrounding Canada150, and my experiences walking the streets in June at the time of the celebrations, were relevant to what I was trying to write about while I was reading the story *Water*. In critically narrating my own position as a First Nations person in relation to this Canadian film and the Canada150 celebration of Canadian nationhood, I do not aim to resolve questions around whether the texts should be or can be effectively used in comparative or trans-Indigenous study, but instead, want to show how these texts can be used as means of interrogation of virtuosity and benevolence.

Comparative and Global Analysis

First Nations literary theorist Chadwick Allen (2012a, 2012b) has written on the potentially generative nature of comparative studies between postcolonising nations such as the United States, Canada and Australia. In addition, he has noted the potential outcomes of considering activist responses and "event centred" responses alongside conventional texts. Performing this analysis, Allen begins his essay *Unsettling the Spirit of '76: American Indians Anticipate the U.S. Bicentennial* on the American Indian Movement's (AIM) responses to the 1976 Bicentennial in the United States with a description of what he saw in Sydney following the 1988 Bicentennial in Australia:

> Graffiti on the footpath declared, "first feet were aboriginal," and farther along, "you are standing on aboriginal land." The concrete

> path meandered through grass and gum trees and then up a steep rise, eventually leading visitors to a scenic overlook where outcroppings of red rock framed postcard views of the famous Sydney Harbor. There, less than ten feet above the bold graffiti, another tourist readied his camera—not to record the legible evidence of a historic protest but rather to snap the expected souvenir of his wife on holiday…The year was 1988. Several days prior to the tourists' visit, Australia had observed a bicentennial anniversary considered crucial by its settler government and a majority of its settler citizens, both to understanding the young nation-state's past and to securing its future. (2012b, 49)

Allen goes on to make a comparative analysis of the activist actions, graffiti, and poetic works of First Nations in response to the Australian Bicentennial. He draws a connection between these actions and those of the American Indian Movement's protests against the 1976 Bicentennial in the United States.

Allen begins his exploration of the AIM's responses to the 1976 Bicentennial with an analysis of the works of Australian First Nations writers like Kevin Gilbert, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, and the late G. Yunupingu, alongside the activist actions of Gary Foley and Burnum Burnum. As he writes, looking at the 1988 Bicentennial became a forceful reminder of what he had failed to attend to in the United States:

> In 1988, I had no idea. Although aware of the major events of American Indian activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, including not only the occupation of Alcatraz from 1969 to 1971 but also the Trail of Broken Treaties cross-country caravan and occupation of the

> BIA in Washington, DC, in late 1972 and the armed struggle at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in early 1973, both of which involved the American Indian Movement (AIM), up to that point I had not heard of any protest action or activist discourse associated specifically with the U.S. bicentennial—and had never thought to ask. (2012b, 55)

Allen's words reflect on his ability to witness the activist events happening in Sydney and across Australia in 1988 with greater clarity than the actions of the American Indian Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. This realisation prompted him to not only consider the history of the AIM more carefully in his research, but also to probe more deeply into the interconnected nature of these seemingly distant activist movements and their textual elements. Gumbaynggir historian Gary Foley (2001) has written powerfully on the history of the relationships between Aboriginal Black Power movements and the parallel movements for Black and Indigenous liberation in the United States which developed in the 1960s and 1970s. He has argued that there were a network of friendships and political relationships through which ideas were shared between Black people in Australia and the United States which are a frequently overlooked aspect of Aboriginal history. Foley writes:

> the term [Black Power'] was catapulted into the Australian imagination when the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League…invited a Caribbean activist and academic, Dr Roosevelt Brown, to give a talk on Black Power in Melbourne…Thus the term came into use by a frustrated and impatient new indigenous political generation. For the purpose of this thesis I defined the 'Black Power movement as the loose coalition of individual young indigenous activists who emerged in Redfern, Fitzroy and South Brisbane in the period immediately after Charles Perkins' Freedom Ride in 1965. (2001, 1)

Aboriginal activists, while they developed a distinct approach of their own, he notes, drew influence and shared tactics and ideas with activists from the United States and other former British colonies who had gained independence.

Looking to the Australian context alerted Chadwick Allen to the need to consider the textual nature of what he calls "event centred responses" alongside conventional texts. Event centred responses alongside discursive responses are important, he argues, because both reflect a capability to promote truth telling as an "unsettling and ultimately decolonizing strategy" (2012b, 52):

> Against such "cloaking" of theft and violence, Indigenous individuals, communities, and activist groups worked to refocus the settler celebration and the media attention it garnered to promote truth telling and to further their agenda of recognition and justice. (54)

The work of activists is read here as essential to and inseparable from the narratives found in the literary. Anita Heiss (2003) has noted that Indigenous writing has formed a politicised mode of historical testimony, often characterised by its tendency to direct address. Parallels between these modes of expression can, and Allen argues, *should* be made with the work of activists in response to such nation building events as Bicentennial celebrations.

Allen's careful treatment of the work of First Nations activists, intellectuals and organisers as discursive products informs my work in this chapter. Similarly, his narration of his own thought processes as a First Nations scholar and observer

travelling to Sydney during the 1988 Bicentennial mirrors my own experience of attempting to study the activism surrounding Canada150 alongside Indigenous criticisms of Australian settler liberal politics, while navigating my troubled position as a travelling Indigenous writer. I felt particularly unstable in this setting, attempting to relate to the experiences of other First Nations people in a country I did not know. I hold with me through this study the words of Wiradjuri writer Jeanine Leane, who noted to me that comparative studies between Canadian and Australian First Nations people should be done with caution given the multifaceted and diverse ways we each relate to our histories of nationhood and identities in place. This was for me a prompt to remember that the specifics of place must not be lost in any comparative study. Anita Heiss' work on the connections between Australian and Canadian First Nations literatures is useful here to understand some of the divergences in form, infrastructure, and cultural capital between the two.

Heiss addresses the similarities and divergences of Australian and Canadian First Nations literatures in her work *Dhuuluu-Yala* (2003). She cites the similarities in the pre-colonisation literary cultures in First peoples from Australia and Canada. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, she notes, there were strong literatures in First Nations "used not only to pass on history, religion and laws but also to provide artistic expression and entertainment within communities. This literature also contributed to providing cultural identities for tribes and distinguished one from another" (Heiss 2003, 155). She also identifies the 1960s and 1970s as a flashpoint for growing Indigenous literary success in Canada as in Australia. This era of Aboriginal writing is defined in both contexts for Heiss by political modes of writing with an "angry tone" and is a significant moment in the development of distinct Aboriginal literary modes in 1970s and 1980s (155). The issue of ethnic fraud is one she also makes note of as a shared concern across both contexts. As Heiss writes, the similarities between the First Nations literatures of Canada and Australia stem from "shared

histories of invasion and colonisation...These experiences in turn also impact upon the creative expressions of Indigenous writers" (154).

Heiss provides a strong assessment of the complex differences which exist between Australian and Canadian Aboriginal writing infrastructures and socio-political contexts. Specifically, she cites the differences in funding, publishing industry contexts, and the value and cultural capital which she perceives First Nations Canadian writers enjoy. She makes the argument, for example, that "many now see the emergence of contemporary First Nations' authors onto the literary scene in Canada as the major development in the literature of North America in the last three decades" (155). She also notes the presence of the Indian Act[9] as a driving social and cultural factor in the development of First Nations literary identity and voice. It is important to be aware of the differences in financing and infrastructure between these texts, as she has highlighted. For example, the institutional support of the Institute of Indigenous Futures, which holds space within the University of Concordia in Montreal and was involved in the production of the virtual reality works I discuss in this chapter, is a paradigm shift away from the Australian context in which Indigenous Futurists work. Indigenous Futurists working in Canada seem to enjoy a much greater influence and a substantial platform for their works to develop and be distributed as a distinct genre and critical mode of enquiry. Indigenous Futurism in Canada has gained a level of status and cultural capital

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[9] See Flanagan et. al (2010) for a deep historical overview of the administration of Indigenous people through the Indian Act from 1876 to the present. The Canadian Indian Act of 1876 is described by Flanagan et. al as an "archaic" piece of federal legislation which originated in a protectionist framework as a means of colonial administration of First Nations peoples and continues to govern and constrain Indigenous property rights in its operation today. It was originally part of a policy landscape "based on two interdependent precepts: fostering friendly relations with Indigenous nations, and protecting Indian peoples and their land from European encroachment" while diminishing Indigenous property rights through a manipulation of the legal meanings of ownership (2010:57). It facilitated processes of "protection and civilisation" and a construction of Indigenous people as savage and backward, leading to attempts to christianise and 'educate' the First Nations people while moving them away from land which the British hoped to acquire (60). Flanagan

which is still in development in Australia, reflected in the funding and the level of institutional and public visibility afforded to it.

