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Aftermaths:
vulnerable times, vanishing places, toxic erasures

edited by Marilena Parlati and Joseph Pugliese

REVIEWS

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Aftermaths: vulnerable times, vanishing places, toxic erasures

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This special issue of *From the European South* stands as an attempt to sound the depths of our post-virus world. We deploy the term 'post' not to signify the overcoming of the virus, but to mark the virus's ongoing transformation of, and entrenchment within, the contemporary geopolitical and cultural landscape. As we write, yet another variant of COVID-19 has emerged: Omicron. As it proceeds to work its way across both the Greek alphabet and the bodies and lives of millions of people, the name for the new variant does more than simply expand the pandemic lexicon. It evidences the capacity for a lethal more-than-human agent, a virus, to mutate and to override and escape human attempts to domesticate, neutralise and eliminate it. Cast in this context, we suggest that COVID-19 carries an emblematic charge that metaphorically embodies different agents of lethal power: colonialism, racism, racial capitalism and ecocide – to name but a few of the most pressing and relevant viral forces at work in the global landscape. If one thing is clear in the contemporary context, it is that none of these toxic agents have been effectively overcome. Like the virus, they appear to have an infinite capacity to mutate, take hold of their hosts and thereby continue to consolidate their hold on power.

In pursuing the thinking through of the coextensiveness of a virus with other toxic agents, we suggest that COVID-19 has worked in tandem with colonialism, racism, racial capitalism and ecocidal regimes to amplify existing unequal relations of power and biopolitical exposedness and vulnerability, specifically for people of colour, for black and indigenous people, for women, refugees, prisoners, and innumerable other-than-human entities. As the spokespersons of a number of African nations have observed, the emergence of Omicron in the southern African context and its virtually immediate spread to Western nations underscores two things: how the practice of hoarding and withholding vaccines by the West works to consolidate existing asymmetries of power in terms of wealth, health and the biopolitical designation as what counts as life worthy of preservation; and how epidemiological forces of auto-immunity effectively breach and override the very self-protective measures and borders mobilised by the West in its ongoing attempts to secure its insular wealth, health and privileges.

In the post-virus global landscape, regimes of toxic erasure and selective memories have not only worked to efface pre-existing fault lines of exposedness and vulnerability, but they have often inverted the narratives so that the victims become the perpetrators. Those contesting the ecocide of global warming, for example, are scripted as 'ecoterrorists.' And, in the wake of the global consumption of face masks to ward off the virus, we draw attention to the millions of tons of synthetic garbage produced by the discarding of used masks. The masks themselves are often carelessly discarded and they have thus entered waterways, seas and oceans, further contributing to the mounting rubbish of plastic waste in the world's bodies of water. Reports from across the globe evidence the lethal ensnaring of myriad forms of wildlife by these masks, as the beaks, feet or wings of various animals are caught in the hooks of the masks: a grim reminder of the vast and colonising reach of the virus.

In different ways, the articles in this special issue speak to a number of the urgent topics that inscribe the post-virus landscape. They track, for example, how regimes of settler colonialism and racism are working to consolidate the very violent relations of power that are being actively contested by those at the receiving end of institutionalised state violence. This is perhaps nowhere more graphically manifest than in the now-global Black Lives Matter movement and the white racial panics (as exemplified by the US Capitol riot) of those that are desperately attempting to hold onto their racialised power, privilege and entitlements – all garnered thanks to histories of imperialism, colonialism and racial capitalism; these are histories that bind Europe and the United Kingdom with the settler colonial states that they birthed: the United States of America, Australia, Canada, Israel and so on.

Situated in this context, we open this special issue with Bronwyn Carlson and Terri Farrelly's "Monumental Changes: History Isn't Always Written by the Victors." In their article, Carlson and Farrelly critically examine the ongoing contestation and toppling of the monuments of colonialism, empire and racism that occupy key public spaces across the globe: from Australia to the UK and the EU, from South America to North America. They contextualise their discussion within the larger, now-globalised formation of Black Lives Matter and its merging of forces with pre-existing anti-colonial and anti-racist movements in places such as Australia. In their analysis of the heated debates about the toppling of racist and colonial statues, Carlson and Farrelly sardonically remark: "Statues themselves are not history – they are about history. And most of them do a terrible job of it. To remove a statue isn't to change history, but how history is remembered" (13). They thus raise and address a number of pressing questions: "Should they be removed and destroyed?", "Should they be amended?", "Should we relocate them to a museum or 'statue park'?" (14). These questions are examined in the context of contemporary settler colonial nations such as Australia, where the violent forces and effects of colonialism and race are as active and destructive as ever.

After cataloguing the myriad ways in which these forces of violence continue to impact Indigenous Nations and communities, Carlson and Farrelly emphatically note that: "To ignore" this contemporary history of ongoing violence and destruction "is not an option, because it also ignores who has the right to determine whose history is being privileged, and whose history is being lost" (14). Following their tracking of the ongoing violent effects of colonialism in the context of Indigenous Nations, Carlson and Farrelly open a vista that gestures towards hope, a hope animated by the unfolding global protests to topple the monuments of colonialism, empire and racism: "History isn't only written by the victors. The fact that protest can change the meaning of colonial commemorations, even when their protectors manage to keep them *in situ*, is proof of this" (19).

In her article, "Quiet Activism Through Dharug Ngurra: Reporting Locally Grown – Not from the European South," Jo Anne Rey offers yet another vision of hope in the face of the destructive eco-genocidal forces of colonialism and empire. She opens her article by delineating the global scale of the current ecological crisis, a crisis mastheaded by anthropocenic-driven climate change:

> As nations flail ignominiously (some more than others) in uncoordinated response to rapid global systemic climate challenges that threaten air, water, earth and fire systems, segments of the so-called 'Australian' government persist in ignoring the pending catastrophe despite major physical warnings across the various systems and despite scientific alerts. (25)

After enunciating this urgent note of warning, Rey proceeds to articulate a vision of 'quiet activism' grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and experiential practices that, over millennia, have continued to offer exemplary templates for the care of Country and the consequent flourishing of both human and more-than-human life. In the course of her article, Rey outlines the transnational valency of this vision of "localised 'quiet activism' in Australia" and crucially underscores how

> [f]or localised 'quiet activism' to truly be effective […] it needs First Nations peoples' perspectives. Afterall, in the context of the continent called 'Australia,' localised 'quiet activism' that can respond effectively to climate change and challenging catastrophes (such as the mega-fires of 2019-2020), is also known as caring for Country by the First Peoples and has been undertaken for more than 65,000 years. (26)

Jo Anne Rey directly speaks to one of the key topics of this special issue – global movements to instantiate acts of decolonisation in Europe, the UK and across their former and contemporary colonies. For Indigenous and other colonised peoples, the noun 'Europe' and its adjectival qualifier 'European' are steeped in past and contemporary histories of colonialism, empire and genocidal violence. In her article, Rey draws attention to these problematics. She stages a felt refusal to be assimilated, and thus neutralised, by the ongoing colonial power relations of these terms. She unfolds a compelling ethico-political Indigenous vision that offers

the only viable template for all our futures, as it provides "ways of knowing, being and doing that quietly activate respectful Presence, Place and People. Together, we [Indigenous people] have the web of Interconnectivity, that is at the heart of sustainable resilience, wellbeing, and futures" (37-38).

In their paper, Thor Kerr and Shaphan Cox also address some ways of dealing with the aftermaths of colonial history in the context of very recent discussions on renaming places and monuments in the Walyalup/Fremantle area. Their specific scientific interest coincides with their own political involvement and intervention in the collective public debate on the renaming of the city civic centre, Kings Square, now Walyalup Koort. Kerr and Cox suggest that while these debates are a fundamental step in the refiguration of national and local senses of communal belonging, they cannot obliterate – nor must they be supposed to do so – the persistence of "colonial relationships and practices of dispossession" (42). These have been made undeniably visible in light of the Australian government's recent rejection of the Uluru Statement of the Heart on constitutional reform. The authors adopt the educational strategies proposed by Alderman and Rose-Redwood (2020), for a different geographical context – but which may be used at a wider global level as well. Those authors imagine classrooms – rather than locally-rooted public debates – as "toponymic workspace" (42). For Kerr and Cox, a constructive critique must take into due account the "'affective entanglements' of place names" in relation to social actors who have too long and too often been excluded from the very act of naming (44). Following Alderman and Rose-Redwood, the authors claim the necessity of assessing the 'procedural justice' inherent in policy making and traditional naming strategies, with the goal of contributing to the acknowledgement of the historical, geographical and cultural histories that inscribe landscapes such as Walyalup Koort – whose Indigenous histories predate the colonial state. They suggest that the Walyalup Koort debate is a "working model for communities to follow and improve upon by including substantially more Indigenous visual culture, language and stories within the toponymic workspace" (52).

In our view, naming the different modalities of violence that continue to impact Indigenous people in the context of settler colonial states, Carlson and Farrelly, Rey, and Kerr and Cox all consistently bring into focus how these violences operate recursively so as to facilitate the desired outcome of eliminating the Indigene from the settler colonial landscape. It is a tribute to the academic rigour of the journal, *From the European South*, that it has engaged with these debates in a spirit of robust and uncompromising scholarly dialogue and engagement and that it has offered our contributors a scholarly platform to initiate genuine acts of decolonising critique.

In the context of another settler state, Lucia Abbamonte and Raffaella Antinucci contribute to the debate with "Edusemiotic Pathways in an Iconic Museum Text – The African American Experience," in which they adopt an edusemiotic approach to investigate the

National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), inaugurated in Washington in 2016, and its educational policies aimed at de-normalising many traditional "histories of the exploitation of slavery and racial subjugation" (57). The Museum has deliberately set for itself the task of unmasking the innumerable forms racism and racial (and gendered) exploitation that have been constitutive of settler American history, but also of enhancing "new racial literacies" (56). The amazing volume of its resources has been made available via its own topographical and architectural setting, its very rich on-site exhibitions but also via its open-access policies, which provide fundamental support to the many educational programmes and campaigns the museum hosts and supports. Since Covid-time has unhappily started to dismantle any sense of planetary ordinariness, the digital collections have indeed continued to promote awareness of what the authors define as a "constructive attitude for positive change" (56). For Abbamonte and Antinucci, in fact, the NMAAHC has successfully managed to mobilise its visitors' critical attention thanks to a very carefully planned communication strategy, whose "synergy between its artefacts and the accompanying verbal explanations and comments […] resemiotize[s] apparently innocuous items as the products of forced labour or means of oppression, and endeavour[s] to promote societal change" (57). The "edusemiotic" approach that the two authors adopt helps them focus on the "embodied foundations of learning" (58), on the necessity of disentangling its processes and assumptions and on the opportunities this long-awaited institution in the United States offers in order to foster a meaningful dialogue with the past and with its painful and bitter aftermaths.

In her paper "Palestine and the Figure of the Palestinian in Lebanese Diaspora Literature," Jumana Bayeh leads us along a different trajectory through another still open global wound, in her investigation of the unending legacies of the Nakba, and the ways in which the Palestinian question can be seen through the cultural lens of the Lebanese diaspora. She explores a few narrative examples from contemporary diaspora fiction with the declared intent of verifying the multiple means by which "Palestine illuminate[s] the writerly sensibility of authors whose lives have been altered or even determined by migration and border transgression" (84). Bayeh chooses to tackle the topic of this special issue by facing the displacement of Palestinians, and later delving deeper into what she considers "the Nakba's continued tragic impact in a significant location of Palestinian exile, that of Lebanon" (78). In her view, these long-resilient exiles – in such complex multiethnic, multilingual and multi-religious spaces – have long been and still are marginalised and culturally exorcised by the Lebanese. Writers such as Elias Khoury, Mai Ghoussoub and Rashid al-Daif were closely "tied to the Palestinian cause and contrasted sharply with the treatment of Lebanon's Palestinian refugee population in the 1970s, 1980s and beyond" (78). Yet, Bayeh reminds readers about the fraught issue of the *Tawtin,* due to which the Palestinians are refused naturalisation, but which has often sparked hot debates on the envisaged mortification of Palestinian 'identity'

that Lebanese citizenship might entail. The author contends that the predicaments of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have not truly been dealt with and fully acknowledged, specifically in relation to the September 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre, in which many Palestinian civilians were murdered by Christian Maronite and Israeli military forces, and whose spectral load awaits address and, hopefully, some form of redress. And yet, in Bayeh's view, Palestine, its loss, the excruciating plight of its people even in Lebanon, also resonate in Lebanese diaspora narratives, which are often concerned with migration and the civil war, as in the case of *De Niro's Game* (2006) by Rawi Hage. For Bayeh, this novel proves that Palestine is not only a historical and geographical reference, but it becomes instrumental in exposing "the weak foundations on which the Maronite imagined identity is built" (81).

The second novel Bayeh's argument pivots around is Amin Maalouf's *Ports of Call* (1999), which narrates the partition of Palestine and the many betrayals and obliterations it engendered. By engaging with Palestine and suggesting possibilities for co-habitation, Maalouf's text "illustrates how a Lebanese diaspora novel both recuperates the toxic erasure of Palestinians," but also "affords insights into alternate pathways to address the Israel-Palestine conflict" (87).

The creative section of *FES* 10 hosts a poem by Sara M. Saleh, "Live from Gaza," which also eloquently delineates how settler violence is repeatedly played out in the context of the Israeli state's serial wars on Palestine. "Live from Gaza" strongly resonates with Bayeh's insightful investigations on the Palestinian question and works as a poetic act of urgent war reportage. Through the fractured syntax and the machine-gun bullet-pointing of words and phrases, Saleh conveys with electric, telegraphic urgency the loss, destruction and death inflicted on Gaza in the wake of the latest Israeli military assault. Across the itinerary of a poem that graphically traces – through spacing, parataxis and ellipsis – a landscape harrowed by war-inflicted trauma and destruction, she counter-mobilises the very terms deployed by the media and international governments to neutralise the forms of systemic violence deployed by the Israeli settler state against Gaza and the larger occupied Palestine territories. In the process, her poem effectively unmasks the real victims that fall prey to these serial assaults. Saleh concludes her poem with a memorial roll call of the names of the Palestinian dead:

> In memory of Muhammad-Zain al-Attar
> In memory of Amira al-Attar
> In memory of Islam al-Attar
> In memory of Suheib al-Hadidi
> In memory of Yahya al-Hadidi
> In memory of Osama al-Hadidi (94)

In naming the dead, Saleh refuses to reduce the Palestinian victims of Israeli state violence to anonymous numbers and statistics. The graphic trailing off this roll call opens to the horror of

a toll without closure, even as the evocative final words and letters of the poem work to embody the gaping wound of this open-ended loss *in* the writer and reader: "In me […] I" (95).

The concluding article of this issue is an opinion piece, "Caught in the Crossfire," by Neilab Osman. Osman writes from a Western nation context as a second-generation immigrant whose parents fled one of the iterative wars that have harrowed Afghanistan. Her piece emerges out of the unfolding violence and chaos left in Afghanistan in the wake of the complete withdrawal of US and allied forces from the country – following decades of war. The withdrawal of Western forces from Afghanistan was conducted without putting in place consolidated measures to make sure that the people most at risk in the country – including women, girls, ethnic minorities such as the Hazara and LGBTQI+ people – would not be left exposed to possible reprisals by the Taliban, who immediately took control of the country. Osman explains that, even in the wake of the dangers posed to her relatives by this regime, fleeing the country was not viewed as a desired option. In the words of Osman's Khala Nahid, she "didn't actually want to leave" (98). Osman stages two critical manoeuvres in her piece: she draws on the voices of her relatives living in Afghanistan to give testimony to their experiences; and she uses these testimonies to contest and undermine the Eurocentric visions of Afghanistan "as a dirt-ridden and unliveable country" and the stereotypical framing of refugees and asylum seekers as opportunistic 'migrants' (98). As Khala Nahid emphasises in her testimonies, refugees and asylum seekers are reluctant to leave their home countries and only do so when their lives are at risk.

Faced with the increasingly dangerous situation that her relatives were confronting in Taliban-governed Afghanistan, Osman details her desperate attempts to try to secure humanitarian visas for them, while facing the most intractable of bureaucratic obstacles thrown at her by the Australian government: as she ironically remarks, "the process is almost *in-humanitarian* in its current design" (99). Osman's article emerges as of one piece with the activist tradition driven by the urgent question of 'What is to be done?' or, in her own words, "What should we do?" (100). She delivers multiple answers to this question and the answers all pivot on the centrality of social justice activism: "For me, activism serves as beacon of hope" (101). In the context of a post-virus landscape inscribed by war, global climate change, a mutating pandemic, institutionalised racism, resurgent neo-colonialisms and ever-virulent forms of racial capitalism, we conclude our Introduction on this sanguine note.

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Monumental changes: history isn't always written by the victors

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ABSTRACT

Recent global protests against racism, largely led by the Black Lives Matter movement, have included heated debate about various monuments and statues, resulting in many being defaced and even removed. Across this continent now known as Australia, this inflamed long-held angst regarding colonial commemorations, particularly those honouring 'discovery' and perpetuating a myth of peaceful settlement. This continent is full of colonial commemorations that honour murderers, eugenicists, racists, thieves, slave traders and a host of other 'assorted bastards' who have profited from the dispossession and exploitation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Daley 2017). Across the world, there is much discussion about how best to respond to problematic commemorations. Should they be removed and destroyed? Should they be relocated to a museum or statue park? Should they be amended and rectified in some way? Such debates often result in a stalemate; however, commemoration is a process, and the meaning of commemorations can change, often shifting from being a focus of reverence to a symbol of dissent. This article explores how some commemorations in Australia, despite being protected, have experienced a shift in their meaning and ultimately come to represent a history that was not intended by the 'victors'.

Keywords

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Captain James Cook, colonial commemorations, monuments, statues, contested heritage

Monumental reckonings

In August 2017, on the continent now known as Australia, a statue of Captain James Cook in Naarm (Melbourne) was coated in pink paint with the words "no pride" painted beneath its feet. Another statue of Cook, this time in Hyde Park, Warrane (Sydney), was spray-painted with "no pride in genocide" and "change the date" (in reference to the commemorations publicly endorsed on January 26th known as 'Australia Day'). Monuments to former colonial governor Lachlan Macquarie and to Queen Victoria were also targeted with similar messages. These acts of so-called 'vandalism' occurred in the fallout that followed a heated debate about the appropriateness of such colonial commemorations and their future in Australian public places.

This debate in Australia had followed protests in the USA against Confederate monuments which had been erected in the segregation era as a means of white supremacist domination over Black communities. In response, many US city councils opted to remove their Confederate monuments. However, this incited much retaliation from neo-Nazi, neo-Confederate, neo-fascist and white nationalist groups, even resulting in the death of an anti-fascist counter-protester and the wounding of many, after a white supremacist rammed them with a vehicle in Charlottesville, Va., in August 2017 (Blout and Burkart 2020). While disgruntlement regarding Confederate commemorations was by no means a new trend, the recent Black Lives Matter (BLM) activist movement had certainly fuelled a new swell of protest which registered across the globe. BLM began in the USA as a hashtag (#BlackLivesMatter) and grew to a more widely known movement in response to police brutality against African American men and women and its widespread support has seen it achieve global reach (Carlson and Frazer 2021; Anti-Defamation League 2020).

Related events were also occurring elsewhere in the world. For example, in South Africa in 2015, the Rhodes Must Fall movement (#RhodesMustFall) was formed after a Black university student threw a bucket of excrement over the statue of white supremacist Cecil Rhodes (Fairbanks 2015). The movement grew in power and eventually sparked demands for the fall of South African head of state Jacob Zuma in 2018, as well as extending to England, against Rhodes House at Oxford University. In Canada, monuments to historical figures with a role in the residential school system and in the massacre of Indigenous peoples were rectified and even removed (Arce 2017).

Far from being a simple act of being inspired by events overseas and jumping on the protest wagon, protests against colonial commemorations in Australia have a long history. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been registering their discontent with who and what Australia's colonial commemorations are honouring for decades, including the claim that James Cook 'discovered' this country and the myth of peaceful settlement. Governments have named places, streets, creeks, landmarks and buildings and created statues and monuments in honour of murderers, eugenicists, racists, thieves, slave-traders and a host of other "assorted bastards" who have profited from the dispossession and exploitation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Daley 2017). Despite this, when Aboriginal journalist Stan Grant responded to the events in the US in 2017 by calling for the Cook statue in Hyde Park to be amended, what resulted was tantamount to hysteria (Murphy 2017). The Prime Minister at the time, Malcolm Turnbull, blustered that the "editing" of statues and inscriptions was an attempt to deny, rewrite and even obliterate history (cited in McKenna 2018). Grant was explicit in stating his position: he wasn't calling for the statue to be removed, but rather to revise the existing inscription or include an additional plaque recognising First Nations peoples. However, such moves were likened to Stalinism and Grant was even

nicknamed “Taliban Stan” in the media (Grant 2019). Then Treasurer Scott Morrison commented that Australians “don’t get to choose when or how our story starts… or rewrite what has happened since” (cited in McKenna 2018, 46). Days later, the Cook statue was sprayed with graffiti and a furore ensued.

In 2020, further events in the US sparked a global reckoning for colonial, imperial and enslaver monuments (Cain 2020). Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the murders by police of Breonna Taylor in March and George Floyd in May sparked nationwide protests against racial injustice and police brutality, largely led by the BLM movement. These demonstrations inspired widespread supportive protests across the world as well as the toppling of numerous controversial statues. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their supporters took to the streets to vent their anger at the ever-increasing number of Indigenous deaths in custody, incarceration rates and police brutality (Bond et al. 2020). An Australian BLM protest march scheduled for Sydney apparently made the government nervous about the safety of the Cook statue in Hyde Park. Dozens of police were deployed to guard the statue and were joined by many members of the public, also gathering under the guise of protecting “our history” (Wainwright 2020, np). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, public gatherings at this time were not permitted. However, while BLM protesters were being threatened with arrest if they were to attend rallies, those that were in support of the statue were able to congregate freely should-to-shoulder with police (see the photo at Betoota Advocate 2020). Despite this, two women still managed to spray the statue with the phrases “sovereignty never ceded” and “no pride in genocide” (Chain and Coe 2020, np). A second statue of Cook in Randwick was also defaced (SBS News 2020). In response, Prime Minister Scott Morrison advised the Australian public to “get a grip”, stating that the protest movement against Aboriginal deaths in custody was being hijacked by radical left-wingers, declaring “this is not a licence for people to just go nuts on this stuff” (Baker 2020, np).

Both Turnbull and Morrison drew on the popular argument against removing statues – that to do so would be to ‘erase our history’. History is generally defined as “past events”.[1] Statues themselves are not history – they are ‘about’ history. And most of them do a terrible job of it. To remove a statue isn’t to change history, but how history is remembered (Grossman cited in Glaude Jr 2017). Their arguments also ignored the fact that the toppling of statues is no new phenomenon. For as long as we have erected monuments, we have also defaced and destroyed them. Ancient civilisations removed commemorations that no longer reflected their societal values and so too have modern societies. Significantly, their arguments also failed to acknowledge that protest against colonial commemorations is nothing new and in many parts of Australia, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities have already worked together to amend some of these commemorations and to give individuals and events that had not yet been acknowledged the recognition they deserve.

Off with their heads?

Commemorations are reminders, permanent tangible markers that reflect the values and attitudes of a society, committing to memory what is deemed significant and memorable. Commemorations also legitimise a particular version of history, enforcing what must be remembered and what those in power wish forgotten. On this continent, to erect statues and monuments to 'discovery' and 'exploration' is an attempt to legitimise white settler history and efface Aboriginal presence (Healy 1997). It presents only one side of the story and an incorrect one at that. The aim of these commemorations is to fortify colonial ideologies, to bolster the assertion of white occupation and permanence and black erasure. Aboriginal scholar Tony Birch has spoken out about this agenda for many years and notes that such commemorations are not marking history, but rather promoting an ideology (Birch 2020).

The reason this debate about colonial commemorations such as the Cook statue is happening now, more than a hundred years since its erection, is because these legacies still endure today (Baxter 2019). Colonisation had, and continues to have, a devastating impact on Aboriginal peoples: massacres and disease, mass dispossession of land, disruption of ties to Country and the attempted destruction of cultural practices, separation of families and communities, forced rapid cultural change, marginalisation and exclusion from the dominant culture, racism and discrimination restricting access to healthcare, education, housing and employment, disproportionate incarceration and the forcible removal of children. To ignore this debate is not an option because it also ignores who has the right to determine whose history is being privileged and whose history is being lost (Carlson 2020).

Across the world, there is much discussion about how best to respond to problematic commemorations. Should they be removed and destroyed? Some argue that removal of problematic statues will not remove the attitudes and institutional racism that allowed for their creation in the first place and could allow a kind of amnesia where the trauma and violence suffered could be 'forgotten' (Cherry 2006 cited in Baxter 2019). Should they be amended, rectified in some way, such as with an additional plaque that presents another side of the story (what is referred to as a counter-monument)? Some see this as too soft an approach while others argue it can enable these commemorations to be contextualised. Should we relocate them to a museum or 'statue park', where they can be used as a tool for education? Those in favour of this option argue it enables the provision of context and interpretation in a location that allows people to choose whether or not they wish to interact with them (Grinberg 2020). There are, however, several problems with the museum option, as explained by the curator of African American Social Justice History at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Tsione Wolde-Michael (2021). Firstly, this suggestion presumes that a museum 'should' preserve the statue and provide the appropriate context and interpretation required and it also presumes that a museum is a storage place for items such as unwanted statues.

Secondly, a museum may not have the space required, or may simply not be able to afford the alterations required to accommodate it. The funds required may indeed be better spent on preserving other aspects of history. Thirdly, a museum may not be equipped to provide the kind of context and interpretation required to appropriately display the statue. Relocation to a museum may have the unintended effect of further legitimising the statue in what is commonly revered as an authoritative space (Baxter 2019). Statue parks too can have the potential to serve as a place of veneration, like a shrine, and can generate a sense of irony or caricature that may limit the ability for serious reflection on the events and atrocities of which the statues are symbols (Baxter 2019). It has also been argued that to put statues like Cook's in a museum is ultimately an attempt at avoiding the conversations we really need to have (Bryant et al. 2018).

Such debates often result in a stalemate. However, it is not just the commemoration itself that has meaning, but also the context in which it exists – and contexts can change. Commemorations and their sites can gain new meaning as a result of certain events, or the discovery of new knowledge about that location. Commemoration is a process – "public memory does not remain static over time" (Nettelbeck and Foster 2010, 53). While those with the power can choose what is commemorated and how, they cannot completely control the meaning of the commemoration – this will evolve under the pressures of changing social interests and ideologies (Baxter 2019). We see evidence of this in the way monuments that were thought of as sites "of shared national values and ideals" are evolving to become deliberate sites "of contested and competing meanings" (Young 2000 cited in Nettelbeck 2011, 1116-7). The historical dream that our colonial commemorations would have us believe has been ruined by an ever-increasing demand for truth-telling (Healy 1997).

When protest becomes part of what a monument represents

Sometimes the meaning of a commemoration such as a statue can change enough that it ends up serving the purpose of those that originally protested against it – it becomes a symbol of dissent. This has happened in numerous locations around the world. For example, in 2011, an anonymous street artist targeted the *Monument to the Soviet Army* in Sofia, Bulgaria, transforming the statues of Soviet soldiers at the base of the monument into icons of American popular culture such as Superman, Ronald McDonald, Santa Claus and the Joker. Spray-painted beneath the statues was the phrase "Moving with the times." Since then, the monument has been the target of several more transformations (Beatty 2018). After much deliberation, the University of Mississippi installed a new plaque on a 1906 statue of a Confederate soldier, which describes how the statue was the meeting place for a 1962 rally opposing school integration (Grinberg 2020). The plaque acknowledges the university's divisive past and notes: "Today, the University of Mississippi draws from that past a continuing

commitment to open its hallowed halls to all who seek truth, knowledge, and wisdom" (Grinberg 2020, para. 18). In June 2020, during the peak of the BLM protests in response to the murder of George Floyd by police, a monument to Confederate General Robert E. Lee in Richmond Virginia, that had been covered in spray-painted messages of protest, became a meeting place for African Americans who were repurposing its symbolic meaning. Photographer Julia Rendleman posted shots on Instagram that she had taken of ballerinas dancing and young men posing for graduation photos, in front of the defaced monument (@juliarendleman, 6 June and 12 June 2020). In 1997, in Alcalde, New Mexico, a statue of Juan de Oñate that had been erected in 1994 had its right foot removed, a reference to Oñate's 1599 order, following the suppression of rebellion, that each adult Acoma Pueblo man have a foot amputated and serve decades in slavery (Labode 2018). In 2017, the statue's left foot was painted red and the words "Remember 1680" (the Pueblo revolt) were spray-painted on the base of the monument. In June 2020, as a result of increasing protests, the statue was finally removed by the County of Rio Arriba.

While our colonial commemorations supposedly reflect what we as a society value, so too does our protest against these commemorations. A number of Cook commemorations around the world, including the one that sits in Hyde Park declaring "DISCOVERED THIS TERRITORY 1770," have now become a focus for rising tensions and are imbued with additional meanings related to the protests made against them. Cook statues in England have been added to a crowdsourced map of UK monuments that celebrate slavery and racism on the *Topple the Racists* website (Stop Trump Coalition 2020). In Aotearoa, a statue of Cook in Tūranganui-a-Kiwa (Gisborne) was removed in 2019 following repeated Māori protests, with plans for it to be rehoused in a local museum. On 1 July 2021 in Victoria, British Columbia, a statue of Cook was pulled down and tossed into the harbour by protestors who smeared the pedestal with red handprints and erected wooden red dresses symbolising murdered and missing Indigenous women (Harnett 2021). Australian targets have included the Hyde Park statue, the Randwick monument on Gadigal Country, the odd-looking 'Nazi Captain Cook' statue on Gimuy (Cairns) and the monument on Dharawal Country at Woonona. During the height of the BLM marches in June 2020, someone placed a 'FRAGILE' sticker on the Cook monument at Kamay (Botany Bay) as a tongue-in-cheek observation that such commemorations are at risk.

Protest has become synonymous with Cook commemorations, particularly the Hyde Park statue. A number of Indigenous activists have depicted the removal or toppling of the Cook statue, including Kuku Yalanji artist Tony Albert in his work *You Wreck Me* (2020). The work began as a video and later became a series of collage works in which Albert depicts himself straddling a wrecking ball 'Miley Cyrus-style', singing as he swings in to kick over the statues. Gamilaroi concept artist Travis De Vries has created a digital drawing depicting a

group of Aboriginal activists in the process of pulling down the Cook statue, titled *Cook Falling, Tear it Down* (2019). Aboriginal artist Jason Wing created a bronze bust of Cook, appropriated from the typical statuary style making his identity unmistakable, even with the black balaclava that Wing has added to challenge Cook's iconography. The work is titled *Captain James Crook* (2013). Nicholas Galanin (Yéil Ya-Tseen), a Tlingit/Unangax̂ multi-disciplinary artist and musician from Alaska, created a work titled *Shadow on the Land, an Excavation and Bush Burial* (2020), commissioned for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney 2020 and installed on Cockatoo Island. The work essentially consisted of a grave for the Cook statue – an archaeological-style excavation into the earth that is very identifiably in the shape of the shadow the statue would cast.

In some locations across this continent, protest has resulted in the rectification of colonial commemorations, which not only gives recognition to Aboriginal perspectives, but arguably makes it a site of contested meanings. In Walyalup (Fremantle, Western Australia), there lies the Explorer's Monument, which has long been controversial but has become famous more recently for its addition of a counter-monument plaque commemorating the Injudinah (La Grange) Massacre. The monument was built in 1913 to commemorate three white explorers (Frederick Panter, James Harding and William Goldwyer), who were murdered by "treacherous natives" as well as Maitland Brown, the man who led an expedition to bring back their remains. Brown also responded with a punitive expedition that resulted in the massacre of up to 20 Karrijarri people (Scates 2020). In 1994, the United Nation's Year of Indigenous Peoples, Elders from Bidyadanga and the Baldja network in Walyalup, which includes descendants of survivors of the punitive massacre, added a new plaque to the monument. It outlines the history of provocation that led to the explorers' deaths and acknowledges the right of Indigenous peoples to defend their lands and commemorates all of the Aboriginal people who have died during the invasion of their Country.

The significance of missing monuments

In his book *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, the late historian Ken Inglis stated that "monuments missing in a landscape can be as significant as those erected" (1998 cited in Reynolds 1999, 174). There are a number of commemorations across Australia that inadvertently testify to the fact that Aboriginal peoples did in fact 'fight back' and that colonisation was in fact violent. These commemorations typically consist of graves, memorial monuments and even place names and they are dedicated to European settlers who were 'killed by Natives'. They serve to uphold the pioneer legend, honouring the brave settler and the characteristic representation of the 'Natives' as being savage and vengeful and their attacks unmotivated and unpredictable. Typically, the events are decontextualised; there is no account of what led up to the incident, what the settlers may have done to provoke such attacks

(other than the obvious invasion of lands). There is also no account of the retribution that followed, where settlers indiscriminately brutally massacred Aboriginal peoples in attacks that went unpunished and largely undocumented (Graves and Rechniewski 2017).

For example, in Northam, Western Australia, there is a memorial grave tablet to Peter Chidlow and Edward Jones, 'killed by natives' in 1837. The tablet was erected in 1929 in celebration of the centenary of Western Australia, but today is also revered by the local Aboriginal community for what it inadvertently represents – a testimony of Aboriginal resistance. At Esk in Queensland, a stone cairn was erected in remembrance of Captain Logan who was 'murdered by Aborigines' in 1830. The cairn was funded by an individual in 1984 who obviously admired the man. However, Logan was reportedly "hated by convicts and the Aboriginal population alike for his violence" and thereby "met a just end," upon which "the jailed convicts celebrated with joyful singing for days" (Barrigos 2017, para. 12). The cairn also now serves as a record of Aboriginal resistance.

Aboriginal oral history tells of a number of massacres in the southwest Victorian region, including an incident where Aboriginal families were forced to jump to their deaths at the cliffs at what is today known as The Crags, located between Port Fairy and Yambuk. The event remains unacknowledged. However, there is a cross commemorating the grave of George Watmore, "speared by blacks 1842" (The Standard 2017). Aboriginal oral history states that Watmore was killed after refusing to hand over food rations promised to local Aboriginal people (The Standard 2017). Today, Watmore's memorial at the site commemorates the life of one white man, but it also represents the absence of a memorial to the lives of hundreds of Aboriginal people, including children (The Standard 2017).

Remembrance, not reverence

The defacement of the Cook statue has served to attract attention and raise awareness through what Tony Birch calls "clear acts of provocation […] in that they interrogate the fragile foundations of colonial history and expose the naked emperor" (2021, np). The Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt stated: "These statues should remain as a reminder of a point in time in our lives – even when detrimental. They serve as prompts to encourage people to talk about history" (Baker 2020, para. 21). Some colonial commemorations serve as a testament, as evidence of how Aboriginal people have been regarded by white Australia (Pearce 2016). We keep them for remembrance, but there is no longer reverence.

Some have called for not only keeping contentious statues in place, but to also let the protest become part of the story. At the launch of the Australian Heritage Festival in 2018, historian Lisa Murray delivered a provocative speech questioning if the graffiti painted on the Cook statue in 2017 should have been kept as part of the changing meaning of the statue,

rather than removed (Taylor 2018). Murray pointed out that the graffiti and protests are a sign that our values are changing and are symptomatic of a push by Aboriginal people to gain a voice as well as their rightful place in Australian history (cited in Taylor 2018). Let the protest be part of the story of colonial commemorations. To preserve the 'vandalism' and even display it enables defaced monuments to provide a visible record of how people have responded to, interacted with and contested racist historical narratives in public spaces (Wolde-Michael 2021). This idea gained a lot of ground during the 2020 BLM protests. Pseudonymous street artist and political activist Banksy responded to the toppling of the statue of slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol with a sketch on Instagram of a group of people pulling down the statue, posting:

> What should we do with the empty plinth in the middle of Bristol? Here's an idea that caters for both those who miss the Colston statue and those who don't. We drag him out of the water, put him back on the plinth, tie cable round his neck and commission some life size bronze statues of protestors in the act of pulling him down. Everyone happy. A famous day commemorated. (@banksy June 9th 2020)

History isn't only written by the victors

History is written by the victors. Many who respect colonial commemorations will shrug their shoulders when questioned about their appropriateness and refer to this famous adage. It is commonly attributed to Winston Churchill, however, there doesn't appear to be any concrete proof of this. Churchill did make a joke in a speech before the House of Commons on 23 January 1948 stating: "For my part, I consider that it will be found much better by all parties to leave the past to history, especially as I propose to write that history myself" (Phelan 2019, para. 3). It was a regular feature of his repartee – he'd been spouting versions of that line at public events since the 1930s (Phelan 2019). However, the sentiment of the phrase was in use long before Churchill in numerous languages. Yet, interestingly, it was associated with people who have not necessarily gone down in history as victors themselves.