In terms of the socio-political context the works exist in, however, particularly during the Canada150 celebrations that *2167* was responding to, it was clear to me that there were some powerful connections between the ways Indigenous Futurist writers were describing their political realities in Australia and Canada. Despite the level of support and cultural capital Indigenous Futurists hold in Canada, they also contend with a context of stifling white left-wing progressive sensibility which obscured the continuing and deeply racist ideology of Canadian national identity that felt extremely present in 2017. The visibility of that strong cultural and political attachment to the idea of white Canadian 'niceness' prompted me to look more closely at exactly how Indigenous Futurists in Australia and Canada use their texts to reject claims of white civility. In the Australian texts, this appears as a critique of seemingly reformist and progressive law making in the areas of native title and Treaty law. In *the Hunt*, it is a direct response to Canada's national day in which the nation is imagined as 'nice'. Allen writes that national holidays like Canada150 are dense points of origin for "coherent narratives" of settler histories and serve as birthdays for settler colonial identities (2012b, 50). He notes the Australian Bicentennial in 1988, for example, was followed by "additional commemorations of settler colonialisms [which] were planned, staged, and actively protested in the years following" in Aotearoa and Hawaii, and notes additionally the Columbus quincentenary observations in Europe and the Americas in 1992 (55). It is important to attend to these parallels in how postcolonising nations construct their nationhood around these events, and in how they are resisted. For me, the most salient point of connection between *Water*, *The Swan Book*, and the activist and artistic responses to Canada150, is their modes of criticality which powerfully

deconstruct specific aspects of white progressive nationhood, and it is through this that I will engage with each text.

Canada150

Between June and August in 2017, I visited the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver on a Ph.D research trip to gain insight into Canadian Indigenous Futurist works which I could use for comparative analysis. I landed in Vancouver in early June, unknowingly coinciding with the time of the preparations for Canada Day. I stayed in a sublet in the Downtown Eastside, an hour's bus ride away from UBC. Unlike the 26th of January in Australia, or 'Invasion Day', which is a celebration of the date of invasion and the beginning of violent settlement, Canada Day celebrates the enactment of the Canadian constitution act, signifying the birth of modern Canada. However, it otherwise reminded me of many of the contemporary associations of Australia day. Canada150 included public celebrations of the diversity and strength of the Canadian state, and large-scale partying, including flags draped around the shoulders. Red and white fireworks decorated the sky in the evenings, and sunburnt white people filled the sidewalks. Canada Day is also preceded by a series of other national days designed to celebrate Indigenous peoples and Canada's multicultural history as a means of underlining the success of Canadian pluralism and progressive ideals.

Canada150, the 150th anniversary of the Constitution Act, was also accompanied by waves of public discourse on Canadian national identity as a *nice* country. Travelling in and out of UBC each day from where I stayed in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, I was daily confronted by a huge billboard display by Canadian clothing brand Roots, picturing a smiling interracial couple wearing

Canada 150 hoodies next to the word 'nice'. Roots' contribution to the celebration of Canada150 was a line of clothing specially made for Canada Day's 150th celebration, including buttons, tshirts, hoodies all branded with the word nice or alternatively, 'be nice' along with the hashtag Canada150. The joke was that Canadians are so nice and so polite almost to a fault; Roots' advertising campaign included a national competition to find Canada's nicest person. This joke seemed almost ubiquitous. In Vancouver I observed that you could be on the bus, and if two people would get off at the same time, they might stand there for an exaggeratedly long time trying to let the other person off first, before laughing to each other, and the rest of the bus, saying, "How Canadian we are right now! We are too polite". This notion of a diverse and equitable 'niceness' has been interrogated by researcher of education Angelina Castagno. Her work, along with that of critical race theorist Richard Orozco, explores how niceness is a strategic "manifestation" and "mechanism" of whiteness (Orozco 2019, 130; Castagno 2014, 9). Castagno describes that niceness as a "strategic element of whiteness", which is "intimately tied to engaging whiteness, and whiteness itself is aligned with niceness" (2014, 9). Niceness, then, is something which I understand as a consciously and strategically exercised element of white power. This seemed true of Vancouver's racial dynamics on the street. Displays of good-humoured Canadian stereotyping was something I only witnessed between white people; and public encounters I observed between First Nations residents and white people often did not play out with this level of camaraderie. White Canadians in the inner-city urban spaces frequently react with suspicion and hostility to First Nations people. There are veiled and explicit implications of potential violence everywhere, the sense that there would be strong retaliation should any native put a foot wrong in disturbing the peace.

At one time, I was seated on the shore at Crab Park behind my apartment. The beach was crowded with white families and dogs. I noticed an older First Nations man in a basketball jersey making a lot of noise up on the lawn, away from the water and the crowds. He seemed upset. A few of his friends and family were there, walking away from him. He looked around accusingly at the people watching, and the space around him seems to expand. The people on the beach were smoking weed and throwing balls around. A few lone white men close to me, shirtless, with sunglasses on, looked at him, and then nodded to each other. One said to the other, *don't worry, I'll back you if something happens with him.* They were strangers, but the us vs them mentality kicked in immediately.

The Downtown Eastside is an important site of community building and activism for First Nations people, and since the 1960s, it has been home to peer-led drug user organisations, feminist and sex worker peer support services, and First Nations organisations. It is home to many displaced and homeless Musqueam people, and a large and politicised homeless community. It has been the site of more than a few waves of attempted gentrification, and waves of strong, organised and politicised resistance in the community to this development and the processes of marginalisation, indignity, and criminalisation which accompany it. Moving around the city and overhearing conversations about the area, I often noticed affluent, white and progressive Vancouver residents describe it as dangerous, scary, dirty, full of drugs and people who don't know how to take care of themselves. The words Downtown Eastside seemed synonymous with filth and shame, a euphemism for the wrong part of town; in opposition to nice Canadian sensibilities. The building I stayed in in the Downtown Eastside was a housing coop, founded by a group of mostly white middle-class artists of varying practices, who had held a space in a condominium building with a separate set of governance and social practices from the body corporate. These people seemed to see themselves as outsiders to the

social market of property, wealth and rapid gentrification, and identified primarily as artistic, progressive, community-minded folks.

Upon arriving back at my house sit on my second day there, I was questioned by a white couple in their 30s, with bikes and bike trailers and straw hats on, on their way home from the market. They were residents in my new building. They were almost comically archetypal nice Canadians, progressive, liberal, and white, like most of the residents there. Rather than holding the door for me as I came in behind their bike trailers, they stopped me, despite the notice in the elevator announcing my stay in the sublet, and the fact that I had held out a keypass to the building on purpose to signal to them that I was a resident. They asked who I was visiting where, blocking me from entering. When I had established that my entry was legitimate, and we then had to share the elevator, they explained that they had had to question me because sometimes people who aren't supposed to be here come in through the door when one of the residents is on their way in, and "you have to confront them!".

A few days later, very early in the morning on my way to get a coffee on Canada's National Indigenous people's day, I met a First Nations man in the elevator of the building on my way down. He informed me of the day's meaning and asked me a few questions about who I was and why I was in the building. He said he was going to go out and fight some white people. Upon saying this he said "see, I've got my weapon here with me", and pointed to a long spear in his shopping trolley he pushed along with him. He held the door for me on the way out, and we parted ways.

As other First Nations researchers have noted, it is not only institutions which provide us as Indigenous peoples with our knowledges and research experience. It

is our experiences of locating ourselves in place which ground our research practices. Tongan artist and researcher Latai Taumoepeau has noted the importance of the "embodied archive" in knowledge production, noting the multiplicity of knowledge institutions such as "villages, suburban church halls, nightclubs, and universities" (2017, n.p). The journey from my building to the seemingly progressive and reconciliatory space of the University of British Columbia was a persistent reminder of this. I existed in British Columbia as a foreigner, but one who was likely to be read as white, middle class, and English-speaking most of the time. In the spaces I moved in, I could pass as familiar and did not present a disruption or a threat. In fact, locals delighted in the opportunity to demonstrate their Canadian hospitality to me. Travelling afforded me a strange sense of safety, a temporary observer role. The University of British Columbia was at the time the site of a newly opened truth and reconciliation building, the Musqueam First Nations Longhouse and house of learning, the museum of anthropology, and the totem poles which had recently been erected to commemorate the victims of the residential schooling system. All of these physical structures indicated an institutional landscape of reconciliation which was discontinuous with the daily goings on of the city space outside the borders of UBC. I was consciously beginning to contrast my experiences at the outwardly progressive institution of UBC, with all its emphasis on Indigenous inclusion and reconciliation, the space I was doing my research in, with the distinctly unreconciled life of the Downtown Eastside and the Indigenous peoples living there.