History isn't only written by the victors. The fact that protest can change the meaning of colonial commemorations, even when their protectors manage to keep them *in situ*, is proof of this. The fallout resulting from any defacing and petitioning for their removal certainly serves to provide an effective method of awareness-raising. But whether the statues are toppled, rectified, or left alone is less important than the ongoing discussion they inspire about what we choose to remember and who we are today (Handler 2016).

One city is using the changing meaning of its contentious colonial commemoration to do just that. In Franklin Square, Nipaluna (Hobart), there stands a statue of William Crowther (1817-1885), surgeon, naturalist and parliamentarian. In 1869, Crowther was appointed one of the four honorary medical officers at Hobart General Hospital but was suspended in March 1869 over charges of mutilating the body of Palawa man William Lanne (aka Lanney). Lanne was amongst the Palawa people removed from Lutruwita (Tasmania) and sent to Wybalenna

(Flinders Island) and later to Putalina (Oyster Cove). Known to the settlers as King Billy, he worked on the whaling ships and became the third husband of Truganini. He was also an activist, working to improve the conditions of his people, even meeting the Duke of Edinburgh in Hobart in 1868 (City of Hobart 2021). Incorrectly believed to be one of the last Palawa of Lutruwita, when Lanne died in 1869 at the age of 34, Crowther removed his head and sent it to the Royal College of Surgeons in London. Lanne's hands and feet were also removed and Crowther then turned the corpse over to colleagues who removed the rest of the skeleton, effectively butchering him like an animal (Mansell cited in MacDonald 2021). Lanne's skull was only finally returned in 1991 (City of Hobart 2021).

The Crowther commemoration has long been a painful reminder for Aboriginal people and others aware that Crowther's legacy is not all good. Concerns had been raised numerous times over many years that Lanne's story was not being recognised and finally in 2021 the City of Hobart responded with the Crowther Reinterpretation Project. Commissioning a series of four temporary public art commissions by local arts practitioners, the project allows each to offer a response to the Crowther statue in an effort to promote community discussion. Priority was given to Palawa artists, who were each paid $5000 for the delivery of their temporary art works and given two months on display (City of Hobart 2021).

The first work of the project is *Truth Telling* (2021) by Palawa visual artist Allan Mansell, on display from April to June 2021. Mansell's work temporarily transforms Crowther into a memorial for William Lanne. The inscription is covered and instead a new plaque memorialises "our King Billy, replacing a man who was in truth a criminal with a man that was in truth a leader" and provides an explanation of Crowther's treatment of Lanne's body. The statue's head and hands are coated in red flexible vinyl printed with an image of Lanne's face, representing the removal of Lanne's head and hands. He holds an Aboriginal flag in one hand, representing the strength of the Palawa people of Lutruwita and a saw in the other (City of Hobart 2021).

The second work is *The Lanney Pillar* (2021) a collaboration by filmmaker Roger Scholes and Trawulwuy writer and curator Greg Lehman, on display from June to August 2021. It consists of a three-metre high, temporary free-standing mixed and multi-media sculpture which stands alongside the Crowther statue. It presents a series of stacked wooden blocks showing archival images, historical artefacts, film stills and text. A solar-powered LED screen displays the film footage and archival material set to a musical soundscape to present a portrait of William Lanne's life before Crowther. There is also a longer film created by the artists called *The Whaler's Tale* that can be accessed by scanning a QR code on the installation's base.

The third work is *Breathing Space* (2021) by Trawlwoolway artist Julie Gough, on display from September to October 2021. The work is a disruption of Crowther's statue, consisting of

a wooden crate-like structure that encases the statue, removing it from view and creating a break for those who find its presence distressing (Gough cited in City of Hobart 2021).

At the time of writing, the fourth and final instalment by Palawa journalist and photographer Jillian Mundy is soon to be unveiled. While increasing awareness about Crowther and the desecration of William Lanne, the Crowther Interpretation Project also serves as a community consultation process, to help inform a permanent response to the statue that can then be enacted in the near future (City of Hobart 2021). We look forward to seeing the outcome of this process and what the statue's future will be.

The BLM movement has brought renewed attention to the power of colonial monuments and the histories they represent. As this article has explored, debates have been raging across the world about how best to respond to problematic colonial commemorations – whether they should be removed and destroyed or relocated to a museum or statue park or amended and rectified in some way to be more truthful. As noted, such debates often result in a stalemate due to competing positions about how we remember and commemorate history and indeed whose history. However, as this article argues, commemoration is a process and the meaning of commemorations can change, often shifting from being a focus of reverence to a symbol of dissent. Mirning artist and scholar Ali Gumillya Baker reminds us that "everywhere is a memorial to what has come before us" (2020, np) and, thus, in this article, we the authors assert our own shift of focus by consciously refusing to use the names of cities that honour the colonial past, instead privileging Indigenous reclamation of language – a practice that is steadily regaining ground across Australia.[2] To illustrate the shift in focus of reverence to dissent, in this article, we highlight the ludicrous behaviour of some settlers as they violently defend a history they often know little about, including the actions of the police who stood guard protecting a statue while simultaneously threatening to arrest BLM protesters revealing the "fragile foundations of colonial history" (Birch, 2020, np). However, as this article concludes, in Australia, despite being protected, some colonial commemorations have experienced a shift in their meaning and ultimately have come to represent a history that was certainly not intended by the 'victors'.

Notes

[1] According to the definition of history on the online dictionary Lexico. https://www.lexico.com/definition/history. Accessed July 9, 2021.

[2] We use the terms 'Naarm' and 'Warrane' to refer to locations such as Melbourne and Sydney. While 'Naarm' refers to the body of water now known as Port Phillip, Naarm (also spelt Nairm) is used by many to now refer to Melbourne more broadly (see Boonwurrung language specialist Aunty Fay Stewart-Muir speak about language https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/awaye/features/word-up/word-up/8343268). Similarly, 'Warrane' refers to what is known as Sydney Cove but is used to refer to Sydney more broadly (see https://www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/sydney-cove-warrane/).These terms are used widely by many to refer to the respective cities in the ongoing efforts to reclaim Indigenous histories (see

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/17/we-must-return-all-our-landmarks-to-their-indigenous-names).

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Quiet activism through Dharug Ngurra: reporting locally grown – not from the European South[1]

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ABSTRACT

As nation-states flail ignominiously (some more than others) in uncoordinated response to rapid global systemic climate challenges that threaten air, water, earth and fire systems, segments of the so-called 'Australian' government persist in ignoring the pending catastrophe despite major physical warnings across various systems and despite scientific alerts (IPCC 2021). However, the gap between governmental bureaucratic inertia and citizenry determination to respond to the realities and threats of future human-induced climate catastrophes opens the possibility for a citizen-led activism that goes beyond protests in the streets. 'Quiet Activism' is an approach that is already happening on the ground, where localised responses by people who care about their local area are opening opportunities to disrupt the complacency and fossil-fuelled corporate greed of bureaucratic systems (Steele, Byrne, Hillier, et. al. 2021). This paper contends it is not just non-Indigenous people undertaking 'quiet activism'. Using three sites on Dharug Ngurra, also known as Sydney, Australia, the paper demonstrates how Indigenous cultural practices, that have been undertaken for thousands of years prior to colonisation, are continuing. By showing leadership that cares for Country-in-the-city, utilising sustainable 'cool fire' cultural burns, culture camps, and educating for connection, caring and belonging, this paper argues that colonising 'Possessed-Possessor' practices can be turned around – away from perpetuating climate catastrophes, toward sustainable futures. As such this paper is reporting about the 'locally grown' – not from the 'European South'.

Keywords

Dharug, 'Quiet activism', 'Possessed-Possessors', Colonisation, Dharug Ngurra/Nura

Introducing the landscape: a complex agentic web

As nation states flail ignominiously (some more than others) in uncoordinated response to rapid global systemic climate challenges that threaten air, water, earth and fire systems, segments of the so-called 'Australian' government persist in ignoring the pending catastrophe despite major physical warnings across various systems and despite scientific alerts (IPCC 2021). Three high profile examples impacting the continent known as 'Australia' today provide facts on the ground. They involve the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), the 2019-20 megafires in south-eastern Australia, and rising sea levels.

Firstly, the GBR has suffered more frequent coral bleaching events (three in five years since 2017) indicating it is already experiencing the consequences of climate change (2021). Secondly, in the south-east Australian megafires of 2019-2020, more than 10 million hectares burned, including "suitable habitat for 69% of all plant species (17,197 species), with 44% of

Australia's threatened plants being burnt" (Gallagher et al. 2021, 1166). Thirdly, according to the 6th Assessment Report (IPCC 2021, 9 SPM A.2.4) "Global mean sea level has risen faster since 1900 than over any preceding century in at least the last 3000 years (high confidence)". According to Flannery (2020), the Earth is close to reaching dangerous tipping points which will ignite threatening climate consequences, including the collapse of the Earth's ice sheets, temperatures warming above 1.5 degrees Celsius and destructions of coral reefs, permafrost and Amazon rainforests (Flannery 2020).

However, while the bureaucratic responses of governments at Federal and State levels have been less than inspiring, if not downright obstructive by refusing to establish a plan, a recent Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) climate poll showed 67 per cent of 15,000 voters believed the government should be doing more to address climate change, including a majority in all 151 national seats (O'Malley and Perkins 2021).

As such, the gap between governmental bureaucratic inertia and citizenry determination to respond to the realities and threats of future human-induced climate catastrophes opens the possibility for a citizen-led activism that goes beyond protests in the streets. According to Steele et al. (2021), 'quiet activism' is an approach that is already happening on the ground, where localised responses by people who care about their local area are opening opportunities to disrupt the complacency and fossil-fuelled corporate greed of bureaucratic systems. They argue this localised 'quiet activism' provides innovative leadership for mutually supportive benefit. However, Steele et al. (2021) note that there are missing actors at the table of localised 'quiet activism' in the context of their research. These absentees include Indigenous peoples' perspectives and activisms. For localised 'quiet activism' to truly be effective, I argue it *needs* First Nations peoples' perspectives. After all, in the context of the continent called 'Australia', localised 'quiet activism' has been undertaken for more than 65,000 years. This longevity makes Indigenous peoples the specialists in sustainability because those knowledges continue, not only in remote and regional areas, but also in the city.

As such, this paper firstly responds to the absence that the work of Steele, et al. (2021) presents. Aruna D'Souza (2018) uses the term 'whitewalling' (verb) in the title of her book for such absences, where topics or contexts extinguish Indigenous presence and voice, as if any colour or Indigeneity does not exist. Secondly, it draws in the role of 'whitewalling' as a perpetuation of colonising forces, their bureaucracies, and how insidious these practices are in the context of contesting extinction industries and transforming relationalities between humans and other-than-humans in the future. Finally, the paper offers an Indigenous response that speaks back and demonstrates the power of Indigenous local 'quiet activism'. It does so through the context of Dharug Ngurra, also known as 'Sydney, Australia'. Through 'quiet activism' creative interventions that articulate the courage of hope and actions for change are made.

'Whitewalling' localised 'quiet activism'

Firstly, it's important to note, that calling out the absence of Indigenous examples of local quiet activism is not to fail to recognise the importance of drawing attention to examples of non-Indigenous localised effort. Such work is a significant addition to the discourse in the search for solutions to the malevolent negligence and lack of leadership by governments and bureaucracies in 'Australia', as they try to support extinction industries, such as globalised oil, gas, and coal sectors.

However, by leaving out Indigenous perspectives the silencing practices that have underpinned white European hegemony since colonisation are perpetuated. Continuing such a hegemonic 'whitewalling' continues the colonisation of First Nations' presences, places and people (D'Souza 2018). Colonisation fosters mentalities and systems that privilege human-centricity – an approach that I argue underpins the warming of the planet by fostering unsustainable solutions that negate and make extinct other-than-humans. Thus, 'whitewalling', human-centricity and colonisation become entwined forces that perpetuate the demise of the Indigene and undermine sustainable wellbeing (Pugliese 2020). This paper, therefore, challenges the persistent silencing and exclusion of Indigenous perspectives, practices and caring by systems that only consider Euro-centric and more broadly human-centric positionality. In so doing, I argue, they continue colonised thinking and consumptive 'Possessor' practices (Pugliese 2020, Moreton-Robinson 2015). I call them 'Possessed-Possessors', being the agency that underpins continuing consumption of the Indigene.

Blaklighting localised quiet activisms on Dharug Ngurra

The discourse on the importance of 'quiet activism' emphasises the threats that humanity and other-than humans are now facing based on the privilege given to human-centricity at the expense of the natural systems and bio-diversities in any given area, especially towns and cities. To frame this within an Australian context, according to the Australian Conservation Foundation report using figures from Ives, C. D., Lentini, P. E., Threlfall, C. et al. (2016), nearly 90% of Australia's human population lives in its towns and cities (ACF 2020, 7). Towns and cities in Australia are where 25% of the nationally listed threatened plants are located and 46% of threatened animals are located (ACF 2020, 2). Thus, human-centric systems and urbanised areas are fundamental to the threat faced by other-than-humans. Additionally, according to Ward et al. (2019), across Australia, more than 7 million hectares of habitat have been destroyed by human beings (ACF 2020, 9). Given urbanisation is not simply an Australian issue, it is reasonable to recognise these imbalances can be globally extended. It is clear therefore that globalised 'quiet activism' must be located where the deepest problem lies and that is in urbanised areas across the globe. Recognising 'localism' as the parameter that underpins 'quiet activism' highlights a point of symbiosis with the approach that Indigenous

people have always maintained in their caring for Ngurra. Localism underpins custodian stewardship by communities as caring for Country within language groups. Thus, taking a turn towards Indigenous sustainable practices is to recognise the importance of a nuanced approach for sustainable futures. Global futures start with localised solutions. Given that Dharug Ngurra (aka Sydney, Australia) represents one of the most urbanised areas in Australia (geographically and by human population), it is logical that 'quiet activism' being undertaken by Dharug traditional custodians is a site from which others can gain insights and opportunities from which to contextualise their own areas of connection, caring and belonging.

Nuancing the solutions – a woven Dharug approach

Ever since Dharug Ngurra (aka Sydney, Australia) was colonised in 1788, traditional custodians have had to take a nuanced, quiet approach for survival. I call it 'Goanna walking' with footsteps on the left (Dharug cultural way) and footsteps on the right (bureaucratic, institutional white-Anglo way) (Rey and Harrison 2018). It requires walking between people, presences, and places and just like a Goanna's track in the sand, the trailing tail/tale shows there are no straight lines between the footsteps. With the arrival of the First Fleet ships in 1788 and the smallpox pandemic just one year after, Dharug community and their neighbours have known their lives and futures have been under threat. Similarly, as has been shown above, the other-than-humans of Dharug Ngurra have also, and continue to be, under threat.

The strategic response can be summarised as "keep your head down and survive". Up until the mid-20th century simply speaking Dharug language in public would get you thrown in jail for a few days ('Ringtail Possum', Rey 2019). As the area with the longest experience of colonisation, Dharug and their neighbours had to learn early to have strategic, localised responses. As such, 'quiet activism' is a system that has facilitated survival. How? By systematically providing sustainable practices that foster resilience and wellbeing that provide strength and continuity over a long period of time. In a human-centric model, it is known that human populations need to be resilient, that is, they need to be able to have the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties, if they are to be sustainable. Further, for such a resilience a sense of wellbeing is required. Similarly, for other-than-humans, sustainability requires the same conditions of wellbeing and resilience to be able to continue over a period of time. As it has always been recognised that humans not only receive from and depend on Ngurra, it has also been recognised that humans must offer reciprocity, that is, they must support the wellbeing of Ngurra, for the resilience of Ngurra, for the sustainability of Ngurra.

A sustainable strategy, therefore, requires reciprocity. Across 234 years, this has been extremely difficult, requiring constant transitioning as access to food resources, places of sacred ceremony, language and community were subjugated. Thus, sustainable strategies took culture indoors, into domestic spaces, where language and storying continued, as well as

outdoors in family groups so that connections to presences, places, and people could quietly continue.

Over time, when whiteness was so embedded as the controlling agency, when the Possessed-Possessor felt so safe, having removed the existence of Dharug peoples and their neighbours from the general population's consciousness through the education system, 'loud activism' through protest marches produced some recognition that the dire circumstances of Indigenous peoples generally was necessary. Those 'loud protests' in Redfern and other places tested that strength, especially as many Indigenous people were coming to the city looking for work and searching for a place of cultural belonging after being removed as children. This process is commonly referred to as the 'Stolen Generations' (Australian Human Rights Commission 1997). However, with typical consumption ambitions and practices, those efforts of 'loud activism' resulted in many being consumed into government Indigenous bureaucracies, which in turn consumed Indigenous workers as they were compromised by the need for employment and housing and health services (Foley 2007; Foley and Read 2020). Understanding how this created a re-colonisation process is critical to showing how 'quiet activism' is the resultant next step in the path of 'Goanna walking'.

While there are many examples of 'quiet activism' on Dharug Ngurra over the last twenty years, this paper focuses on traditional custodians undertaking this process through three sites. Together they provide a path from the foot of the Blue Mountains, with cultural education camps and a cool-fire Indigenous burn at Shaw's Creek, on the western edge of the metropolitan area, to the heart of the Cumberland Plain at the site of the Blacktown Native Institution, now called Oakhurst. The path then leads almost to the harbour, at Brown's Waterhole, in the upper section of the Lane Cove River, within the Lane Cove National Park. Each site and the associated 'quiet activism' connected there will be outlined, for the purpose of demonstrating Dharug resilience, wellbeing, and sustainability, for both humans and Ngurra. Each of these sites enacts the web of Interrelatedness (Fig. 1) that involves connecting, caring and belonging to presences, places and cultural practices (Rey 2019).

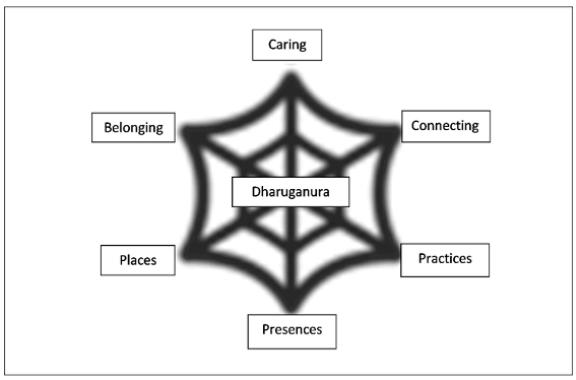

Fig. 1: Dharug Web of Interrelatedness Image: 2019, 318

Getting on with it: doing Dharug activism

1) Shaw's Creek Aboriginal Place – Activating Connecting, Caring, and Healing

Dharug-led 'quiet activism' has been undertaken at Shaw's Creek Aboriginal Place in a variety of ways. These include educational culture camps, which involve both Dharug community members, school groups and academic researchers. Under the auspices of '*yanama budyari gumada'* (to walk with good spirit), education and research have brought people together (Dharug and non-Indigenous) to implement intercultural caring for Country that recognises entangled connectivities and ways of engaging healing practices (Ngurra et al. 2019, 280). As such, strengthening cultural knowledges, activating, and growing wellbeing through experiential engagement on Ngurra concomitantly strengthens resilience for humans and other-than-humans, while producing opportunities for sustainable futures.

Additionally, caring-as Country at Shaw's Creek has been enacted through Indigenous cool-fire burn activations. However, a close examination of the governmental account, through the Australian Government National Land Care Program website, shows persistent privilege given to bureaucratic promotion and collaboration, and merely reluctant acknowledgement of the benefit gained from Dharug custodial participation (Australian Government 2021).

The final paragraph on this webpage opens with a note of optimism, yet quickly descends into bureaucratic authoritarianism. The Possessed-Possessor must always take control and inflict its power of subjugation. From a Dharug perspective, statements about "the land owner, manager, and funding provider" can retraumatise community grief, in relation to the fact that Dharug sovereignty and land ownership remains at the behest of the coloniser.

> Through the implementation of this program there has been an opportunity for cross cultural exchange and relationship building, not only with each other but with the landowner, manager and the funding provider, Greater Sydney Local Land Services. The NPWS of the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) *agreed to allow* [my emphasis] this on-ground burning program to take place on a site in the Yellomundee National Park. Key elements for this project included: reconnecting people back to country, maintaining interest and diversity in voluntary bush regeneration on the site, capacity building, knowledge transference and intergenerational exchange, combining traditional knowledge with science.

For this Dharug community member, reading this takes me back to the time when Governor Lachlan Macquarie was establishing the Native Institutions, the Governor was issuing declarations of power over the landscapes of Dharug Ngurra and cold observations and judgements were being made *about* Indigenous people. To simply list the elements of the cultural burning reflects no relationship, thus is devoid of relationality which is at the heart of Indigenous Law. There is no sense of relationship to these events, to the people involved, the place, its presence or its storying. And yet, the quiet activism of community opened a doorway, set a precedent and allows us now to argue that this has happened once, so it can happen again. Our hope for resilience, our hope for wellbeing, our hope for sustainability relies on the future. Let's hope!

This paper now takes a turn and we will go to the second site of quiet activism, that of the Blacktown Native Institution at Oakhurst in the Cumberland Plain of the western Sydney metropolis. This is not about cultural fire. This is about getting physical possession of some of our stolen Country: the land – getting our land back and regenerating it, our culture, our connections and caring.

2) Blacktown Native Institution (BNI) - Activating Cultural Agency

The Blacktown Native Institution is the second site selected for inclusion in the MUFIR research project (2020). It was selected because of its colonial history and because my three times great grandmother, Ann Randall was placed there by 'Fanny', her mother (Frances Randall, the child of the partnership between Dharug Kitty, and Black African First Fleet convict John Randall). Uncovering this heritage led directly to my own involvement in seeing the return of the Blacktown Native Institution site returned to Dharug community. The final iteration (after generations had previously strived) of this effort took five years of negotiation with one of the agencies of the 'Possessed-Possessor'. Between the direct ancestral heritage, the years of 'quiet activism' of which I was a part and the poor condition in which She was returned to community, the BNI site was selected as the second site for the MUFIR project (2020) and for this account of 'quiet activism' on Dharug Ngurra-as-Sydney, Australia.

Dharug Country was consumed by the 'Possessed-Possessor' from 1788. Steadily over two centuries, Dharug Ngurra has been settler-consumed: residential block after residential block. Developers and capitalists have also consumed Her: commercial block after commercial block. Our Ancestral places, presences and practices have been disregarded, dishonoured, and devastated. Industrialists have poisoned and consumed the waterways, the forests, the animals, the life of Dharug Ngurra, for the sake of 'progress' and 'civilization' and the 'Industrial Revolution'. Human beings have carved across Her face, extracted from Her belly and inserted toxic industrialised objects into Her skin and waters, killing off Her landscapes, Her flora and fauna and Her custodians. But we, the Dharug custodians, survived through strategic sustainable practices and some of the Indigenous other-than-humans have done likewise.

Between 1810-1821 Governor Lachlan Macquarie, after whom Macquarie University is named, ordered the take-over of places, the killing of people, the destruction of families and the terrorization of the first human inhabitants of the majority of what is called the Sydney basin today, as his ambition drove the change from a convict penal settlement to a British colony (Karskens 2010). He was not alone. The emancipated convicts and immigrant settlers enacted his ambitions and their own. Towns such as Windsor, Richmond, Castlereagh, Pitt Town, and Wilberforce were all commenced in 1810, the year of his arrival (Karskens 2020). Four years later, he established the Parramatta Native Institution (PNI), which was later followed in 1823 by the Blacktown Native Institution (BNI), following the demise of the PNI when Dharug families refused to allow their children to attend (Brook and Kohen 1991, Norman-Hill 2019). The BNI

itself was disbanded in 1829, once again a failure, but not before children died, families were broken, language desiccated and desecrated.

The site of the BNI sits on the corner of Rooty Hill Road North and Richmond Road. The site was chosen as it was proximate to the land grant, returned to Nurragingy and Colebee by Macquarie in 1819. This land grant was as a reward for "'fidelity to Government and their recent good conduct' as native guides and, significantly, 'to have and to hold forever'" (Norman 2015).

The choice by Nurragingy to select that particular site is strategically linked to the area of land today known as Stonecutter's Ridge. So-named as it was the place for sourcing silcrete and other stones important for making tools. Such a site has been subject to important archaeological investigation, with nearby burial sites and evidence of continuing connection to the vicinity (Munt and Owen, 2022). The BNI site is within 500 metres of this land grant and sacred place. Proximate to both was also the site of gathering of many Dharug who were surviving the onslaught of colonial-settlement and Macquarie's governance and take-over.

Ever since this land grant site was confiscated by the Aboriginal Protection Board in the early 20th century from the descendants of Nurragingy and Colebee, generations of Dharug have been trying to see the restitution of the land, which Macquarie has stated was for Dharug 'to have and to hold forever' (Norman 2015). In 2012, it was placed on the State Heritage Register (Norman 2015). While local government bureaucracy has provided land for the so-called 'Nurragingy Reserve' (though not located on the actual land grant site) managed by the Local Blacktown Council, on the one hand, another NSW government bureaucracy, the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE), went ahead with building the suburb named Colebee neighbouring the Oakhurst golf course, both established over the top of Stonecutters Ridge, against much Dharug community protest. Current research findings within this MUFIR project suggest that doing so impacted all 22 sites recognised as having Aboriginal artefacts, being thousands of years old. Although the hand back (October 13, 2018) realised Dharug community holding legal title to the BNI site through the Trusteeship of the Dharug Strategic Management Group (2020), activation did not simply commence then. Transgenerational effort by Dharug community to see its return is a legacy of 'quiet activism' that makes evident the continued presence, connections and relationality with Ngurra by Dharug people (Rey 2021).

Indigenous artist's camps have been engaging in quiet activism and activation on the site for several years beforehand. Across 2014-15, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) held a series of artists' camps that included Dharug and other Indigenous artists activating culture, art, music, ceremony and dance on the site. The two Artist Camps were held in November 2014 and March 2015 and a Corroboree celebration was also held in November 2015 (MCA 2021).

In 2021 and currently, 'quiet activism' at the BNI site and through Dharug Ngurra is being undertaken within the research project through the Macquarie University Fellowship for Indigenous Research (MUFIR). Yarning with Dharug Elders who have a long connection with the site across generations is being undertaken. Additionally, regeneration of the riparian areas along Bells Creek is also anticipated at the time of writing. Such an activation will bring community together to plan and undertake the work. Regeneration, while healing Country through the site and the creek, strengthens cultural connections, caring and belonging and enacts the Dharug Web of Interrelationships that Rey's (2019) research recognised (see Fig. 1 above).

3) Brown's Waterhole (BWH) – Activating Quiet Presences, Places, People and Practices

The third place of 'quiet activism', the BWH, brings together the presences, places and people by enacting Dharug connections, caring and belonging. As such this also provides evidence that the Web of Interrelationships (Fig. 1 above) that is at the heart of continuing Indigenous cultures broadly and, specifically on Dharug Ngurra, is providing agency and activation. It is also the third site within the MUFIR research project (2020).

There are several reasons why the BWH site was selected for research. Geographically, it was specifically selected because it is physically directly down the hill from Macquarie University, making it accessible for potential teaching and learning activism, that can be centred on Dharug Ngurra, Her ontologies and epistemologies. As Dharug Ngurra is Country-as-Sydney that suffers through colonising urbanization, pollution, and disrespect, finding ways to turn-around practices that have been embedded by colonising education bureaucracies requires changing educational practices and priorities. Bringing students to an awareness of relationships with Ngurra requires experiential educational practices. It recognises the interplay between western cultural systems that dominate in the city and traditional custodians' practices of care and nurturing as Country that continues the fight for survival as Dharug Ngurra.

Secondly, the 'Brown' of Brown's Waterhole (BWH) is a convict Ancestor who married Frances Randall, from whom I am descended and connected to Dharug community. The latter being the same Ancestor who was the mother of one of the first seven children placed in the BNI (as mentioned in the BNI section above).

The third reason for selecting the BWH site is Her location in the Lane Cove National Park (LCNP). She functions today in many cases as simply a place to pass by, as people walk, or cycle past Her at breakneck speed. She is also a neglected place, stuck between three local Council bureaucracies (Ryde, Hornsby and Kuringai). From Her appearance, the BWH and surrounds seem ignored, perhaps easily overlooked as another bureaucracy's responsibility, that of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Her role, however, goes way before colonisation. Her role as a waterhole recognises Her as connected with the Dreaming and Songlines. She has always been a meeting place. On one bank, the north-eastern side of

the *Turrumburra* (Lane Cove River), She met with Turrumburragal, the freshwater people of the area. On the south-western bank, She meets with the saltwater Wallumattagal people, those of the Black Snapper fish. BWH is found in the freshwater part. Her continuity is realized also through the Aboriginal Presences that remain engraved in her sandstone nearby. Additionally, She is a part of an ecological refuge, being within the LCNP, her Presences include a wide variety of threatened and local other-than-humans (NSW Department of Environment and Conservation National Parks and Wildlife Service 2006). Together we all co-become agentic Ngurra (Ngurra et al. 2019).

As such, BWH is a 'third place' (not just a third site for the research). She is that interface (Nakata 2007) between western, bureaucratic, colonising, and disrespectful 'modernity', the place and context of the human-centric 'Possessed-Possessors' and our other-than-human agency, on which we depend. Rey recognised and identified this 'third place' in her doctoral journey as 'Goanna Walking' (Bhabha, 1990, Dudgeon 2006, Rey and Harrison 2018, Rey 2019). There, in the 'third place', walking between the mentalities of 'Possessed-Possessor' and understandings of co-becoming *as* Ngurra, it is argued, transformation, as critical reflexivity, can be found; there resilience, regeneration and sustainability can be found.

Following Moffatt, Ryan, and Barton (2016) reflexivity is defined as the mediations and adaptations between our inner and outer circumstances involving responsive action within context. According to Kelly and Neale (2020, 60-61), this is the place of the 'third archive' between western 'salvage' mentality towards preserving Aboriginal knowledges and the Aboriginal activation of our cultural continuity.

> While Country is an archive of ancestral actions, the full extent of the archive can be accessed and worked only by the custodians with the knowledge and authority to do so. As with all archives, the archivist doesn't just guard the archive: they interpret and add to it, engaging creatively with it to keep it alive, or to keep its knowledge relevant and active in the present. For the Aboriginal archivist […] They are effectively present-day incarnations of their archive. (Kelly and Neale 2020, 60-61)

As such, working with Dharug Ngurra, across the three sites, is to work with the incarnations of our archive. Doing so involves critical reflexivity, critical reflection, activisms, and creativity and together we co-become in the experiential, doing-learning, between the binaries that are the agency of change. I argue that it is here, in this doing-learning that provokes critical reflexivity, that the decolonisation process takes place.

Following Larsen and Johnson (2017), therefore, it is argued here that agentic change in Country-as-city is enacted in the specificities, the localities, and the "down in the dirt" of messy place, interacting with the presences, and the webs of connections in which both colonisation and its antithesis, decolonisation, occur. Where relationships with localised presences (human-other-than-human), places (human-other-than-human) and practices (human-other-than-human) are entwined, and where opportunity for change occurs.

It is here at the BWH that Dharug 'quiet activism' as 'doing-learning' in proximate relation to the Macquarie University and the relevant bureaucracies, is happening, as a decolonisation quiet activism.

'Doing-learning' – 'quiet activism' as a praxis for decolonisation

Decolonisation, through recognition of Country as the Indigenous archive, is being engaged within a first-year undergraduate Indigenous Studies unit (ABST1020: *Dharug Country: Presences, Places and People*) at Macquarie University, in the Dharug clan area of the Wallumattagal – the people and place of the Wallumai (Black Snapper fish). Through in-situ, out on Country experiential learning that is broadly self-selected, students meet Ngurra: Her presences, places, and people, through Indigenous (Dharug) protocols. These include the acknowledgement of other-than-human presences resident in that place. Cultural protocols require our respect. So, when we enter other-than-humans' places (including Ancestors), we are entering their abodes, their places of belonging, connection, and caring. Just as we would when we go to visit another's house, we don't barge in. Instead, we knock, make our presence known and we ask permission to enter. This simple practice brings us into an equitable relationship with the other-than-humans there. We are not positioned as superior. We practice our humility and recognise our interdependence with the ecologies around us and within us.

Having asked permission to enter, we wait, listen and engage our senses. We transform ourselves from cognitive-dominant beings to multi-sensory beings. It also makes us "attentively present", a term Val Plumwood engaged (Rose 2013). We relate and with this relationality we co-become. If we are fortunate, we recognise ourselves as being a part of Ngurra's archive, the living continuity of text through place, in harmony with the agency and activism that is life (Kelly and Neale 2020). We understand ourselves as Ngurra and more-than-human (Ngurra et al. 2019). In so doing, students are not 'positioned', but position themselves through the process. It is within the specificities of their experience that individuals can find transformation and change agency. They can be reflexive. Every situated learning context becomes an opportunity for agency through choices and reflections. So, through the web of interconnections, over time relationships can also transform and decolonisation is activated. Over the two and a half years since the unit began, more than 200 students have awoken to their relationship with Ngurra, activating their sense of connection, caring and belonging to the Presences, place and people of Ngurra as they become familiar with the agency that She has on them.

A second form of doing-learning is also currently being undertaken through the MUFIR research project. It is through the proposition that the BWH site opens the opportunity for a Dharug-led 'cool-fire' cultural burn that deep reflexivity and quiet activism can lead to profound change given the current climate-challenging contingencies. The context since the summer

megafires of 2019-2020 has brought the realization that the relevant bureaucracies cannot continue down the path they have followed in the last 232 years. As such, recognising that the First Peoples of this continent have been sustainably engaging with gentle fire for healing purposes, as caring for Country practices, for more than 65,000 years, is starting to become a familiar theme within NPWS and other government agencies. While other 'Possessed-Possessors' are undoubtedly still active, consuming the presences and places of Dharug Ngurra, nevertheless, perhaps they too are forced to pause, as they come to understand that in order to possess, they must have something worth possessing. When fire has ripped open the Country all around the city, it is only a matter of time, that megafires will reach within the urban-scapes and. when that happens, the multiple billions of assets that underpin the Possessed-Possessors' own presence will be destroyed.

As such, now the Possessed-Possessor is quiet, having to listen and watch, as the quiet activism of Dharug community, led in this instance by Dharug women, work towards undertaking the first cultural, 'cool-fire' burn close to the inner-urban business district of Macquarie Park, the Macquarie University itself, Macquarie Hospital, and residential housing areas. It is in this complex setting within the Lane Cove National Park, at Brown's Waterhole, such an historic attempt is proposed.

Unlike a western 'hazard reduction' burn, this is a gentle, relational process using fire to engage the animals, to protect their habitats, to 'clean up' the weeds and colonising urban invasive plants. Across 2022 and 2023 a collaboration and activation is anticipated, involving the people and stakeholders connected and caring for and caring about the presences, places and people of the Lane Cove National Park inclusive of the Ancestral practices of reciprocity that underpin Aboriginal Law.

This will be the first time since 1788 that such practice has been engaged so close to the Sydney Harbour and the Warrane/Sydney Cove. It brings the opportunity for doing-learning, for critical reflexivity: critical reflection, experiential and contextualised creative learning through Ngurra. This acts as a precedent for other urbanised National Park areas, where protection of threatened species is so necessary. It brings change from relationship based on Possessed-Possession to a relationship with Ngurra based on respect and reciprocity. Ngurra can be seen, heard, and cared for through Indigenous relationality. Ngurra can provide sustainable futures for Indigenous leadership, employment, and cultural continuity, that can provide resilience and wellbeing for all sentient beings through our Law of reciprocity. Our storying can continue.