I was also considering the role of anger, revenge, and of violent and nonviolent direct action in movements for change. The Aboriginal man I saw in the elevator with his spear, hoping to go out and fight, may have been positioned as distinctly uncivil by the reconciliatory landscape of UBC's Indigenous inclusion framework. Aboriginal writer Tristen Harwood, at a public talk between him, myself, and Trawlwoolway architect Sarah Lyn Rees at MPavilion around the time of Invasion

day in Australia in 2019 spoke about his experience of becoming violently ill with a stomach infection while travelling in Mexico with his partner. He recounted being informed that the illness was referred to as Montezuma's revenge; referring to the Aztec ruler Montezuma, who was slaughtered and humiliated by Spanish invaders. As an Indigenous writer himself, living on the Kulin nations but coming from the Marra people in Ngukurr, Harwood noted his own delight in the idea of anti-colonial revenge being enacted through subversive bodily contagion on people who were entering the land without permission. Revenge as a framework for resistance to colonialism held some of the focus for the rest of the conversation. Its power for me was in how well it repudiated some of the whitewashed, strategic language of policy and 'practical' institutional responses which have so much dominance. Much like the unapologetically threatening response of the First Nations man I met in the elevator on National Indigenous people's day, 'revenge' as articulated by Harwood reflected the frustration many First Nations people feel at uncritical celebrations of the nation, standing as a provocation for centering anger over diversity rhetoric, reconciliation and other forms of 'soft' colonialism in institutional responses to colonial problems.

A few weeks after hearing Harwood speak on revenge, I speak with my friend, a Larrakia poet-revolutionary. We are working on some writing projects together. Alongside this, we are in continuous hypothetical conversations about the role of direct action and even violence in social movements, about revenge as a political act, and about what change can mean outside of normalised models of reformist pandering. I keep calling them a wannabe dictator as a joke, and in an ailing attempt to restrain their bloodlust, I share an article I read on CrimethInc about the danger of valourising the guillotine as a tool for bringing down the ruling class. "I was just thinking about this in the shower", they reply. The author of the anti-guillotine piece argues that revenge is a strong motivator for justice, but it can't

become the basis of one's politics. Rather, its utility is in the pleasure it can offer to the agonised souls of the powerless, and in the instabilities it reveals in seemingly impenetrable power structures. However, the tools of the state can only kill, they cannot give life; "As the concentration of political legitimacy and coercive force, [the state] can do harm, but it cannot establish the kind of positive freedom that individuals experience when they are grounded in mutually supportive communities" (CrimethInc n.d.).

Dale Harding's (2019) artist statement in un Magazine's thirteenth volume, accompanying his 2015 work *His legacy to the colony; their ongoing privilege*; is taken from a 1982 Gordon Reid text, presented without comment. It describes the 1857 Jiman attack on a white homestead on the Dawson River in Queensland and the subsequent white retaliation resulting in the deaths of over 300 Aboriginal people. The final lines of Reid's words, repurposed by Harding, point to acts of revenge on the part of Aboriginal people as a futile, 'tragic obsession', leading only to death and destruction. It implies that the person seeking revenge is no longer invested in future-making, instead becoming fixated on vindictive helpless self-satisfaction. An Aboriginal person with revenge on the brain is seen as dangerous because they reject the falsities of reconciliation and other forms of institutional soft colonialism. They do not hope to play by the terms set by the coloniser. This is an inherently threatening position.

Thinking through the Downtown Eastside, I was repeatedly struck by the violence of Canada and white Canadians, especially given the claims made that Canada is a *nicer* place, a more reconciled, socially progressive, or ethical settler colony, than Australia. At one time, myself and my Wiradjuri collaborator Todd Fernando visited Vancouver's contemporary art museum by the Davie village to see the late Gordon Bennett's solo exhibit, titled *Be Polite*. We mentioned to the gallery attendant that

we were excited to see his work, and that we had never had an opportunity to see it exhibited all together like this. She nodded proudly, "Well, you wouldn't have, especially in Australia" and visibly grimaced. This gesture towards Australia's more obvious national expressions of racism is a familiar one, but it was the first time I'd heard it from a Canadian. I remembered the 2014 election of Tony Abbott, the outwardly conservative Australian Prime Minister - often referred to as the contemporary of Canadian Prime Minister at the time, Stephen Harper. I remembered the white and upper-class left-wing people I had known who had said things like *this is it! I'm moving to Canada! I'm taking my whole family with me! This country isn't home anymore*. I had not felt like I had been taken in by this presumption of Canada as a progressive paradise where cringing leftist Australians could evacuate to when they wanted to wash their hands of Australian racism. However, I was still struck by the contradictions inherent to Canadian urban spaces. The prolific imaginary of being nice, of progressive, polite, of gentle and fair-minded Canadianness sat in such close proximity to the disgust, contempt and explicit policing of space and property held by the city towards the residents of the Downtown Eastside and other urban spaces where Indigenous peoples are still fighting in a very literal way to maintain their lives and their voices.

It was from within that contradictory space of the Downtown Eastside, in the middle of the Canada150 celebrations, that I could begin to comprehend the Canadian specifics of what Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015b) has termed the virtuous white settler colonial nation. In her reading, there are irreconcilable contradictions between this assertion of virtue and benevolence, and the harder realities of Indigenous life under colonial rule. Moreton-Robinson has argued that Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States all deploy notions of virtue and the virtuous state discursively as strategies through which they are able to construct themselves as benevolent. She argues that acts of state-based inclusion and

demonstrations of equality have little impact on the lived realities of Indigenous peoples. They act instead to reinforce a narrative of unique moral virtue and peacable civility on the part of the white occupiers which invests moral weight to the sovereign claims of the colonisers. The bestowal of rights by settler states therefore become a part of the maintenance of colonial rule and white possession.

This construction of Canada as nice, politically anti-racist and socially inclusive was mobilised to a large extent in the Canada150 celebrations. It was also weaponised against Indigenous peoples who protested the celebrations. In 'Virtuous Racial States', Moreton-Robinson writes that settler colonial states reiteratively and continuously claim that they are working to protect Indigenous rights while displacing the cause of internal state conflict onto Indigenous peoples themselves. She notes the example of the 1967 referendum in Australia, arguing that the vote for citizenship for Indigenous peoples was imagined as an act which would bestow equality; that within the white imaginary, “citizenship represented equality and it was assumed that this status would enable Indigenous people to overcome their poverty and become the same as other Australians” (2015b, 162). Similarly, in the Canadian context, she notes that the representation of Canada as possessing values of civility, diversity and benevolence constructs a Canadian nationhood as underpinned by “moral egalitarianism…predicated on the theory that the transition from a state of nature to civil society founds government on the popular consent of individuals taken as equals” (163). The idealisation of a particularly Canadian niceness shared by the citizens of the state is represented in particular through acts of state-based inclusion such as the legalisation of same sex marriage, the welcoming of Syrian refugees into the country, and formal attempts by the state at reconciliation with First Nations communities-all events which were referenced in Roots’ Be Nice campaign for Canada150 as ‘quintessentially Canadian’ acts of niceness. That settler colonial states construct themselves through legal acts of

virtuousity, Moreton-Robinson argues, allows them to take possession of a moral high ground, blaming Indigenous peoples for not wanting to work in harmony with them, or dissenting in response to assertions of state-based bestowal of rights and reconciliation. Effectively, First Nations peoples who dissent then become the ones not willing to work in unity and harmony, not part of the virtuous nation, not *nice*.