Looking ahead – not just a conclusion

This paper has undertaken three tasks. It has argued that, in the context of climate changes and challenges, there must be responses that are inclusive of Indigenous People's voices,

values, and practices. It is no longer good enough for non-Indigenous researchers to make responses that leave out Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. In the face of climate threats, whether it be in the oceans, through the air, or across the landscapes, human beings can no longer ignore the webs of interconnectivity upon which they belong. They cannot continue to suck from the systems that provide balanced agency across diverse habitats. They can no longer privilege human-centricity that undermines and destroys the presences, places and ultimately the people's wellbeing, resilience and sustainability.

Secondly, it has talked back to the silence created by non-Indigenous researchers, bureaucrats, the corporations that are causing 'extinction industries', whether it be through fossil-fuel extractions, corporations that thrive on 'development' or globalising systems that produce narratives that enact and support continuing colonisation consumptions. This has been undertaken in the early phases of this paper in order to clarify and demonstrate the need for a different approach – one that puts localised, Country-centric, Indigenous-led, 'quiet activism' at the top of the list of choices for sustainable futures. In the process, it argues that more than 65,000 years of relationship based in reciprocity, interwoven caring for, with and as Country, and continuing cultural practices, provides a unique opportunity for humanity to respond sustainably for the wellbeing of futures.

Thirdly, using Dharug Ngurra (aka Sydney, Australia) as the site for demonstrating localised, Indigenous, 'quiet activism', it offers leadership to other Indigenous mobs, whose Countries have been turned into urbanised concrete megacities. Engaging three sites (Yallomundee, the Blacktown Native Institution and Brown's Waterhole), the paper has shown that local Dharug people – who are the traditional custodians of this area, who are the descendants from the First Peoples residing here for thousands of years before the "Possessed-Possessors" (also known as colonising consumers) descended – are 'quiet activators' who are leading the way in providing examples for sustainable futures, by following localised cultural Law.

They do this by activating local places and their presences: through culture camps, cool-fire burns, through storying, engaging in dance, weaving, and customary cultural relationships with other-than-humans; activating local knowledges: they are bringing together both written and oral storying, through Dharug language classes and putting Dharug language into workplaces, homes, and bureaucratic organisations. Activating local caring is strengthening communities, as cultural burning brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. Such caring strengthens Ngurra and in the process strengthens communities as they come together, to share time together, to connect to the presences, places and people that underpin reciprocity, the backbone of Aboriginal Law. Strong communities produce strong families; strong families produce strong individuals – strong in caring, connecting and belonging. Together they provide ways of knowing, being and doing that quietly activate respectful

Presence, Place and People. Together, we have the web of Interconnectivity that is at the heart of sustainable resilience, wellbeing and futures.

Yanama budyari gumada,

Walking with good spirit.

Notes

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Public consultation and pub talk as toponymic workspace: Kings Square to Walyalup Koort[1]

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ABSTRACT

The drive to recognise and assert pre-colonial toponymies and Indigenous place names in settler colonial cities has been gaining local and global momentum. Localized systems of governance have emerged as an effective scale for public engagement, consultation and decision-making. In this paper, we explore the City of Fremantle's initiative for the (re)naming of its civic centre Kings Square now Walyalup Koort. The paper presents an analysis of texts produced through the consultation process and dialogue at a Pub talk question-and-answer session. We assert that the consultation and talk can be understood as toponymic workspace for opening up a politics of place-naming and a method for assessing and improving procedural justice. Such forms of public consultation can be applied by local governments and communities seeking ethical representation in and of public places, and they can be made effective through substantial inclusion of Indigenous visual culture, language and stories within the toponymic workspace.

Keywords

Toponomies, postcolonial, settler colonial, Indigenous, subjectivity, Australia

In contemporary Australia, colonization's aftermath appears as a horizon of collaborative action seeking to unsettle the structuralism of settler colonialism (Wolfe 2001) while evading the appropriation of recognition and reconciliation works by the neoliberal state (Coulthard 2014). Aftermath here can be seen as a horizon for negotiations between postcolonial and Indigenous subjectivities (Moreton-Robinson 2015) in a land scaped by human activity for over 50,000 years (Ouzman 2021). Towards such an aftermath, this article analyses discursive events that led to the renaming of Kings Square in Walyalup/Fremantle in 2021 and offers advice to anyone intent on this horizon.

In postcolonial spaces around the world, the political drive to rename places with pre-colonial names, arguably, has as much to do with desire to erase colonial symbolism as with "attempts to assert regional ethnic and linguistic identities against the homogenizing narratives of the nation state" (Kumar 2017, 818). The drive to remove monuments to white masters has been shown to be about asserting regional identity and building a more reflective represent-

ation of human diversity within that community (de Velasco 2019). It has also been an opportunity for developing critical pedagogies of place naming in educational institutions and, potentially, broader society (Alderman and Rose-Redwood 2020). Yet, as symbols of white patriarchal power are challenged and, sometimes, removed from public places, persisting colonial relationships and practices of dispossession remain (Herman 2009; Moreton-Robinson 2015). In Australia, this persistence can be seen in the Government's rejection of the Uluru Statement of the Heart on constitutional reform (Hobbs 2020). Despite the re-energized defence of white possession by the Australian Government, the drive to rename places has been gaining momentum in local government. This momentum is evident in initiatives to restore Indigenous place names in the port towns of Fremantle and Albany (City of Albany 2021) on the southwest coast of the continent. This movement towards pre-colonial toponymies has been proceeded by a successful native title claim for the region (South West Land and Sea Council, Host with Owen 2009), and by increasingly problematic Australia Days and successful alternative days of inclusive community celebration in Fremantle (Cox and Kerr 2018). When the City launched community engagement in October 2020 on the renaming of Kings Square (City of Fremantle 2020b), the authors of this article saw an opportunity for analysing representations in the public consultation process. By the time Fremantle Council voted to rename the site in Whadjuk Nyoongar, 'Walyalup Koort', the authors had become involved in the renaming discussion and begun considering its educational potential. In this article, we focus on how public consultation and a pub talk functioned as toponymic workspace for community education on the impacts of colonization. This focus engages with Alderman and Rose-Redwood's (2020) educational strategies for reshaping commemorative landscapes by acknowledging, debating and coming to terms with legacies of white supremacy.

Walyalup and the Kings Square invasion

Whadjuk Nyoongar people have been living in Walyalup for up to 50,000 years (Moodjar Consultancy 2016). Walyalup incorporates the sea, foreshores, swamps, river mouth, river and land in Fremantle and surrounding areas. It is spiritually, socially, aesthetically and historically significant:

> Walyalup has spiritual significance to Whadjuk Nyoongar people for its connection to dreaming narratives and creative ancestral beings, particularly the Waugal, and its ritual role as a place of funerary rites […] Walyalup has social significance to Whadjuk Nyoongar people for its wide social functions. It was a shared space between many Nyoongar people and was a highly significant place of trade and exchange. It was a place where families gathered for kinship and in-law making, cultural and ceremonial business […] Walyalup holds historic significance […] with the first Nyoongar sightings of the arrival of the British fleet at Fremantle and having been one of the first places in Western Australia that Nyoongar people experienced the full impact of colonisation including massacres, forced removal, the loss of land and incarceration of Nyoongar and other Aboriginal people. (Moodjar Consultancy 2016, 32)

Naval officer James Stirling led the British fleet that sailed to Walyalup in 1829 to colonize the coastal plain via the beachhead township he named "Fremantle" after a captain in his fleet (Statham-Drew 2003). The eviction of Nyoongar people occurred discursively through exploration cartography, during and after the voyage, and physically by the invading British colonists. Discursive eviction continued through the 19th and 20th centuries via general exclusion of Nyoongar words and names on European-imagined maps of the area (Mickler 1991, 72-74). Meanwhile, the coastal plain was surveyed and occupied by settlers backed by British arms and symbols of entitlement. Rich men and favoured colonial officers were awarded occupation rights to land by Stirling on behalf of the British Crown in the settlement's 1829 regulations (Statham-Drew 2003). By 1831 land grants were traded, and by 1832 the land grant system was replaced by the sale of Crown land. Settlers ignored the land-occupation laws and spatial organization of the invaded Nyoongar people (Carter and Nutter 2005). Stirling asserted he could grant rights to all "unoccupied land", but this was written "wasteland" in regulations because it was occupied by Nyoongar people (Carter and Nutter 2005, 4-28). Despite the discursive dexterity of colonisation, social memory of the Crown's theft of Walyalup remains: "This is where our land was taken from us […] The white people claimed all of Fremantle. They took our ancestors from us" (Moodjar Consultancy 2016, 14).

Stirling's colonists established Kings Square as a public reserve at the inland end of High Street, but the site was appropriated by Anglican church trustees (Ewers 1971) who built St. John's Church there by 1843. This church was demolished and reconstructed on the northern portion of the square by 1879, enabling Fremantle Council to purchase the southern triangular portion of Kings Square and build a Town Hall there by 1887. These alterations enabled an unimpeded view and traffic flow along the extended High Street from the Round House gaol on the headland, through the merchant district, past the Town Hall and up to Monument Hill. The Town Hall was constructed as a "grand monument of Victorian architecture" (Brown 1996, 102) sponsored by Fremantle's merchant elite, whose influence slipped away with industrialization. By the 1960s a one-way road system had been constructed around the square and a car park built within it, interrupting the view along High Street. Amid subsequent regentrification, the car park was removed and the passage along High Street from Bather's Bay to Monument Hill restored, making High Street a popular tourist strip. Meanwhile, Kings Square functioned as a resting, meeting and networking place for many Aboriginal people despite systematic whitewashing over representations of their culture at the site (Cox 2018).

In April 2019, construction of a civic centre began as part of the "$270 million Kings Square Renewal Project" (City of Fremantle 2019). In February 2020, Fremantle Council voted to name it the "Walyalup Civic Centre […] in recognition of the Traditional Owners of Fremantle and in the spirit of the City's Reconciliation Action Plan" (City of Fremantle 2020a). The Walyalup Reconciliation Action Plan calls for Whadjuk Culture and history to be included in the

Kings Square Redevelopment and in place names around Fremantle. On 26 May 2021, Fremantle Council voted to rename the square "Walyalup Koort". Endorsed by Western Australia's Minister for Lands, the name was implemented from July 2021 as: "Walyalup Koort (heart of Fremantle) - Walyalup *(Wal-ya-lup)* being the name for the Fremantle area and Koort *(koo-rt)* being the word for heart" (City of Fremantle n.d.).

Methodology: public consultation and pub talk as toponymic workspace

This study examines discursive events leading to Fremantle Council's resolution to change the name to Walyalup Koort. We analysed 15 digital texts (145 pages in PDF format), published by the City of Fremantle between October 2020 and May 2021, and two digital audio recordings, totalling 1 hour and 42 minutes, of the speaker panel and the question-and-answer session at the Politics in the Pub talk on 25 May 2021, the eve of the council resolution. The Pub talk was organized by the Fremantle Network activist group with the primary author being one of three invited speakers. The digital texts were analysed by close reading and critical thinking (hooks 2010), building on the authors' earlier research on Kings Square (Cox 2018; Kerr 2012). As themes emerged through an iterative process of analysis and review of scholarly literature, we could see the public consultation and pub talk beginning to function as a toponymic workspace for community education. From North American campus research, Alderman and Rose-Redwood argued that classrooms could function as toponymic workspace, enabling students "to understand the politics of place (re)naming" and to critique "seemingly naturalized toponymic formations within their own educational institutions" (2020, 124). They developed three instructional strategies "for documenting, analysing, and intervening to reshape the commemorative landscapes": firstly, classrooms should discuss the 'landscape backstories' of naming conventions and place names and consider how they shape political debates; secondly, classrooms should consider the 'affective entanglements' of place names in relation to "contemporary identities, memories, and material conditions of different people, empathizing with social actors and groups traditionally marginalized from the power to name"; thirdly, classrooms should serve as space for interrogating place naming policies, assessing 'procedural justice' in these policies, and for planning "a more inclusive and anti-racist naming policy and campus landscape" (Alderman and Rose-Redwood 2020, 125). In engaging with this approach, classroom and campus were substituted respectively with public consultation/pub talk and local government area.

Public consultation on Aboriginal heritage has been problematic in Western Australia (Kerr and Cox 2016). Pubs, like breweries, have been problems too (Cox et al. 2016). The pub talk venue of The Local Hotel was, potentially, even more problematic given Garbutt's (2011) demonstration of "local" places as Australian nativist space, cleared of Indigenous histories and cultures. Seeing places through the lens of Massey (2005, 265) as contingent and

privileged collections of stories, this study aimed to examine whose stories were represented in discussions hosted by colonial settler institutions: the local government and the local pub. Could these institutions be hospitable to Indigenous sovereignty (Creagh et al. 2016) as toponymic workspace when subjectivity values in postcolonial Australia were so asymmetrically in favour of the colonizer over the colonized? Moreton-Robinson argues the "right to be here and the sense of belonging it creates are reinforced institutionally and socially; personal profound sentiment is enabled by structural conditions" (2015, 18). White possessive discourse ignores Indigenous possession, violating "the subjectivity of Indigenous people by obliterating any trace of our ontological and epistemological existence" (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 114). This construction of ignorance is supported by the colonial facades and monumental architecture in and around Kings Square (Kerr 2012). However, white possessive discourse may become apparent, and disrupted, when shown as "excessive desire to own, control, and dominate" (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 67). With this in mind, the authors set out to analyse the public consultation and pub talk.

Public consultation: indigenous perspective to community engagement

Making settler-colonial-dominated places safer for Indigenous habitation is a complex process that should begin with Indigenous hospitality to the project (Creagh et al. 2016). In consultation with the Whadjuk Working Party of the South West Land and Sea Council and the Walyalup Reconciliation Action Plan (WRAP) Working Group, the City of Fremantle (2020b) began exploring in 2019 the issue of changing Kings Square to a Whadjuk Nyoongar name. The process was lent state legitimacy when Western Australia's Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Ben Wyatt invited "local governments to partner with Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal Language Centres, Native Title Representatives and body corporates to identify opportunities to preserve and reawaken local languages through place naming" (Ben Wyatt, Letter to City of Fremantle, July 8, 2019). Positioned in the spirit of 2019 being the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Languages, the letter was sent in Wyatt's capacity as Minister for Lands and co-signed by the Minister for Local Government. This letter provided the City encouragement to adopt Aboriginal names starting with "Walyalup Civic Centre" for its new library and civic building in Kings Square (City of Fremantle 2020b). In February 2020, Fremantle Council considered Whadjuk Nyoongar renaming options developed through consultation with Traditional Owners, but voted to "broaden the engagement with the whole community" (City of Fremantle 2021a).

In October 2020 the City of Fremantle (2020b) launched a community engagement process to explore the renaming of Kings Square, and provided a 16-page information pack titled, *What's in a Name? Information Pack (Stage One Engagement)*. The pack can be read as an educational document providing background, a participatory task and a set of texts and

images offering varying views on the topic. The pack contributes to toponymic workspace (Alderman and Rose-Redwood 2020) by opening the site's historized 'backstory'. The pack includes a painting of King William IV in robes that suggest his constructed supremacy. The Kings Square name is described coming into being as "an assertion of ownership […] using familiarity as one way to attract settlers and investors to the Swan River Settlement." Endurance of the name, from this distant king, is disrupted in the adjacent column showing St. John's Church in 1985 during the decade the site was named St. John's Square. The following page provides four Whadjuk Nyoongar naming options with reasoning that mentions dispossession and violence endured by the Whadjuk clan. Then, a timeline begins:

> To the local Whadjuk people, whose heritage dates back tens of thousands of years, Fremantle is a place of ceremonies, significant cultural practices and trading. The area contains many campsites and spiritual sites which have been used by Nyoongars from precontact to the present day. (City of Fremantle 2020b, 6-9)

The community engagement pack promotes reflection on 'procedural justice' in the power to name, and encourages readers to consider some 'affective entanglements' around the site's names and the contemporary identities of people connected to them. However, the pack does little to solicit empathy for Whadjuk Nyoongar marginalized in the naming of public places. Visually, the pack relies on European cartography and landscape painting perspectives which enabled their dispossession. Besides the absence of Whadjuk Nyoongar images, word usage disproportionately favours the colonial establishment with "Fremantle" included 98 times compared to "Walyalup" 14 times and, for example, "church" 30 compared to "Whadjuk" 25 (City of Fremantle 2020b). The visual and language bias is reproduced in the report on stage one of community engagement, and in the idea card poster and display at Fremantle Library used to promote the engagement (City of Fremantle 2021e, 3-4).

Stage one of community engagement solicited digital submissions and idea card suggestions for naming "the heart of Fremantle, with fantastic new community, cultural and civic facilities" (City of Fremantle 2020b, 5). Suggestions would be assessed on whether the name generated a sense of pride, was relevant to Fremantle, and was enduring. The City received 194 submissions (150 online, 39 idea cards, 5 direct emails) with proposals for 128 new Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal names, five dual-naming suggestions, and 108 general comments about keeping the current name or renaming (City of Fremantle 2021e). The submissions were assessed against the criteria, provided to Landgate for preliminary comment then presented to the stakeholder group representing St. John's Church, Whadjuk Nyoongar elders, Department of Communities, Fremantle Chamber of Commerce and Fremantle Council. The *Community Engagement Report – Stage One* suggested a binary in the submissions between using an Aboriginal name for "recognition of the Traditional Custodians", and not changing the name of Kings Square (City of Fremantle 2021e, 6) because it "relates

to the constitutional monarchy by which the country is still governed." An analysis was provided in a supplement document showing 70 name types measured against assessment criteria with comments from Landgate and the stakeholder group, and a determination on whether the name would be included in stage two engagement (City of Fremantle 2021f). Almost all name suggestions were rejected outright: including names of historical and contemporary non-Aboriginal figures, Nyoongar words and names suggesting decolonization, 'Freedom Square', and reconciliation, 'Sorry Square'. Fremantle's Italian migrant heritage featured strongly, contributing a suffix for consideration in stage two engagement. Suggestions were marked in the style of an educational assessment rubric, indicating the criteria by which some passed the assessment while most others failed. The supplement provided participants limited feedback on their submissions and little opportunity for reflection. It was left to the engagement report to present an argument for the affirmed naming suggestions being included in stage two along with "Kings Square" and three of the four Whadjuk Noongar names ("Midgegooroo," "Whadjuk" and "Walyalup") nominated earlier in consultation with the Whadjuk Working Party and Whadjuk elders.

Stage two of community engagement began in March 2021 with the release of *What's in a Name? Community Discussion Pack* (City of Fremantle, 2021d), a 20-page document promoting community conversation on renaming:

> It's a big decision, so we encourage you to explore the information behind the space before sharing your thoughts. Start a discussion around the dinner table, with your neighbours, at your school or local community group, then let us know what you think! (City of Fremantle 2021d, 2)

In enabling toponymic workspace, the 2021 discussion pack is an improvement on the 2020 information pack. The discussion pack favours British heritage and cartography but with some improvements: naming Nyoongar territories – including Walyalup in Midgegooroo's Beeliar territory – in one of the maps (City of Fremantle 2021d, 3); and showing images of an art installation proposed for the site that depicts Nyoongar night sky and represents Nyoongar clans (9). Although limited, these inclusions solicit empathy with Indigenous people marginalized from the power to name and promote openness to their affective relationship with the site. There is also a clearer attempt to solicit empathy and historicize background knowledge in the document's area timeline:

> Midgegooroo attempted to resist settlement of his country and after many confrontations he was caught and executed outside Perth Gaol in 1832. His son Yagan was killed a few months later. The same year Roe's town plan for the colonial settlement of Fremantle was published and showed Kings Square. (City of Fremantle 2021d, 3)

Three naming themes were outlined. "Theme 1: Monarchs and Leaders" (City of Fremantle 2021d, 7) begins with background on colonists' pragmatic decision to use King William's title.

The theme suggests a dual-naming option to retain 'Kings Square' with reasoning presented in the form of submission comments, arguing that the name reflects the heritage of the dominant population and the ongoing system of government. They are contrasted with comments appealing for local community relevance and justice in the "Midgegooroo Square" option:

> Those who live in Walyalup have a great sense of pride in their city & to reflect this with Indigenous Cultural naming supports this. This move will also support a strong sense of community & greater awareness of the work that's still yet to be achieved in recognising our Colonial past. (City of Fremantle 2021d, 8)

The appeal to assert local area identity over imperial identity was reinforced in "Theme 2: Walyalup Koort" and "Theme 3: Boya Karla" (City of Fremantle 2021d, 8-9). Then an appeal for 'procedural justice' is implied in answering "Why do you want to destroy all of our history?" (City of Fremantle 2021d, 13) with reference to a study finding that no Indigenous names were used in Fremantle between 1829 and 1850 and that 61% of the British names were primarily British places shifted to the colony to attract settlers and investors. Suggested destruction of 'our history' was countered with only 10 in 500 street names being Aboriginal.

The final quarter of the document encourages readers to host group discussions, constructed around a set of notes, tasks and questions. Groups would reflect on the timeline and street-naming statistics then comment on advantages and disadvantages of the proposed names and suffixes. If the group had a clear preference, they were asked to write it down with their reasoning then send their group discussion notes and feedback to the City. Through this process, participants had an opportunity to consider 'landscape backstories', 'procedural justice' and 'affective entanglements' around past naming policies and to reflect on a more inclusive naming policy.

It is not known how many group discussions were attempted. Only one discussion pack was returned to the City: from a family who wanted Walyalup Koort over Kings Square because there was "no need for mention of royalty" (City of Fremantle 2021a, 12). Instead, most recorded engagement came via the *My Say Freo* webpage with 2,000 visitors including "182 participants in the online discussion, who made 275 comments and placed 647 votes on other people's comments" (City of Fremantle 2021a, 7). Most positive sentiment (78 comments) was in favour of "Walyalup Koort" with only 2 negative comments in this name thread. "Kings Square" had the second highest number of positive comments (37) but also the most negative (28). As toponymic workspace, *My Say Freo* provided useful downloads, an opportunity to comment on the proposed names and to read comments by other participants. Comments in favour of Walyalup Koort were expressed in few sentences. These comments were often forward looking, expressions about identity, beauty, and respect for Nyoongar culture; indicating an opportunity to express 'affective entanglements'. The word "respect" appears

nine times and “beauty” eight times in the Walyalup Koort thread (City of Fremantle 2021c) but only once and twice respectively in the Kings Square thread (City of Fremantle 2021b). Whereas “colonial” appears 10 times and “political” five times in the Kings Square thread but only five times and not at all under Walyalup Koort. Comments in favour of retaining Kings Square were longer, and argumentative – such as, the name change was a waste of City resources and settlers should be respected.

Pub talk as toponymic workspace

The night before Fremantle Council voted to rename the site ‘Walyalup Koort’, several councillors could be seen in the audience of about 50 people at *Politics in the Pub* in The Local Hotel. Despite yard-like aesthetics, the spatial arrangement was much like a university seminar with a series chair, MC and three speakers presenting for a total of 40 minutes from the front of the room. Audience participants stood and sat around tables in the middle and rear of the room. Their voices dominated the hour-long question and answer session.

The MC, former state Legislative Council member Lynn MacLaren, positioned the renaming of Kings Square within Western Australian desire “to embrace our history, wanting to name things with the original names”.[2] Renaming was positioned as a fun, self-deprecating process: “Kings Street, Kings Square, Kings Park, what do they all have in common?” This hint at royal excess in naming popular nearby places produced substantial audience laughter.

The first speaker, Brendan Moore, was introduced as Fremantle’s Aboriginal Engagement Officer, and Chair of the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council. After welcoming participants to Whadjuk land, Moore said:

> all places in Australia have an Aboriginal history, and Walyalup has an Aboriginal history […] Engaging with Aboriginal knowledge can empower community and ensure spaces they live in reflect their diverse and localized cultural values, traditions and uniqueness of place.

Moore said drawing on the locality’s cultural identity in renaming would support its future direction through shared history and collaboration. Moore discussed the injustice of only 10 streets in Fremantle having Aboriginal names and even fewer having Whadjuk Nyoongar names, then described new state and local government policies to address the lack of ‘procedural justice’ in place naming. Moore closed emphatically: “English language and culture is not at risk in Australia”. This was met by laughter and applause.

The next speaker, Russell Kingdom, was introduced as the ‘Kings Square Project Director’ overseeing the revitalization project. Kingdom described a timeline of events around naming the site beginning with 1833, a pivotal year in “Walyalup and also the colonial settlement”: when Midgegooroo and his son, Yagan, were killed by colonists and the first town plan showing “Kings Square” was published. Kingdom jumped to 1982 when Fremantle

Council voted to rename the site St. John's Square, then to 1991 when Council changed the name back in a narrow vote in which a dissenting councillor called for a pre-colonial name. Desire to adopt Aboriginal names is not new but the renaming process has been building momentum from engagement with the Whadjuk working party then broader community consultation. Kingdom said these processes were never perfect and, with feedback, would be improved – towards a horizon of 'procedural justice'.

The next speaker, the primary author of this article, read an observational account by the second author from a decade earlier that describes Aboriginal representations being recorded overtly then whitewashed covertly from the square. The primary author (Kerr) then described fieldwork in Broome, Western Australia, and Banyuwangi, East Java, where Indigenous heritage volunteers had expressed desire to preserve colonial heritage to learn more about what had happened to their communities (Kerr and Wahyudi 2021); also, how Indigenous media in these towns were exploring, rather than ignoring, British colonial heritage in Indigenous lands.

Audience members who wanted to speak were asked to raise their hands. MacLaren said all hands belonged to men and asked for questions from females first because of the all-male panel. The first participant cited an Aboriginal commentator who did not want to see Aboriginal names adopted. Moore responded that one Aboriginal person did not speak for all Aboriginal people. A participant interrupted to ask whether Moore represented the views of all Aboriginal people in Fremantle. Moore responded that in Fremantle everyone is heard before a considered approach is taken – later, Kingdom confirmed a unanimous opinion for the name change had come through consultation with the Whadjuk Working Group, Traditional Owners and a broader Aboriginal group. Another participant said change was unnecessary because many Aboriginal names were used in Eastern Australia. Moore responded that English names were adopted in Fremantle to attract investors to the new colony, but for his family it was "Walyalup, it's always been Walyalup and always will be Walyalup". This comment was met with applause. A participant suggested dual naming would be best: "You can have Kings Square and Walyalup […] it makes perfect sense". A participant then offered to play devil's advocate by stating that in India, for instance, "renaming has actually been a tool for some of the most ugly violent anti-Muslim nationalism that the world has ever seen" and that language or cultural programs or appropriate use of the space, through funding, would be more useful than simply renaming it. Another participant introduced himself as a fourth-generation local and expert in urban planning, saying that Aboriginal naming was positive but was irrelevant for Kings Square, which "was totally a Western creation […] from beginning to end a creation of the settlers". Speaking for six minutes, this participant said renaming was "about the re-writing and erasing of an important part of our history" yet it was important to maintain "the truth of our heritage". The participant was interrupted by other audience members when disputing the

relationship between place naming and genocide. The MC stated the importance of opportunity to speak and congratulated the participant for voicing "genuine concerns in the community" such as earlier attempts by women's groups to get more women's names accepted. The next participant said the panel-discussion was one-sided and there was not "a balanced amount of time for us to have a say" and that the City's consultation process had excluded Fremantle's historians from the discussion, which had "become a popularity contest, and history is not a popularity contest". This was met with murmur and laughter. The participant continued: Walyalup Koort "has absolutely no relevance to Aboriginal interests or culture", and was patronizing to Aboriginal people while the Kings Square redevelopment was a financial disaster. This generated some applause. Another participant asked what was happening in the square beyond the name change. Moore responded: the name change would have positive impacts on the lives of struggling Aboriginal people who come to Fremantle because they think it has a heart, and a corroboree site was identified 50 metres from Kings Square. Moore said many "colonial names remind Aboriginal people of the theft of their land, and it's as simple as that […] Kings Square, Crown land. The settlement of this state was based on a myth of terra-nullius and that's why this is so important to Aboriginal people". Kingdom encouraged participants to visit the City's website to learn more about the reconciliation action plan.

Another participant said, "We are new to this world and we are trying to progress and understand all the culture that we can". It was easy to access "history about colonialism" but there were not "many opportunities for us, as young people, to dive into this culture that is much older than ours". This participant called for more visual Whadjuk culture "to back up the name change", which was supported by another participant and substantial applause.

As the pub talk proceeded, conversation about renaming seemed to become easier; more natural. Much of the discussion shifted from participant to participant, rather than from audience to panel; reflecting a deepening conversation within the audience. Most comments were greeted with applause, even contrary opinions. Effort was made by the organizers, speakers, and participants to make the talk a safe space for discussing radically different opinions. In a hand poll, at the end of the talk, most participants voted for "Walyalup Koort." As toponymic workspace, the pub talk provided space for historicizing the site's 'background'; for understanding 'affective entanglements', particularly Aboriginal desire for cultural inclusion; and for discussing 'procedural justice' in naming policies and how they might be improved.

Council vote and conclusions

Fremantle Council voted ten to one in favour of renaming the site "Walyalup Koort" through an amended motion that also requested city officers consider options for remembering the square's previous names. The public consultation process and pub talk leading to this vote functioned as toponymic workspace, with significant indication of the instructional strategies

defined by Alderman and Rose-Redwood (2020). The public consultation and pub talk provided workspace for interrogating place naming policies as well as assessing and improving 'procedural justice' in these policies. The renaming consultation began with Whadjuk Nyoongar people as part of the City's reconciliation plan and was guided by them when consultation was extended to broad community engagement. Also, the pub talk began with a Whadjuk speaker who described overwhelming injustice reflected in contemporary place names, and the positive impact for Aboriginal people that would come from a more ethical naming policy. Opening the workspace with Indigenous voice helped participants to reflect on the 'landscape backstories' of place names so that the name 'Kings Square' could be seen as a political assertion of colonial ownership over Whadjuk land, rather than an impartial place name. Arguably, the community engagement documents would have been more effective in enabling empathy with Whadjuk Nyoongar had they not contained so much colonial settler representation, reflecting contemporary postcolonial subjectivity (Moreton-Robinson 2015) in Fremantle/Walyalup. The packs should have contained a greater proportion of Whadjuk Nyoongar images and had a better linguistic balance by including more Whadjuk Nyoongar words and stories. Better balance in the content of engagement documents may have helped readers to learn more and reflect more critically on the 'affective entanglements' around the site; particularly the impact of excluding Aboriginal culture from public memory. Demand for greater inclusion of Whadjuk Nyoongar culture in public places – particularly visual culture in the square – and for more opportunities to learn about the culture and people was clearly articulated in the pub talk. The findings above suggest that public consultation and pub-talk-style seminars should be adopted and promoted by local governments and communities seeking ethical representation in, and of, public places. The renaming of Walyalup Koort has provided a useful working model for communities to follow and improve upon by including substantially more Indigenous visual culture, language and stories within the toponymic workspace.

Notes

[1] Ngaala kaaditj Nyungar moort keyen kaadak nidja boodja. Ngaany kaaditj Nyungar kabarli bworan koora yey. This article was researched and written in Whadjuk Nyoongar country. The authors pay their respects to Whadjuk elders past and present, and thank Dr Helen Ulli Corbett for ongoing mentorship on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

[2] The quotes in this section are transcriptions of various interventions from the *Politics in the Pub* event.

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Edusemiotic pathways in an iconic museum text: the African American experience

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ABSTRACT

Since its opening in 2016, the National Museum of African American History and Culture has surpassed 6 million visits, becoming a monument to the African American identity. The representational emphasis of the NMAAHC lies on how resilient the African American people who endured slavery were, though museumgoers cannot avoid witnessing racial violence and the unvarnished truth of slavery. One objective of the NMAAHC is to unmask previously normalised histories of the exploitation of slavery and racial subjugation, as museumgoers progress along its awareness-raising pathways. Unlike many Western museums, the NMAAHC does not display the spoils of slavery and exploitation as valuable artifacts, but reveals and exposes their quality as products of forced labor. The present study aims to investigate aspects of this rich and challenging heritage, in particular the multi-layered communicative dimension of the NMAAHC, with its synergy between its artefacts and the accompanying verbal explanations and comments, which manage to resemiotize (pedagogically) apparently innocuous objects as the products of forced labour and endeavour to promote societal change. The architectonic structure of the museum visually conveys the novelty of its approach and realizes the identity of museums as 'spatial texts' and loci of dialogic interactivity with explicit educational-through-semiotic purposes. Visitors are helped to search for the (hi)stories of their families, record their stories/emotional reactions and realize how essential their individual/family stories are to understanding/demystifying the narrative of African American history and heritage. A broad (edu)semiotic approach (Danesi 2010; Olteanu and Campbell 2018; Semetsky and Campbell 2018) with insights from museum studies (Ravelli 2006; Ravelli and Heberle 2016) and multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 2006), is adopted for this investigation. The considerations/implications of this exploration are discussed in light of the ongoing efforts to find new ways to promote racial literacies and societal change in the US, also by unmasking the existing unequal power relations, which the pandemic has amplified, as denounced by the Black Lives Matter movement.

Keywords

NMAAHC, histories of slavery, edusemiotics, museum studies, multimodal discourse analysis, racial literacies, Black Lives Matter, history and story-telling

It is the story of life [...] the story of our lives,
wrapped up in a beautiful golden crown of grace.
John Lewis (Sept. 24, 2016)[2]

Introduction and aims

Since its opening in 2016, the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), the newest of the Smithsonian's museums and the largest centre dedicated to the African American experience in the US, has surpassed 6 million visits, becoming a valued monument to the African American societal and individual identity.

In 2005, Lonnie G. Bunch III, the renowned historian, educator and NMAAHC's founding director, gave a decisive contribution to its realization, after decades of controversy and efforts, by attracting the necessary private funding, in addition to congressional backing. Declaredly, his mission has been to protect, preserve and interpret African and African American history, culture and art. In his words, "Confronting racism is our shared responsibility. With these educational resources gathered from across our museums and educational centres and the critical work of many organizations at the local level, we aim to inspire change" (@SmithsonianSec, 23 March 2021). Promoting new racial literacies through both its exhibitions (including more than 37,000 items) and the available digital resources is one of the core aims of the museum, which also provides support for the relatively recent developments in school curricula (e.g. Black History Month) by collaborating with teachers. In particular, the Digital Education Initiative has made the museum's research-based curricula available to educators worldwide, which has been particularly helpful in the pandemic situation that has emphasised the difficulties of education in disadvantaged contexts.

The educational issues have often been foregrounded in the relatively recent multifaceted discussions through the media about the unfair disadvantages of African Americans (and BIPOC overall). The insufficient investments made in schools in areas where African Americans live increase the educational achievement gap. These are longstanding issues that the current pandemic has worsened to an extent which is still being studied. However, the inspiring purpose of the museum is not to emphasize the disadvantages, but rather the constructive attitude for positive change, as in The Triumphs and Challenges of Black Education initiative (see below).

Its Grand Opening Dedication Ceremony (on 24 September 2016) consisted of a three-day festival in Washington, with contributions from leading politicians (former president George W. Bush, Rep. John Lewis, Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., etc.), actors and performers (Oprah Winfrey, Will Smith, Stevie Wonder, etc.) and celebrities, which gave rise to a complex multimedia/modal event of high symbolic value – an extraordinary pageant, worthy of a specific study.3 Significantly, Barack Obama inaugurated the museum by ringing the historic 500-pound bell from the First Baptist Church in Williamsburg, Virginia, which was founded by slaves and free blacks in 1776. Before a crowd of thousands of people gathered on the National Mall, the first black president pronounced the words of Langston Hughes – "I,

too, am America" – in his impressive inaugural speech that confirmed his reputation as 'orator-in-chief.' Unquestionably, the overarching attitude was inclusiveness.