The function of niceness as a strategic exercise of whiteness, to refer back to Castango (2014), became particularly evident in the media response to protests of Canada150 by a convergence of First Nations activists and water protectors in Algonquin territory, at Ottawa Parliament Hill. First Nations protested Canada150 in every major city. While the capital was preparing to celebrate Canada150, First Nations activists erected a tepee and peacefully occupied space on Parliament Hill, facing media scrutiny and police harassment. During a press conference at the occupation, First Nations elders Sophie McKeown and Jocelyn Wabano-Iahtail along with a group of other activists spoke on their reasons for protesting the day. They were questioned by two white journalists on whether they thought that the situation for their communities had improved under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in comparison with Stephen Harper. The conference became heated. The white reporters, supporting one another, pressed on with claims that "most Canadians" (Minsky 2017, n.p) felt that Trudeau was an improvement, and incredulously asked why the First Nations women didn't agree. Wabano-Iahtail responded with the following:

> As far as how Justin Trudeau is doing, one of the things we have to keep in mind is we're asking the United Nations to help us … Because your Liberal party was also responsible – every party, your every government that has been in power, there's been a war conflict…none

> of your governments have clean hands. All of your governments have blood on their hands. (Minsky 2017, n.p)

After being pressed further on whether Trudeau was better than his conservative predecessor in Stephen Harper, the two elders ordered one of the white reporters to leave, plainly stating "you can't speak to us that way" and naming the behaviour of her colleagues coming to her aid:

> You know what, white people? You've had your voice here for 524 years…524 years you've been visible, white lady … Look how fast your white man comes and stands up for you. (Minsky 2017, n.p)

Jocelyn Wabano-Iahtail's decision to call the reporters white was represented by the media repeatedly as an act of needless aggression. Both women pointed to the high rates of unsolved murders of First Nations women in their communities as concrete proof of their ongoing struggle under Canada's so-called liberal governance. Media discourse following these statements framed the elders as disrespectful and aggressive towards the reporters, who claimed that their questions were "totally respectful" and defending themselves as "not racist" (Minsky 2017, n.p).

First Nations activists and writers continually point to social indicators and disparities in living conditions to illustrate the ineffectiveness seemingly socially conscientious forms of governance on our lives. As shown by the statement made in 1988 by Yunupingu at the beginning of this chapter; "this was an act of war which led to genocide", these critiques have become increasingly pertinent since the 1967

referendum in Australia and the broader advent of reconciliatory and rights-based discourses. Moreton-Robinson (2015a) acknowledges the contradictory nature of this act of inclusion into the citizenship of the nation in her critique of rights-based inclusion. Much like Sophie McKeown and Jocelyn Wabano-Iahtail, she points simply to the facts of social indicators and continuing violence in illustrating how acts of progressive liberal democracy, while they establish the state in its capacity to 'fix' inequalities through mechanisms of rights, serve to help the white nation construct itself as virtuous while legitimising its own sovereignty:

> Since 1967, Indigenous people have continued to live in poverty irrespective of the level of economic prosperity of the nation or whether there are Labor or Liberal federal and state governments in power implementing their 'different' Indigenous affairs policies. There are still large gaps in outcomes between Indigenous people and other Australian citizens on all social indicators. Our life expectancy rates are seventeen years less than the rest of the population, our health is the worst in the country, we live in overcrowded houses, we have the highest unemployment rates, are over-represented in the criminal justice system and our education outcomes are well below the Australian average. (2015a, 154-155)

Moreton-Robinson crucially also echoes the language of war in the statements of the water protectors, noting that "it is only by repressing the founding violence of sovereignty's emergence through war that equality can circulate as a truth constitutive of citizenship and its relationship to state sovereignty" (163). Here Moreton-Robinson positions those acts which bestow rights to First Nations people not as contradictory to the state of race war under settler colonialism, but rather as necessary to the maintenance of race war and white

possession of land. Moreton-Robinson noted more recently in her keynote on Indigenous Foucault at the University of Alberta in 2015 that governments construct virtue as a unique attribute possessed by themselves, "an attribute of patriarchal white sovereignty, as useable property to dispossess Indigenous peoples from the ground of moral value", and it is very easy to see here how virtue might function in the context of the Canada150 commemorations as a strategic device (2015 n.p). Looking at the events surrounding Canada150, it is clear how First Nations people's activism interrupted the claims to a peaceable and loving white nation. As a result, First Nations people were then framed as unreasonable, mean spirited, rude, and ungrateful, precisely because their existences and willingness to speak their truths to white people point towards the hidden kinds of race war which the virtuous state is built upon. This plays into a broader narrative engendered by the postcolonising settler state in which white invaders are the possessors of a unique morality and virtue, and First Nations people who dissent are constructed as impeding progress. This is closely aligned with the construction of white people as possessing a unique moral virtue which justified colonial exploration and dispossession of First Nations peoples (Simpson 2016; Flanagan 2010; Moreton-Robinson 2015b).

2167 and *The Hunt*

The use of Foucault's idea of war by Moreton-Robinson indicates that narratives of liberalism and equality are enabled by, and enable, a state of race war in settler-colonial contexts. A preoccupation with states of war is also visible in the work of Indigenous Futurists. The collection of Indigenous virtual reality works, *2167*, which were released in Canada in the summer of 2017 as a futurist response to the commemoration of Canada150, provided a strong rebuttal to assertions of

Canadian virtue. The project, the product of a partnership between the Institute of Indigenous Futures and ImagiNATIVE, used speculative futurist mode as a prompt for the artists to create their vision of Canada, 300 years after the enactment of the constitution, or another 150 years from Canada150. Filmmakers who participated in the project included Jeff Barnaby, Danis Goulet, Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, Kent Monkman, Scott Benesiinaabandan, and the interdisciplinary arts collective Postcommodity. Goulet's film *The Hunt* depicts a postwar North America in 2167 that lies in ruin, where the law is enforced by a fleet of automated orbs patrolling the skies. When an orb interferes with a man and his son on a goose hunt on sovereign Mohawk territory, it forces an altercation. *The Hunt* reflects a future in which First Nations people steal these surveillance orbs which target them for hunting in their traditional lands, and then stockpile and reprogram the orbs to use as weapons in a war of resistance. The short virtual reality film uses a combination of animations and live-action 360-degree camera footage, creating a unique augmented reality immersion for the viewer into the point of view of the characters.

The film begins by taking the viewer across a defamiliarised and war-torn landscape in Mohawk territory. The country is scarred by conflict and the viewer is shown the scene from a drone perspective high above the land looking onto the ground. The camera zeros in on a First Nations man and his son hunting geese with a crossbow. The First Nations father and child are confronted by a surveillance drone, indicating a militarised and automated regime of policing and surveillance, prepared to kill indiscriminately and impersonally, and targeting what its programming deems as unauthorised hunting of wildlife and natural resources. This border policing orb evokes the regimes of colonial policing which already exist to prevent First Nations Canadians from residing, trapping, fishing or hunting outside of state approved areas, even within treatied lands. Calmly staring down the orb, the father explains that he is reaching for his papers to show that he is hunting with a license.

Regardless, the orb readies itself to fire upon him. Both the father's preparedness to answer the orb, and the orb's readiness to fire upon him, suggests that this way of relating to one another on Indian country is an everyday and familiar occurrence. Regimes of violent surveillance and policing have become norms. The machinery of occupation has changed, but the suggestion here is that in this postwar future, the control on First Nations living their lives on their territory is much the same, if not subject to tighter and more severe forms of control. Who is programming and operating the orbs is unclear. The tension builds, and when the orb is about to fire upon the man and child, a woman appears with a crossbow and shoots the orb down.

The use of the 360-degree camera places the viewer within the scene in a disembodied observer position. This disembodiment is literal: when viewing virtual reality filmed with a 360-degree camera through a headset, if you look down at yourself, you will only see the ground beneath you. Your body is disappeared, at the same time as you inhabit the scene itself. Within the first two minutes of the film, the viewer is placed in the position of potential witness to a state murder of Indigenous people on their traditional lands and is themselves removed. I speculated on the effects this unusual positioning of the viewer might have on people experiencing the film. There is a degree of power and dehumanisation that such disembodiment, invisibility and anonymity might afford on the part of a viewer. I think about the Facebook comments left by faceless settler Canadians on media posts about the Canada150 protests, the degree of blank rage and threatened violence being levelled at the protesters behind the online cloak of invisibility. I think about how anonymity and disembodiment itself creates a distance which affords greater levels of rage and impermeability, about the status of whiteness as a seemingly neutral and impartial epistemological position. Watching the orb gear up to shoot upon an Indigenous man and his child, I felt

ashamed at the forced voyeurism of the position I was in. Witnessing itself is an ambivalent (but never neutral) action which the use of the 360-degree camera here forces the viewer into. Upon seeing the Mohawk woman appear and shoot the orb down, the disembodied viewer is relieved of the burden of seeing and not acting. This sequence is beautifully constructed to build tension in the mind of the witness/participant. The viewer is then taken to camp with the three characters, where they are shown through an organised and militarised safe shelter for the small community of resisters. At the end of the short film, the secret weapon of these campers is revealed; a large collection of surveillance orbs kept hidden and dormant in a tent. The woman with the crossbow seems to have kept each one she has encountered, and has managed to reprogram them and gain control over them to turn them into what now appears as a small army. As the film closes, she issues a command, and the orbs begin to glow and wake up.