The major representational emphasis of the NMAAHC lies on how resilient the African American people who endured slavery were, though museumgoers cannot avoid witnessing racial violence and what the historian John Hope Franklin used to define as the unvarnished truth of slavery. Indeed, one major objective of the NMAAHC is to disclose this reality, and unmask previously normalised histories of the exploitation of slavery and racial subjugation, as the museumgoers progress along its awareness-raising pathways. In the words of the poet Kevin Young, the museum's new director, the museum is "a powerful place […], transforming visitors both in-person and online, and revealing the centrality of African American culture to the American experience. I am eager to engage further directions in the museum's mission, embracing our digital present and future while furthering conversations around Black history, art, liberation and joy" (Blair 2020; emphasis added).

The present study aims to investigate aspects of this rich and challenging heritage, in particular the multi-layered communicative dimension of the NMAAHC, with its synergy between its artefacts and the accompanying verbal explanations and comments, which manage to resemiotize (pedagogically) apparently innocuous items as the products of forced labour or means of oppression, and endeavour to promote societal change. The considerations and implications of this exploration will be discussed in light of the relatively recent and ongoing efforts to find ways to promote new racial literacies and societal change in the US, also to increase awareness of the existing unequal relations of power.

Methodological approach

The communicative potential of our contemporary semioscape, with its variety of multimodal cross-media channels and genres, finds a remarkable instantiation in some modern museums, such as the NMAAHC. Given its balanced deployment of semiotic resources where audio-visual and verbal components interact to shape new meanings, a broad semiotic approach, with insights from museum studies, was adopted for this investigation. Indeed, in the museum's exhibitions and educational programmes, the emphasis on meaning-making and story-telling is strong, and a variety of digital resources and technologically-enhanced reflection booths are made available to visitors both to search for the (hi)stories of their families and to record their stories and considerations or emotional reactions.

Such an organizational attitude can be described, following Danesi (2010), as "edusemiotic," i.e. as belonging to a domain, where the variety of learning processes are considered from a wider perspective that goes beyond the traditional educational contexts. The thought of C. S. Peirce has been inspirational for this research field. As Peirce put it, people are also signs, signs among signs:

> In learning, in interpreting signs, they grow and become, as Peirce would say, more developed signs. It is the process of learning and evolving that brings together ens reale (reality) and ens rationis (our knowledge of reality). This means that […] [k]nowledge is attainable even if it lurks in the future. […] We should remember that semiosis is a never-ending process […]. Still, by putting edusemiotics into practice […] we come closer to this knowledge, to genuine gnosis that, importantly, cannot be separated from self-knowledge. (Semetsky and Campbell 2018, 124-125; emphasis added)

Furthermore, edusemiotics lays emphasis on the embodied foundations of learning and emphasizes "the continuity of human learning processes with the wider biological and physical world, recognizing that all life forms live and learn through semiotic engagement" (Olteanu and Campbell 2018, 256). Accordingly, edusemiotics encompasses virtually unlimited possibilities of education and learning through a plurality of contexts, modes, media – in Semetsky's terms, "furniture of the universe" (2018, 124),[4] or in Olteanu and Campbell's definition, "Umwelts" (2018, 246)[5], self-worlds. Broadly, these notions include phenomena, such as human mindset, cultural heritage/s, languages, societal structures or institutions, artefacts, i.e., the world of meaning and sensory engagement that the organism is immersed in.

The multi-layered organizational and representational schemata of the NMAACH are clear instantiations of such dynamic edusemiotic processes that unfold in and through the museum along carefully arranged learning pathways, which contribute to promoting meaning-making processes. An important role is played by the salience of the architectonic structure of the museum that visually conveys the novelty of its approach and realizes the identity of museums as spatial texts (Ravelli 2006; Ravelli and Heberle 2016) and loci of dialogic interactivity, which can also have explicit educational-through-semiotic purposes, as in the case of the NMAAHC. Ravelli and Heberle (2016) proposed a useful and detailed review of the studies of spatial texts (museums) from a number of different perspectives, ranging from cultural studies and sociology to phenomenology, semiotics and architecture, with an emphasis on multimodality. A strong theoretical basis is found in Michael Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics, adapted and extended to visual texts. Indeed, Ravelli and Heberle (2016), taking their trajectory from the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, 2006), deftly applied the latters' seminal notions concerning how to interpret and describe "the grammar[s] of visual design" to the museum-text as follows:

> spatial texts need to be analysed in terms of the process types they both manifest (what we can 'see' in them and what they represent) and enable (what users can 'do' with them). Following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), there is a fundamental distinction between narrative process types, which suggest action through the presence of visible vectors, and conceptual process types, which suggest stasis through the absence of visible vectors […]. A number of different tools are needed for the analysis of organizational meanings […]. As described by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the placement of components in relation to each other determines their Information Values, for example, elements placed above others have the culturally-laden value of being the 'Ideal' or the promise. Framing identifies whether the components are strongly or weakly differentiated, that is, shown to be separate or shown to be more unified, and Salience accounts for the relative prominence of one element in relation to others. This intersects with the Navigation Path (Ravelli and Mcmurtrie, 2016), which accounts for the

relation of components to each other as the text unfolds, or as it is moved through by interactants (Ravelli and Heberle 2016, 527; emphasis added)

The systemic functional relations among these different components are essential. Bateman (2014) has considered such intersemiosis, with a focus on the text and image relationship, explaining how the text can either paraphrase/elaborate/explain/expand or contrast/reduce the image, potentially disambiguating and specifying its meaning. Bateman also considered the possible developments of the Rhetoric Structure Theory, which focuses on communicative effectiveness, at a multimodal level (2014, 213-220). Furthermore, in the same vein as Kress (2010), Bateman and Wildfeuer (2014, 3) illustrate how "there are many more semiotic modes than are generally discussed in the literature," according to what the communities have chosen to use as modes to satisfy their socially determined representational needs (see also Kennedy et al. 2016). In more detail, "semiotic modes therefore may grow whenever a community of users puts work into their use and the material employed is sufficiently manipulable to show the traces necessary for revealing that 'choices' between semiotically-charged alternatives have been made" (Bateman and Wildfeuer 2014, 3).

The NMAAHC museum-text is a strong instantiation of such notions, since the distinctive semiotic choices made for its realization meet the longstanding need of the African American community seeking recognition and representation. It should also be mentioned that the dynamic relation between the architectonic organization of the spaces and the navigation paths available to the museumgoers greatly contributes to conveying the NMAACH's multifaceted messages, by helping them realize how essential their individual/family stories were, to understanding (and occasionally demystifying) the narrative of African American history and cultural heritage.

Observational data[6]

The NMAACH's distinctive architectural framing

Museums can be conveniently defined as spatial texts, and their architectures can significantly contribute to conveying meaning, as in the case of the NMAAHC. Here, the visit begins from the museum's underground levels, i.e. the darkly-lit history galleries, where (in the Slavery and Freedom exhibition – three levels underground) the exhibits include the remains of the São José, a Portuguese slave ship that sank off the coast of South Africa, a narrow South Carolina slave cabin, a 16.5-foot cotton tower, and some shackles so minuscule they could only have been used for children. The emotional effect of documenting and displaying the nation's racial history, with the brutal realities of the slave trade and exploitation, in a confined space can be strong. Indeed, visitors are not only confronted with a distant past but with the long-lasting and persistent traces of that shameful past, as exhibits such as Emmett Till's casket[7] put to the fore (in the exhibition "Defending Freedom, Defining Freedom: Era of Segregation 1876-1968").

Then, from these dark periods, they move to the brighter days of African Americans' (ongoing) empowerment, on display in the luminous upper galleries (Fig. 1).

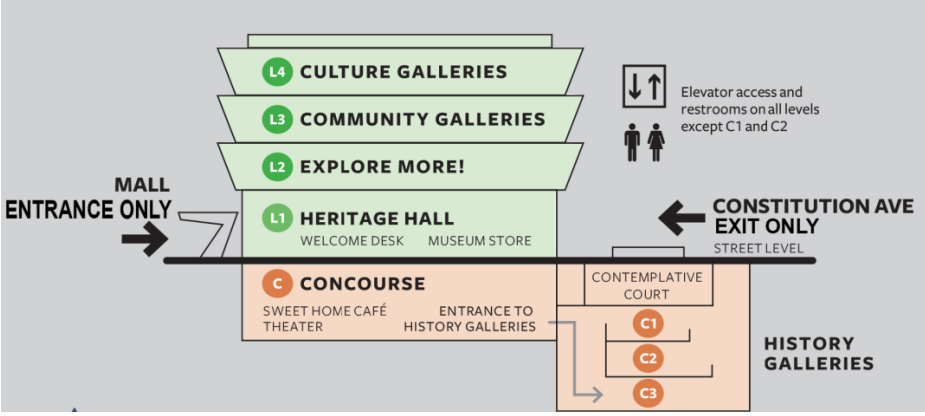

Fig. 1. A graded learning pathway for museumgoers.[8]

Concisely, African Americans are represented not only as victims but also as successful, ingenious human beings – as far as the historical circumstances permitted. Their success stories both as black pioneers and as modern achievers are multimodally celebrated in technologically enhanced environments, thus showing how optimism, hope and spirituality – the typical US values – have defined African American culture as well.

The defining feature of the NMAAHC is the synergy of its distinctive architecture (Fig. 2 and 3) and the exhibition of artefacts as well as the display of digital, filmic and interactive resources along the carefully arranged itinerary, which the museumgoers follow.

Fig. 2. The NMAAHC's three-tiered façade – the 'corona' shape.

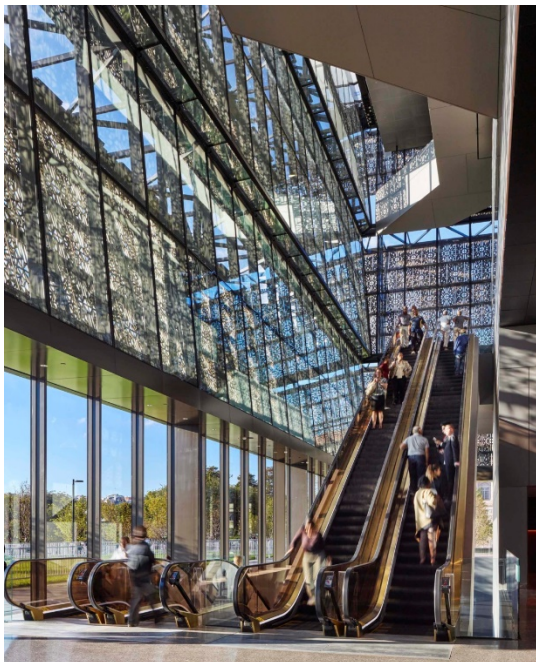

Fig. 3. The osmotic panels covering the building – a riff on the ironwork found in Charleston, Savannah and New Orleans that was largely built by slaves.

There was no neoclassical remaking for the NMAAHC building but, instead, a three-tiered, upward-reaching, inverted pyramid, inspired by the Yoruba caryatids, which modifies the traditional skyline of the National Mall, where the largely neoclassical architectural monuments – the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, the White House, the Federal Triangle buildings and the Monument Grounds – are situated.

As its Tanzanian-born British architect David Adjaye with his team (the Freelon Adjaye Bond/SmithGroup) describe it, the NMAAHC is

> arguably the nation's most prestigious new building. […] [The architectural] approach has been to establish both a meaningful relationship to this unique site as well as a *strong conceptual resonance with America's deep and longstanding African heritage*. The design rests on three cornerstones: the "corona" shape and form of the building; the extension of the building out into the landscape – the porch; and the bronze filigree envelope. […] More than half is below ground – with five storeys above. […] The entire building is wrapped in *an ornamental bronze lattice that is a historical reference to African American craftsmanship*. […] Inside the building, visitors will be guided on a *historical and emotional journey*, characterised by vast, column free spaces, a dramatic infusion of natural light and a diverse material palette comprising pre-cast concrete, timber and a glazed skin that sits within the bronze lattice. Below ground, the ambience is contemplative and monumental, achieved by the triple height history gallery and *symbolised by the memorial space* – the "oculus" – that brings light diffused by a cascade of water into the contemplative space from the Monument grounds. Moving upwards, *the views become pivotal*, as one circulates along the corona with unrivalled panoramas of the Mall, Federal Triangle buildings and Monument Grounds. (Adjaye Associates, n.d.; emphasis added)

The focus of the architectural approach is on both the US African heritage, with the entailed emotional-critical engagement of the visitors, and the osmosis between the interior and the

exterior. Not only are the museumgoers involved in an awareness-raising pedagogical journey, but the passers-by or the onlookers are also made aware of a differently iconic landmark.

To better gauge the innovative quality of the NMAAHC architecture, a comparison can be made with the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool (ISM), which opened on the other side of the Atlantic on 23 August 2007 – the bicentenary of the abolition of the British slave trade and the date of the annual Slavery Remembrance Day. The NMAAHC and the ISM have many common goals and concerns, and the ISM's location in Albert Dock, at the centre of a World Heritage site near the dry docks where 18th-century slave trading ships were accoutred, has a tangible iconic value.[9] Yet, the ISM galleries, which occupy the third floor of the Merseyside Maritime Museum, are situated within a traditionally British architectonic structure with a neoclassical portico, suggesting the greatness of the Empire, and this may appear an (involuntary) paradox (Abbamonte 2019).

Apparently, there is no semiotic continuity between the architectural dimensions and the contents of the ISM in Liverpool, whereas a strong intersemiotic connection can be found between the structure and the artefacts of the NMAACH in Washington.

Text-image relation in the NMAACH's galleries

Starting from the Slavery and Freedom gallery (1400-1877), after relatively brief (multimodal) references to the greatness of ancient African kings, the learning pathway starts in a small dark room – an environment that exerts some degree of control over the visitors' perceptive expectations. Maps, recorded commentaries and plenty of boards explain how the African people became a tradable commodity, illustrating the ghastly Middle Passage of slave trading ships (Fig. 4). To give an example that concerns the text-image relation, it is to be noticed that maps or ship plans would not be enough to narrate the slave passage; thus, words have the function of disambiguating and expanding their information values.

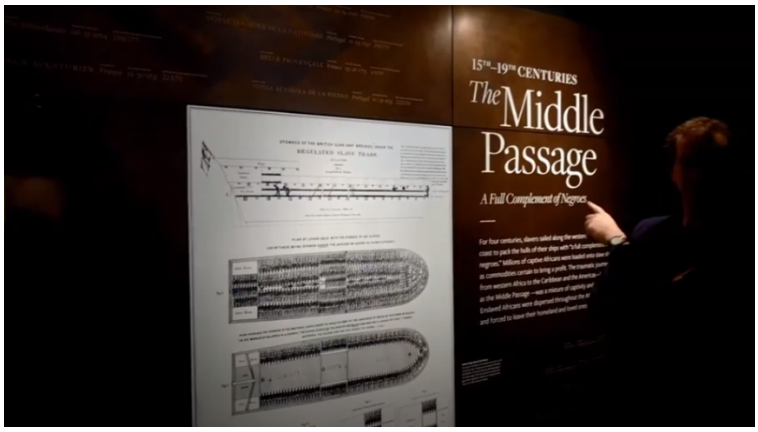

Fig. 4. Information and technical details.

Apart from the technical information about the arrangements in the ships and during the voyage, for the factual instruction of the audience, the evocative words of the Spanish Jesuit

priest and missionary Alonso de Sandoval (1576-1652) are shown, as well as other affectual comments (including "Ship Full of Sorrow"), thus eliciting in the readers/onlookers a conceptual process arising from narrative information (Fig. 5).

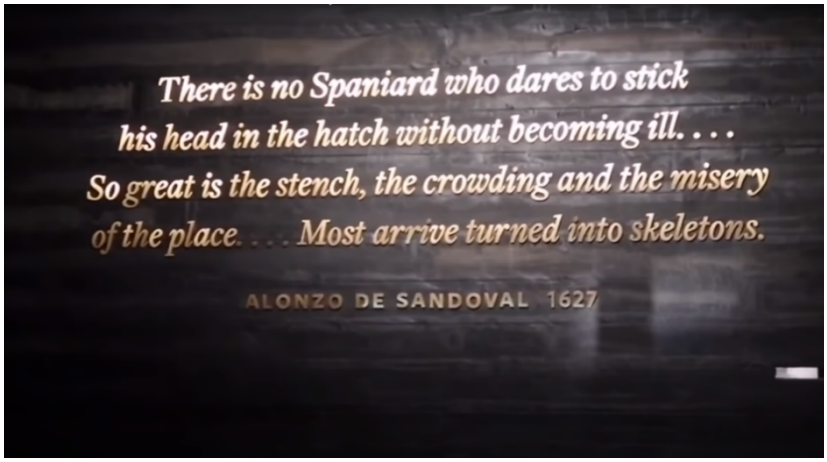

Fig. 5. Alonzo de Sandoval – a grim vision and olfactory perception.

Such notions, conveyed through affective phrases, are expanded upon in other boards, such as the board that titles "Ship full of Sorrow":

> Tens of thousands of slave ships traversed the Atlantic carrying human cargo to uncertain future […] Rather than endure the horrors of enslavement, many jumped into the shark-infested waters. An elderly enslaved man stated that "the iron entered into our souls," as he described the rattling shackles that ripped off the skin of captive Africans.

Shackles of different types are also exhibited, thus completing the educational itinerary with the *realia* (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Shackles – the salience of the material object.

This is an authentic relic from those years that usually attracts much attention and comments from visitors (some are recorded and accessible from the museums website – Visitor voices of NMAAHC), especially shackles for children. Shackles are among the objects that were included in the museum's digitization programme.

Narrative and conceptual process types

Both narrative process types, suggesting action through visible vectors in images and movies, and conceptual process types, eliciting reconsiderations of that complex chain of events, are entailed in the multimodal representations of the American Revolution (1765-1783). While this Revolution granted independence from the British and established in the US the first modern constitutional liberal democracy, grounded on the principle that "all men are created equal" (Fig. 7), slavery stayed on, legally, for nearly one century, since it was not abolished until 1865 (with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment), that is, 76 years after the US Constitution went into effect (in 1789). The effort of clearly representing this intrinsic paradox (i.e. slave owners sending their slaves to fight in their place) is seen through a variety of resources, whose richness cannot be conveyed here. Boards featuring both salient images (where black fighters are foregrounded, e.g. Figure 8) and easily readable texts are displayed, and a variety of films are shown, in an immersive virtual environment so that the apprehension of such notions can rely on a synergy of words (written or spoken), images and music.