The thematics of war and conflict present in the film interrupt the language of peaceful nationhood, 'soft' colonisation, or peaceable occupation, by revealing continuing hidden violence. In *The Hunt*, a prior war is made visible by the devastated and abandoned landscape the viewer is first shown from above. The orbs represent the machinery of colonial war, governance, bureaucracy and social control, which are in many ways continuous with the forms of governance, violence, and social control that have already occurred on Canadian soil. For the characters, this violence is pragmatically normalised as a fact of life. Here I want to return once more to Aileen Moreton-Robinson's assertion that it is only by repressing founding violence of a colonising nation's emergence through war that "equality can circulate as a truth constitutive of citizenship and its relationship to state sovereignty" (2015a, 155). In Moreton-Robinson's work on race war in virtuous nation states, the utterances of war present an unsettling and threatening narrative to the nation state's desire to represent itself as benevolent. The thematic of hidden war in *The*

Hunt is also resonant with the activist responses to Canada150. As Allen (2012a) has written, the work of Indigenous activists and writers has a potent ability to unsettle, to reveal hidden violence and theft and subvert national fictions of peaceful settlement. The altercation between the hunters and the suspenseful visual journey the viewer takes deep into the Mohawk camp via the 360-degree camera, following the female Mohawk resistance fighter which eventually reveals a stockpile of weaponry, disrupts notions of peaceful resistance by making acts of violent conflict visually literal. The representation of a state of ongoing war in *The Hunt* recalls Jocelyn Wabano-Iahtail's bluntly stated recognition that "there's been a war conflict" in Canada.

The Hunt's representation reflects a future reality that includes active, resistant, and technologically engaged First Nations communities. For the community in the film, technologies of war and colonial violence can be repurposed to subvert and resist. As stated by Jason Ryle, the Artistic Director of ImagiNATIVE, the project aimed to reverse representations of the Canadian future in which First Nations people are shown as incapable of adaptation:

> Indigenous people are seen as stuck in the past; with 2167 we wanted to take a very deliberate leap forward in time and see artistic visions about our place in the future…In a year that in many ways commemorates a very complex history for Indigenous people, this project celebrates the decades to come and our role in shaping a new future for Canada. 2167 is a fantastic step in that direction. (Ryle 2016, n.p)

In his discussion of 'action' and the many forms it can take, Laenui notes that "the decolonisation environment has so drastically changed in the last 30 years and the action phase must include consideration beyond" the technologies of battle (2000, 6):

> While the first thought for independence would have been to grab the rifle and march against the coloniser, it seems the new weapons are dictated by technological development. The fax machine, television, radio and newsprint are perhaps more effective in executing the long battle plan. (6)

The creators of *2167* aim to utilise the tools of technological development to a decolonial end. Virtual reality headsets, drones, and 360-degree cameras are recruited into the processes. The future is also used here as a technology and a weapon. Being able to not only imagine, but to "celebrate the decades to come" (Ryle 2016) allows for a generative and critical response which calls out the dystopian niceness of Canada's colonial present. The survival and active, tactical modes of resistance by First Nations in the film provides an unsettling response to whitewashed visions of the Canadian future. This is a significant point of connection to the futurist work of First Nations Australians, which also functions to overturn myths of the 'dying race' or futureless people. In *The Hunt*, tools of state violence are repurposed and reprogrammed for the survival and resistance of First Nations community. The characters in the film are thereby able to significantly subvert power relations between themselves and the machinery of war used to surveil and control their movements.

On the Canada150 public holiday I reflected on the connections between the nationalist celebrations of niceness and the ways that such anniversaries are remembered and resisted in Australia. The events of the sesquicentenary of the landing of the First Fleet in Australia, the 150th year of colonial British occupation, were marked in Sydney in 1938 by a re-enactment and a protest known as the Day of Mourning. Yorta Yorta students in my Indigenous Literature class, descendants of William Cooper of the Australian Aborigines League, who protested against both the Nazi persecution of Jewish people in Germany and the celebration of British occupation in the year of 1938, have also reminded me that the Day of Mourning protest is the birth of the Australia Day we know now. They are attuned to the fact that the celebration began as an act of spite, that the colonisers are indicating that; "we know you are mourning, and this pleases us". The current prime minister of Australia set in motion plans to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Cook's Pacific journey in 2020. A replica of the Endeavour was intended to circumnavigate Australia, in what was at first mistakenly spoken of as a re-enactment of a map-making journey by a curious cartographer; a recreation of something that never took place. This is important. Chadwick Allen writes that such events are dense points of origin for "coherent narratives" (2012b, 50) of settler histories and serve as birthdays for settler colonial identities.

The Olympic torch relay from Athens to the host country of the contemporary games every four years does not re-enact a journey undertaken by the Ancient Greeks. Natalie Diaz writes that the Olympics were a "great mobilizer for Hitler", and notes how they were a staging place for cultural narratives of white supremacy as well as resistance to it. (2019, xxii). The relay of the torch is a tradition which originates in the Nazi Germany Olympic games of summer 1936. Hitler's legacy lives on in its obsession with the symbolic 'journey' undertaken

from Athens to Berlin which intended to illustrate a racial inheritance between the Ancient Greeks, who he proposed were Aryan, and white people in Germany and across Europe. Mark Golden notes that the relay across countries was not included in the games of ancient Greece, but rather, it "was invented at least in part precisely for the spectacular role it plays in Riefenstahl's film"; that film being the Nazi propaganda film *Olympia* (Golden 2011, 3). The film is known for how, as scholars of sports history McFee and Tomlinson write, it "bolstered and promoted an elitist physicality which fuelled the flames of German Fascism" and contributed to the culture of Nazi pageantry (1999, 86). Its famous opening scenes of the film show white, blond athletes emerging from the ruins of Olympia and running a course to Berlin before the 1936 games begin. The modern Olympics and their symbolism should be understood in the context of their use as a historical tool of Nazi propaganda. Mark Golden notes how, despite this Nazi connection; peace, harmony, and equality now circulate as part of the story of the Olympics:

> Working for peace is now one of the core aims of Olympism, enshrined in the second 'fundamental principle' of the Olympic Charter: 'The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting the establishment of a peaceful society. (2011, 4)

Journeys like the torch relay carry the symbolic weight of whiteness, and the facts matter far less than the exclusionary nationalism with which the event, or the re-enactment, is invested. Learning more about Canada's political history, I found out that Justin Trudeau's father Pierre Trudeau is responsible for bringing the Canadian constitution 'home' from British soil in 1982, transferring the power to amend the Canadian constitution acts from British parliament into the hands of Canadian

governance. I learn that this is referred to either as *repatriation*, or simply, *patriation*, also known as, 'bringing the constitution home'. I pictured the document sailing alone across the Atlantic on a tall ship. The temporal dislocation of 2167, placing it 300 years after the enactment of the constitution, creates a direct relation, lineage, and simultaneity between the founding moments of the Canadian nation and the war and destruction taking place in the present and future. Indigenous Futurist texts use temporal defamiliarisation to establish their critical lens on the present reality and to subvert the performances which surround these events. Rather than constructing an alternate universe or 'other place' like utopias based in colonial exploration, they retain connections to country. The characters in *The Hunt* play out the altercations with the orbs on country which, while it imagines the year 2167, is still clearly marked as Mohawk territory. While the physical landscape might have changed, there is still a rootedness in place being demonstrated in this representation.

First Nations protesters during the Canada150 celebrations were met with simmering resentment. They pointed out something which is a lived reality for First Nations people in Canada; a state of violence and war. What is clear from the inaction on issues such as the missing and murdered Indigenous women and other widespread instances of murder and violence against Indigenous people in Canada is that the denial of such violence is in itself a form of violence. Worimi artist Genevieve Grieves has referred to this denial as "doubled violence" (2018, n.p), and it has a foundational part in maintaining the settler state's legitimisation of its colonial occupation. To state plainly that Canada is in a state of war against Indigenous people, in both a representational context through film and virtual reality, as well as in activist action, upsets and troubles the place of 'niceness' in the virtuous national consciousness. To further invite audiences into the position of disembodied witness challenges the passivity of viewership.

Like the ending of *Water*, *The Hunt* leaves the viewer with a cliffhanger. Viewers are left on the edge of the heist, anticipating what will happen next. In both texts, resurgence and survival are only possible from militarised protest and organised resistance. These acts of armed warfare are necessary responses to violence being done against communities, but they are more than desperate acts of survival. They are actions taken by whole communities in unison towards a shared goal. In both of these stories, Indigenous communities act together in resistance, towards the future, and in doing so, they are learning lessons and technologies, and building relationships, which they will be able to use beyond the moment of conflict. These moments of action are survivance based and world building.

Concluding remarks

The Capacity for Indigenous Futurism to shape the fields of Indigenous Studies and Literature

This thesis has examined the growing field of Indigenous Futurist textuality in Australia. It builds upon the intellectual, activist and creative work of Indigenous peoples working with the future across multiple forms and genres, and in doing so, it presents an original contribution to the field of literary theory. My initial hope for this thesis was to identify Indigenous Futurism as a distinct field in Australia and to establish a research basis through which to begin to study it in those terms. When I began work on the task of contextualising the texts, there was very little critical material to draw from on Indigenous Futurism specifically as it is practiced in Australia. While there were works theorising the field in the United States and Canada, there were no academic texts from within the Australian academy which looked at the works studied here as direct examples of Indigenous Futurism, or which examined Indigenous Futurism's meaning in Australia. Existing studies of the works relied on genre readings of the works alongside other kinds of theory from cultural studies and literary theory which continue to be, as Araluen writes, "occupied by notions of otherness", offering "poor model[s] for the potential relationship between theory and representation in the reading of Aboriginal texts" (2019, 522). I was excited by the possibilities offered by futurism, by the radicalism of the visions of the authors, and was dismayed by what I saw as the uninspired or, in some cases, non-existent responses to the works in the academic field. I hoped to, as other frustrated Aboriginal scholars before me have done, shift the terms of that academic paradigm through which scholars and readers relate to Aboriginal self-representations. I also aimed to, through this study, argue for Indigenous Futurism's distinctiveness as a practice, and its significance.

I began this study in chapter 1 by reflecting on some of the problematic habits through which the academy relates to Indigenous knowledges, peoples, and texts. As I conclude this study, I return to the question of how Indigenous Futurism can be engaged with outside of those formulas, and instead, how it can be engaged in dialogue with as a productive political and intellectual framework. I am also reflecting on the ways that the texts and ideas of Indigenous Futurism can be used productively in the disciplines of Indigenous Studies and Literature that I work in. Much academic discussion on Indigenous Futurism is now being generated in Australia. The department of Indigenous Studies at the Macquarie University in Sydney was host to the first international conference on Indigenous Futurism held in Australia in late 2019. Anthologies are under development to foster the creative talents of Indigenous Futurists who have been working in this field as artists, organisers, and experimental voices for years already, and to put their words into print. The Indigenous Studies unit at Macquarie is also actively using Indigenous Futurist theory and story in its academic curriculum in a non-literary framing. Indigenous Futurist principles have appeared as part of its introductory course on Indigenous studies, and in its queer Indigenous Studies coursework, in 2020 and early 2021. Indigenous Futurist thinking is placed at the very beginning of the Macquarie Indigenous Studies unit which will introduce first year students, many of whom have never before engaged with Indigenous scholarship or Indigenous writing, to the politics of the Indigenous past and present in Australia. It is from within this framework that those undergraduate students will be introduced to the politics of relationships between us and the invaders who landed in present-day Sydney in 1788, to a place which former Prime Minister Tony Abbott declared, in terms that might remind readers of science fiction narratives of extraterrestrial exploration, must have been like landing on “the moon” (cited in Henderson 2014).

The recent addition of Indigenous Futurism as a critical pedagogical tool in Indigenous Studies demonstrates the capacity for the field to offer significant knowledge contributions of its own. The inclusion of Indigenous Futurism in introductory content for Indigenous Studies also provides some scope for investigating how Indigenous Futurism can help reshape Indigenous Studies as a whole. Indigenous Studies is, as prominent scholars in the global context have noted, a field which can get bogged down in the demand to respond to western representations of Indigenous otherness. First Nations scientist Kim Tallbear notes her observation, upon first 'meeting' Indigenous Studies, that the discipline

> was a little too obsessed with her marginalisation by staid old western historians and chauvinistic English lit scholars (yawn)…her fiery intellect came with a sanctimonious, self-defeating opposition. (2006, 73)

Martin Nakata has explained that one of the unintended effects in the development of a burgeoning field of Indigenous studies in Australia, which has built a space for Indigenous voices in the academy, has been the production of an intellectual project which tends to be "reductive, producing simplistic oppositions of us and them" which essentialise Indigenous subjectivity (Nakata 2004 cited in Moreton-Robinson 2016, 105). The 2016 work *Critical Indigenous Studies*, edited by Aileen Moreton-Robinson, provides some viewpoints which recognise the cultural and intellectual "entrapment" which presents itself in the ways Indigenous studies is taught (Moreton-Robinson 2016, 102). Metis scholar Chris Andersen writes further that Indigenous studies is often "reduced" to "the continuity of land, community, self-government and culture" (2009, 88), and

Moreton-Robinson recognises the necessary demands to move Indigenous studies "beyond identity concerns to develop and expand its mode of enquiry to a range of intellectual projects" (2016, 104). The 2016 volume on Critical Indigenous Studies expresses, through a chorus of voices, a demand which Indigenous scholars are making of themselves and of one another to facilitate the growth of the discipline "beyond tokenism", to allow it to participate in a bold project of "liberat[ing] universal thought" (Hokowhitu cited in Moreton-Robinson 2016, 102).

Indigenous Futurist ideas and texts cannot neatly resolve all of the forms of struggle and entrapment described by contemporary philosophers working in Indigenous Studies. However, they may at least provide some room for intellectual and philosophical experimentation with a view to breaking out of what Moreton-Robinson describes as its cultural containments. Tallbear notes of her own experience teaching Indigenous studies that

> I came to understand that we need to teach students that building Indigenous studies as an anti-colonial intellectual project is not only about turning "sovereignty" and "decolonisation" into fighting words. We need to teach them a love for this process of knowledge production that can help enact those ideas…anger and reaction can only take us so far. (2016, 74)

For Tallbear, the challenges in Indigenous studies involve contending with the role of disciplines in colonialism exists alongside the "the promise of intellectualism in helping us work our way through to another kind of world" (2016, 70).

Tallbear's statement about the differences between what she presents as an intellectual reactivity and love for the process of knowledge production refers to the quality of survivance outlined by Dillon (2012) in her exploration of Indigenous Futurism. Tallbear expresses her deep hope that this spirit of intellect, which moves towards another kind of reality, become the fuel that feeds into the intellectual projects of Indigenous Studies.

In our Indigenous Studies classes, my colleagues and I have frequently found ourselves urging our students to step outside of the worn-out binarisms that sometimes seem baked into teaching in this area, and to develop a deeper understanding of, and pleasure in, the compelling and complex personhood represented in the texts and films of Indigenous artists and creatives. We often find ourselves attempting to instil, through an intimacy with these works, an appreciation of survivance which transcends the simplistic culturalism which has formed the way the disciplines relate to Indigenous people. Tallbear's insistence on the need for the move beyond "reaction" opens up a view to consider the creative practices of and emboldened visions of Indigenous Futurism as a valuable part of Indigenous Studies (2016, 74). The project of a newer critical school of thought in Indigenous studies is, as Hokowhitu notes, "no mean feat" (2010, 11). It requires a transformative imagination rooted in an "interdisciplinary approach…which involves engaging with the epistemic complexity of our communities" (103). I believe there is scope for Indigenous Futurism to participate meaningfully in the development of that critical project.

My aim in the thesis has been to argue for the relevance of the field of Indigenous Futurism as a form of critical theory, and to argue that the texts

themselves provide methods for inquiry. Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated this relevance by working through the critical theoretical interventions being done, and questions being asked, by the innovative textual examples in each chapter. I relate each work to the history of protectionism, to questions in the emerging discipline of feminist law, to queerness, governance, virtuosity, and progressive white statehood. In their responses to these complex political and philosophical issues, the works studied in this thesis express survivance and assert complex Indigenous realities in the future. They implement the principle of survivance in narrative, which goes beyond "survival", "more than endurance or mere response", and foregrounds instead an "active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (Dillon 2012, 6). Indigenous Futurists present images of Indigenous people not only existing in the future of the country, but thriving in undeniable nuance, vulnerability, pleasure, and strength. They construct future spaces of governance which are able to make the sovereignties of Indigenous women and queer people central to legal and social structures, and to bear witness to their stories, as I have highlighted in Chapters 3 and 5 in relation to the works of Nicole Watson and Ellen Van Neerven.

It is my hope that my work also assists in the project, which Indigenous literary theorists have already done much work on, of reorienting the gaze of Australian literary theory. It is vital that the field of Indigenous literary studies is directed away from that postcolonial analytical model which Araluen has criticised for its lack of attention to Indigenous lived experience and its over reliance on the application of abstracted western epistemologies. It is for this reason that my lived experience formed a necessary part of the way I wrote. Storywork, as Araluen writes, "emphasizes the entanglement of story, storyteller, and listener to obtain meaning and understanding" (2019, 534), and it is through an honest

narration of this entanglement to produce meaning that I have written this thesis. Chapter 4 in particular relates *The Swan Book* to my own experiences as an Aboriginal person interfacing with governance through the possessive actions of benevolently 'including' Aboriginal trans and gender diverse people in Victoria. This experience drove me towards the texts as a way to help me make meaning of what I was seeing and feeling through the lens of virtuousity and the progressive racial state.

Storywork principles provide the Indigenous literary scholar a means of navigating and "improv[ing] upon interpretive and pedagogical approaches structured through conventional literary theory" in the work of Indigenous literary study (Araluen 2019, 535). While I initially set out to write a study of Indigenous Futurism from within a framework of literary utopia and dystopia, and indeed some of the texts do use elements of those forms, it also became vital to my methodology and to my thesis project in general to illustrate how conventional genre readings fail. It became important to attend to how readings of the texts as roadmaps for action could emerge in their place, and also to demonstrate through my own narration of my internal responses and thought processes in response to the textual works, how they could be thought of as critical tools for, as Daniel Heath Justice (2018) notes, questioning "How we become human". I was motivated to produce this study because the works themselves helped me make sense of the things I was seeing and experiencing in my life. The narration of my own lived experience, through my own processes of ethical questioning, became an unavoidable way for me to implicate myself as researcher, and to assist with an understanding of how story can be used to interpret the world from an Indigenous perspective as a collective of people. I use my own lived experience to inform the study from this basis, and also because I am aware that the authors of Indigenous Futurist works are using their own process of creative production to do the same; to help them make meaning of the things we experience as a community under ongoing destructive

colonialism. In particular, I believe the works studied in this thesis critically interrogate and illuminate its contemporary manifestation in the 'nice' progressive nation state which uses rights as a means of securing patriarchal white sovereignty, as I covered in chapters 4 and 6.

This thesis also makes connections between works from Canada and Australia, and places a virtual reality work alongside an eclectic collection of written texts. I was drawn to include the work of Danis Goulet (2017) because it shares with the works made by Alexis Wright (2013) and Ellen Van Neerven (2014) a sensibility of Indigenous Futurism which is responsive to the tyranny of the virtuous state. It also raised important questions about the differences of institutional support and infrastructure which influence the development of Indigenous Futurism in Australia and Canada. It is my hope that the comparative work done here between Australian and Canadian Indigenous Futurist pieces through the theme of the virtuous and 'nice' settler state inspires many more international conversations.

The analysis done in my thesis resists a simplistic international comparative method and takes methodological direction from Chadwick Allen's (2012a; 2012b) Trans-Indigenous model to emphasise connections between the works and the contexts in which they are produced. Araluen's (2019) response to the problems of literary theory and the importance of storywork also addresses the importance of Chadwick Allen's trans-Indigenous methodological approach to begin to look at works from Indigenous writers globally in conversation with one another. Doing this contributes to the project of looking at global Indigenous stories, in many forms both printed and not, in order to begin to unseat the "boundaries of literature as they are framed by colonial discourses and institutions", and to, in the place of those boundaries, begin to articulate an

"Indigenous global" (Araluen 2019, 514-515). I have conducted this study from the same understanding as Araluen has operates from, that literature as a term is one which is applied to the textual products of the west, "or those texts that reinforce accepted narratives of the other", and that literary theory and its categorical understandings of narrative, genre, and sensibility are to be subverted, if not directly interrogated (510). As the scholarly and creative field of Indigenous Futurism expands in Australia, I hope more conversations are had which expand the dialogue between Indigenous texts from seemingly disparate generic and geographical contexts.

How is Indigenous Futurism Practiced in Australia?

When I began thinking about this project, I was interested in finding out how Indigenous Futurism is practiced in Australia. I had observed some of the events and actions which were taking place around me already, in 2015, that involved acts of imagining the future from a collective Indigenous perspective. I was interested in how those events were informed by activist actions being taken around them, locally and internationally. I was also aware that these events applied some of the same strategies and principles of the textual works in imagining the possibilities for an Indigenous politics in the future. They were concerned with the act of imagining how Indigenous communities could effectively resist colonial power. More than just concerning themselves with how to decolonise, they were interested with how we might organise and live in a future decolonised world. An inherent part of my research has been, from the outset, arguing that Indigenous Futurism is an activist *practice* in Australia. It is a practice, I argue, because the texts themselves are useful and practicable critical

tools with flexibility in their theoretical and pedagogical applications. It is practiced by communities who are using the method of imagining the future with a critical purpose in activist movements. Answering my research question of how Indigenous Futurism was practiced in Australia also necessarily meant having to grapple with the economic and cultural factors which influence our modes of creative production. There is some urgency to introduce to the field of study, as Evelyn Araluen has noted, an account of the cultural and economic experiences which influence our practices. She writes, for example, that "literary theory in Australia has carried on largely without accountability to the political and cultural conditions that shape Aboriginal textual production", and without reference to Indigenous methodological principles or value systems, the things which our communities find relevant and important in artistic and storytelling practice (2019, 512-513).

Considering this prompt from Araluen, one of the most interesting findings of the study was that there is a deep tension between institutionalised and grassroots practices.This tension frames the practices of Indigenous Futurists working in the field. The works themselves could not be isolated from the work that took place around them. While I was in the process of writing my chapters, the *Blak to the Future* exhibition went through two iterations at the Footscray Community Arts Centre, in my suburb. The show was curated by the First Nations artists Katen Balla, Rosie Kalina, Pierra Van Sparkes, Savannah Kruger, Hannah Morphy-Walsh and involved many others. It was an exhibition, but before it was public facing, it was a work in development which was cordoned off from the public completely where the curators and their mentors and families, along with other First Nations practitioners in the field were allowed to spend a month developing the show together as a collective with intergenerational mentorship and a feeling of safety and protection. The

practice of communal organising in the gallery space is a common one in First Nations collective arts practices in Narrm/Melbourne, and subverts the notion of the gallery exhibition altogether, where an art show is for a public to wander through and to consume a cultural experience. The brief of the show was oriented towards imagining an Indigenous life in the future.

A few months after the show had closed, the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), one of the most well-funded and culturally influential arts institutions in Australia, advertised with the same title of the show, *Blak to the Future* for a retrospective exhibition of some of the Indigenous artists in its permanent collection. The NGV were then publicly and privately confronted about what appeared to be a theft of that title from a grassroots collective show of young emerging First Nations curators working in a community arts centre. The tension around this action was heightened by a common perception of the NGV amongst the community as an exclusive and inaccessible space for local First Nations artists, and it took place in the midst of an ongoing discussion about diversity and power in the arts in Victoria. Following this confrontation, the NGV altered the title of the show, and instead exhibited the works under the new title, *From Bark to Neon*. The idea of First Nations art moving progressively 'from Bark to Neon' asserted a western linear progress narrative over the development of Indigenous creative production. The idea of linear progress is one which so many of the Indigenous Futurist works I studied in the thesis actively resist in their use of time and of temporal defamiliarisation as formal strategy which questions the assumptions of a journey made neatly from one point on the map to another. It alluded to a journey from ancient to modern, a sentiment which I have argued throughout this thesis that Indigenous Futurist narrative distinctly and purposefully resists.

The example of the appropriation of *Blak to the Future* as a title by the NGV illustrated to me that Indigenous Futurists in Australia frequently work without the support of, and often in direct antagonism towards, larger and more dominant art institutions. As two of the curators of *Blak to the Future* wrote in the 2018 edition of *the Blak Brow* magazine:

> the NGV…disrespected a grassroots community and movement of young blak people across the country who continue to fight and advocate through art, activism, and community work, in spite of minimal resources. In contrast to a large and profitable institution such as the NGV, we remain proud of our efforts to create something unique. (Kalina and Morphy-Walsh 2018, 32)

Indigenous Futurist artists working in Australia often self-organise to do their creative labour without institutionalised support or the consistent backing of universities, and without pools of grant money. Returning to Araluen's critique of western literature's analytics from the perspective of storywork reinforces the importance of attending to this dynamic. Araluen called upon the study of literature to become attentive to Indigenous scholarship, sovereignty, lived experience, "the reality of capital and the various economies of physical and intellectual labour that govern Indigenous representation and self-presentation" (2019, 530). While I believe that independent Indigenous Futurist artists do deserve to be funded in a way that allows them to realise their creativity to the fullest extent, this is one of the things that defines our practices; that they are often realised as grassroots collective politicised efforts, and they are values-driven. The final artworks produced for the audience are decentred, while the artists declare their intent to disrupt the gallery, to declare "sovereign land" inside it, to disrupt its audience's perceptions of blackness, and to celebrate "the

artists themselves as they are, and the stories they tell" (Morphy-Walsh 2018, 34). The element of a self-supporting community is essential to the project of Indigenous Futurism in this context, as expressed by Taungerong curator Hannah Morphy-Walsh; "the story of co-curating Blak to the Future is...about how the black community comes through for its own" (2018, 34).

The collective ethics of the mode of production for *Blak to the Future* were clearly as important as the story being told in the work itself. The show firmly demonstrated, in both the way it exhibited the story of the future (or didn't exhibit it), and in its confrontation with the NGV, the tensions between grassroots practices and the ways 'texts' are produced in western institutions. The ethics involved in the way the stories were actually written is part of what separated them from the image of utopia as a form of story, where the future is produced through a process of explicitly colonial extraction that is repeated many times in the story of science fiction and speculative fiction, as Ambelin Kwaymullina (2018) has pointed out.

The Use of the Future as 'Dreaming'

In the beginning of my research, as mentioned, I hoped to tie my study of the works into the study of utopianism in literary theory. My theoretical study of utopianism initially allowed me to investigate futurism as a process of politicised imagining, but it also illuminated key differences between utopianism and

Indigenous Futurism. Indigenous Futurism, which contains texts which sometimes borrow from utopian, anti-utopian, and dystopian forms, is non-utopian not only due to its relationship to Indigeneity, but because in Indigenous Futurist narrative, the future is imagined in a way which does not put the future elsewhere, but locates it close by. To use futurism as Dreaming, in Laenui's (2000) terms, means operationalising the future collectively, in active and ongoing dialogue, to give life to movements and people in the present. It is this which produces Indigenous Futurism as generically distinct from utopia and as politically meaningful for Indigenous activism and philosophy. In her Ph.D thesis on the uses of time in utopia, trans scholar from the United Kingdom Caterina Nirta (2014) points out that contemporary utopianism fails precisely because it is oriented towards a future which is elsewhere and aspirational. Her work argues that fixations on the future which has yet to arrive can present a limitation in our actions in the present moment. Utopian futurism fails to act generatively because it is attached to "something to come", invested in "anticipation and expectation [of]…something that will be, an event for which to prepare and get ready", and subsequently, the futures presented are "emptied of their generative power" (2014, 5). She argues that "On the contrary, I contend that in order for utopia to be a generative force, it needs to be located in the present and be framed as an impulse of the now" (2014, 5).

The approach I have taken revealed that the future is not used by Indigenous Futurists to do the work of a political utopia. The way writers imagine the future has implications in the present, and can make important contributions to struggles for regaining what First Nations scholar Tom Flanagan calls Indigenous people's "underlying title" (Flanagan et.al 2010, xii). Flanagan discusses, in his historical review of the Indian Act, how the Act's main function was to restrain Indigenous people's property rights and economic success

specifically through halting creativity. Therefore, from his perspective, it is Indigenous creativity which must be unleashed in the interests of regaining Indigenous people's underlying title and in the interests of imagining and implementing Indigenous governance and economic structures. He writes that "For me, a book about establishing a system of property ownership that protects our underlying title and unleashes our creativity is just the next part of this agenda" (xii). He envisions a "wave of First Nations creative and entrepreneurial spirit" deployed with the intent to restore Indigenous sovereignty (xii). Flanagan's point directs me to look at the creativity and imagination of Indigenous Futurist projects, in all their forms, as grassroots practices of freedom which enable us to bring about a future where Indigenous people not only exist, but build governments, justice systems, and communities which are strong, militant and values-driven.

In addition to contributing to the broader project of reclaiming original title, as Flanagan puts it, Indigenous Futurist practices are helpful processes in themselves. Larrakia, Gurindji and Kungarakan poet and activist Laniyuk wrote the following words on her own relationship with Indigenous Futurism as a practitioner and a reader of the genre, commenting on its effects on her own personal healing:

> Taking what I have learnt from Speculative Fiction I am creating a lens through which to view my life and the world. It has become more than just a genre, I am carving a way of life that allows me to survive in the present and build towards the future. Writing our own futures creates a road map to them. It sets intent and invites people into that imagining and on an individual level, it's strengthened my overall mental health… Reading

> Indigenous Speculative Fiction and Futurism revealed to me that at some point, I had subconsciously accepted the colonial limitations of possibility. I had, on some deep level, conceded to the white imagining of an Aboriginal-less future, that at some point we would just 'die out'. As a writer I've started writing my own futures, hoping to plant the seeds of the world I want to live in (sooner rather than later). The practice of dreaming our futures allows ourselves to be honest and vulnerable with what it is that we actually want and need. Whether that be Aboriginal schools, healthy, flourishing languages, an end to child removal, incarceration and of course, Land Back. (2020, n.p.)

These words highlight the important effect imagining the future can have on us as a community. Despite the generative and healing power of futurity described by Laniyuk, there might still be some limitations to consider in investing heavily in Futurist imagining as a political tool in isolation. A fixation on futurism could lead naturally to a fixation on youth, or to a fixation by Indigenous Futurists on their own inventions as new. In other words, a fixation on futurity can be an expression of an internalisation of the linear progress narrative. A critique of linear progress and virtuous state logics underlines each of the works. The works studied in this thesis centralise the complex lived experiences of women, queers, children, and the non-human world as a means of interrupting linear progress narratives. This is present in the ways that Nicole Watson (2014) uses the search for Djappari's sovereign lived experience in the colonial archive to challenge the notion of a white feminist law. It is present in the deconstruction of political progressiveness and anti-racism in *The Swan Book* and *Water.* The works urge us to look beyond the offers of inclusive and tokenistic measures of the progressive nation state. They antagonise settler colonial constructions of

virtuosity and providing instruction for Aboriginal people negotiating with the state currently.

I've generated, in this thesis, some scope for considering Indigenous Futurism as a tool. This research creates space for future studies to consider statements like the above by Laniyuk about how futurism is a tool for building roadmaps towards a better future, and how it can be used as a healing tool for individuals in the present. Future studies into this area in Australia might consider how engaging with futurism is impacting on the way Indigenous people think and feel, on our mental health and wellbeing, and how it influences collective political organising and resistance work.

The work done in this thesis contributes towards further study of Indigenous Futurism in Australia. It demonstrates the importance of broadening the study of the field and changing the terms through which it is discussed in literary studies. It contributes towards generating an academic discussion of the texts themselves from within a framework of dreaming and envisioning as they have been outlined by Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Laenui (2000). This thesis demonstrates the importance of looking at Indigenous Futurist texts and events as both purposeful living roadmaps for action and as methodological tools for understanding problems. That Indigenous Futurism is being used outside of literary studies, and in other disciplinary places even outside of Indigenous studies, signals its philosophical and scholarly utility as a tool for making students think differently about the past and the future, and about arts, text, and theory. It is for this reason that I argue that Indigenous Futurism is a truly powerful theoretical and critical tool.

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