Fig. 7. The Paradox of Liberty – imposing statues and high-sounding yet unfulfilled words.

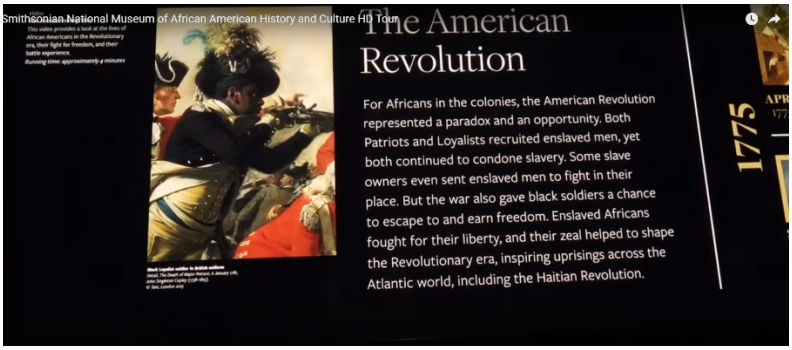

Fig. 8. A black fighter in the foreground.

Words are not circumscribed into discreet side labels as in many European art galleries and museums – typically displaying series of more or less famous, self-standing artistic masterpieces – but at the NMAAHC are often situated on large boards that either occupy salient positions, which give them high information value, or are in the most convenient place

for onlookers, e.g. under screens, in order to explain and conceptualize objects or to unravel and/or demystify the signification of images, films, maps, photos, statues and books. A black man sawing a log, for example (Fig. 9), does not in itself signify slavery; to resemiotize such an activity as unjustly forced labour requires a verbal level of communication.

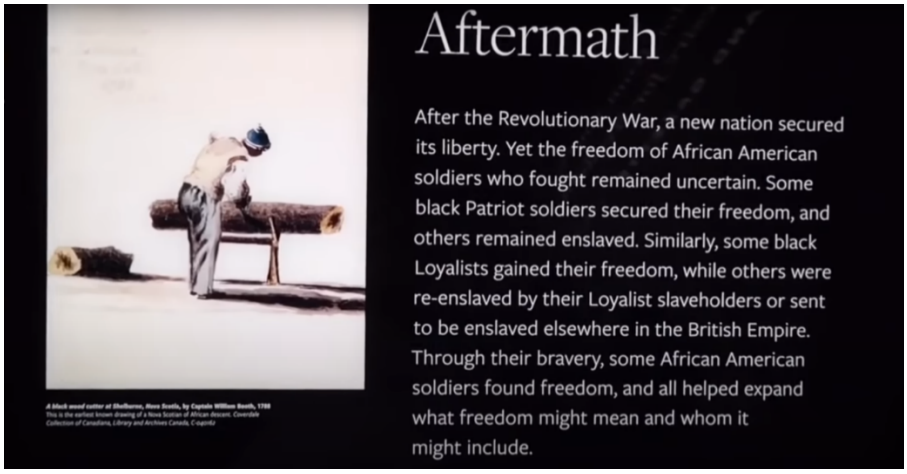

Fig. 9. Continuing servitude – a figure from behind, disambiguated by a concise commentary.

As visitors move through the museum text, it becomes increasingly apparent how the skills and labours of the slaves were (and indeed still are) visible everywhere in the US. Apart from cultivating the thriving cotton plantations, the slaves built railroads, canals, beautiful homes, furniture and fine objects, though they were never safe from violent punishment and other unmentionable treatments. Domestic slaves were subject to even more ill-treatment, as the panels' text (e.g. the central panel in Figure 10) makes clear, thus resemiotizing the information value of the fine embroidery and connoting the verb "to nurture" with sinister overtones – enslaved women were forced to care for their (violent) owners while missing their own families.

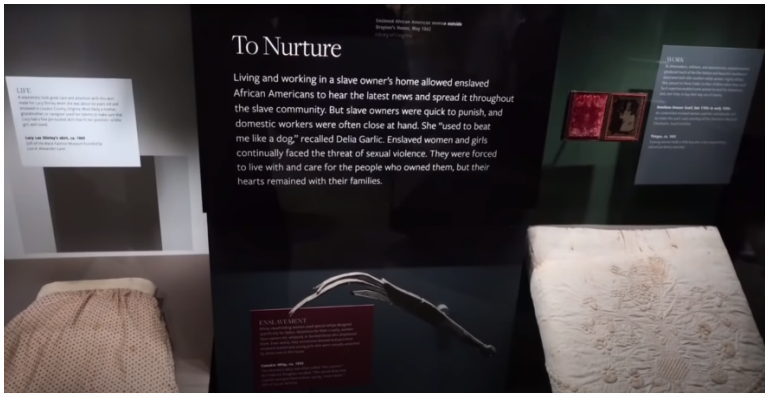

Fig. 10. Unwilling nurturers.

The long, tortuous and challenging path towards the abolition of slavery – through struggles, occasional compromises, rebellions, radical conventions and executions – is effectively illustrated and narrated, and its complexity repeatedly made clear, also by representing the stories of white abolitionists, such as the resilient hero John Brown. He wrote a constitution that protected African American rights and then waged a guerrilla war against slavery in Kansas, but, in 1859, he was captured and executed. The proclamation of emancipation did not mark the end of this dire story. Much attention in the NMAAHC is given to illustrating the role of African American soldiers, who occasionally brought the horrors of the slaves' condition to the public's attention (Fig. 11) and successfully struggled through prejudice and discrimination (Fig. 12–14), all the way up to their present condition. The onlookers can choose from more or less interactive access to such information.

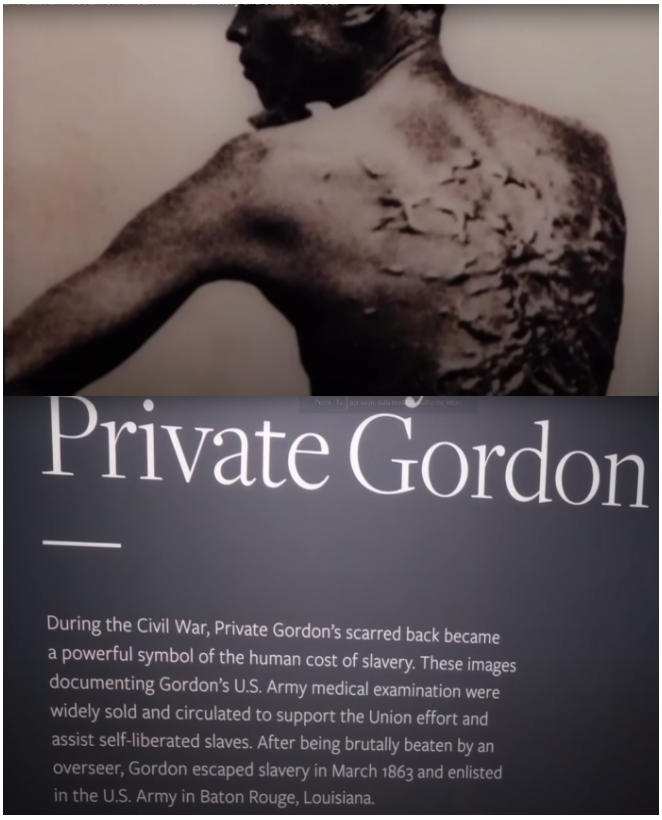

Fig. 11. The disturbing image – an icon in favour of the Union and its historical framing.

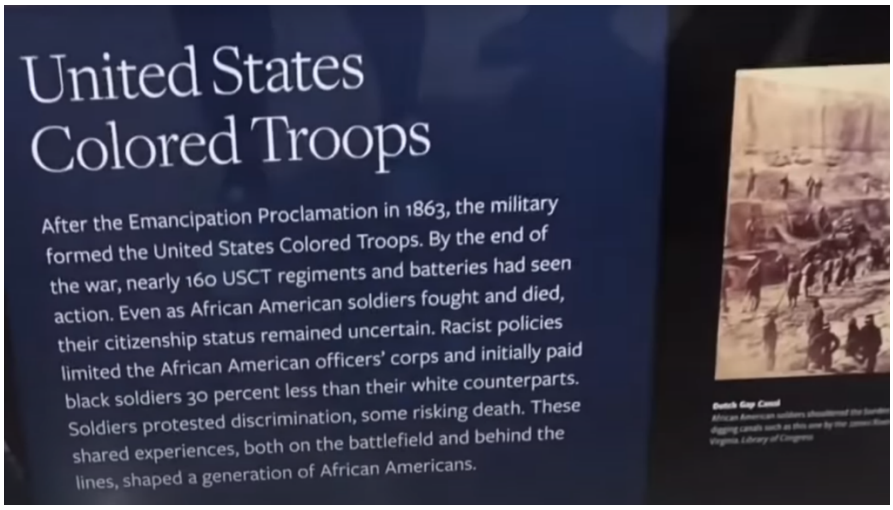

Fig. 12. History made self-evident by juxtaposing words and pictures.

Fig. 13. A comprehensive medal table for lovers of detail.

Fig. 14. Recent attainments, concisely explained.

The shaping of places

The learning pathway unfolds through multimedia narratives and representations, including the reconstruction of places and the inclusion of big objects, such as an 1853 log cabin (Fig. 15),

since the space and loci can shape and/or be shaped by identities to varying extents. On display from the era of segregation (1876-1968), there is an authentic railway carriage (Fig. 16) and, among many other things, a car with an interactive keyboard where the visitors can follow the itineraries of the Green Book for black travellers (Fig. 17) in that long and challenging century. From later years, a prison toilet is exhibited (Fig. 18) as a reminder of the many possible aspects of the loss of freedom due to lack of opportunities.

Fig. 15. Cabin from Point of Pines Plantation in Charleston County, South Carolina (1853).

Fig. 16. The battle over segregated transportation – recounted in brief – and the real thing, which visitors can enter.

Fig. 17. Follow the Green Book for black travellers.

Fig. 18. Slavery by another name – a toilet from Alabama state prison.

The way out of segregation has been (is?) far from simple, and African American settlements were established across the US with varying degrees of success to escape from the repression of the Jim Crow laws and mindset. Gradually and painfully, African Americans claimed their dignity and freedom, as the visitors can learn both from the original artefacts, ranging from all-too-clear notice boards for 'Colored Section' to Ku Klux Klan costumes (19), with their accompanying verbal commentaries and through a variety of interactive videos and devices.

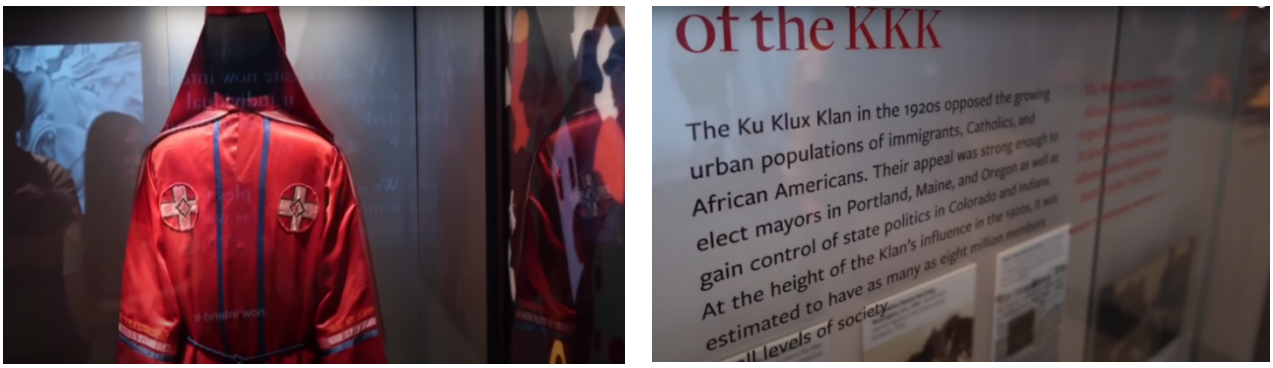

Fig. 19. A KKK robe on display and the covert organization unveiled.

Blurring the boundaries

Overall, the greater and more widespread the success of African Americans, the more kaleidoscopic and rich its representation becomes. In the gallery "A Changing America: 1968 and Beyond," which ranges from the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. to the second election of Barack Obama, large-scale graphics and original artefacts synergically represent the Black Arts Movement, hip hop, the Black Panthers, etc. up to Black Lives Matter, offering an impressive panoramic vista at the same time (Fig. 20).

From an edusemiotic perspective, the rise of the visitors from the oppression of the underground dark history galleries to the luminous above-ground community and culture galleries, where, circulating around the corona, they can enjoy the view of the surrounding monumental landscape, spatially conveys the idea of the rise of African Americans in US

society. The display of information boards and filmed images to represent the progress of the civil rights movement and the advancement of black influence in society in nearly every field is impressive.

Fig. 20. "A Changing America: 1968 and Beyond" – Syncretic billboards with the repetition of the colour orange as a guiding thread.

It should be noticed how the figure of Martin Luther King, Jr., though salient, does not polarise the scene (Fig. 21). This is in line with the pedagogic orientation that almost exclusive attention to major figures, such as Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, King Jr., Malcolm X or Barack Obama, cannot render the complexity of the advancement of black people. Although a number of artefacts and boards are dedicated to these leaders, the main emphasis is on the progress of African Americans as a collective effort. Furthermore, the inclusive ideological orientation of the NMAAHC also gives space to the (not numerous) white heroes who were engaged in this process, such as the aforementioned John Brown.

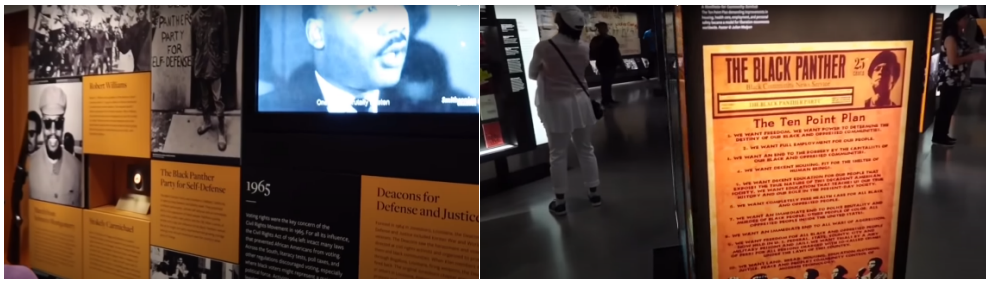

Fig. 21. Martin Luther King, Jr.; the Black Panther Decalogue.

Space is consistently dedicated to Oprah Winfrey (Fig. 22) in whom the positive identities of black achiever, successful woman and philanthropist are concentrated, as the juxtaposed text summarizes. The very influential talk show host, television producer, actress and author

is dubbed the “queen of all media.” She contributed $13 million to the building of the NMAAHC, and its theatre is named after her.

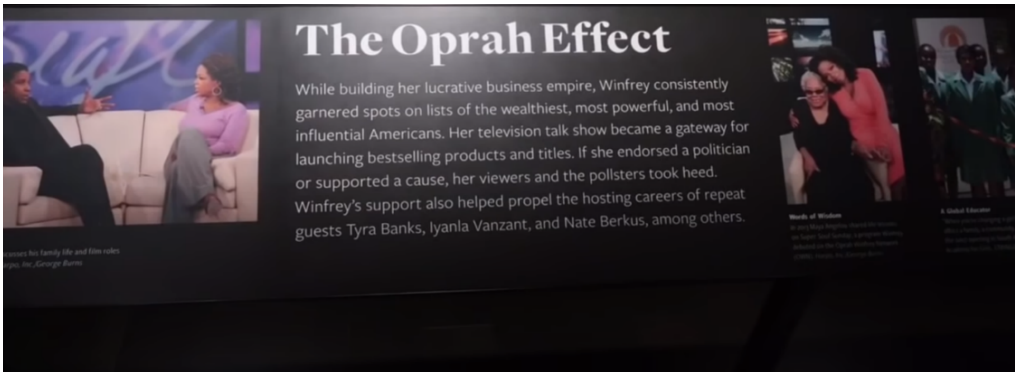

Fig. 22. The success of a black woman – media wizard and opinion-maker.

The “Oprah Effect” has also been palpable in politics, especially in the 2008 presidential race with her endorsement of Barack Obama, which was apparently worth about one million votes during the Democratic primaries. Among other things, a kind of synoptic summary, consisting of closely interrelated images and texts, was dedicated to Obama’s achievements (Fig. 23).

Fig. 23. A syncretic Wunderkammer.

Overall, the meaning-making process relies on a plurality of co-occurring information flows, thus blurring the boundary between genres and modes (photos, printed images, TV news, movie frames, scripts, written information, still images, music, spoken words) and drawing on a variety of semiotic resources at the same time (Fig. 24).

Fig. 24. Flowing images, immersive media context.

The very process of moving through these exhibitions entails a sequence of choices by the visitors in comprehending and interacting with complex meaning-making museum text, following their individual preferences for some modes (e.g. audio-oral) over others (e.g. visuals and reading) in that polymedia environment.

Discussion and concluding remarks

The NMAAHC's distinctive architecture, synergically with its exhibitions, identifies it as an innovative spatial text and a valued societal communicative space, where not only artefacts but also plenty of informative textual, filmic and digital resources are available in a technologically enhanced multimodal dimension. In the words of Ravelli and Heberle (2016, 5),

> […] members of any given culture respond to the built texts of their environment in myriad ways, be it positively, negatively or neutrally. Spatial texts are an inherent part of our social world, contributing to how we live, work and play. A spatial text, however, is more than a mere physical building itself and its architecture; it also includes its content […], as well as how it is used by people.

Indeed, in the communicative modes of this museum, with its skilful balancing of audio-visual and verbal substance, visitors play an active role. Among the variety of educational initiatives, such as *The Civil Rights History Project* or *In Slavery's Wake,* we find very successful interactional schemes, such as the *Memory Book* and the *Oral History Initiative*, or, in the well-developed section "Learn", *Talking about Race*. The latter are dedicated to collecting the memories and histories of the visitors, and are worthy of a specific discourse analysis (Abbamonte and Antinucci, forthcoming).

Essentially, the primary goal of the NMAAHC has not been to collect impressive artefacts per se, but rather to configure exhibitions/initiatives that could actively engage the

museumgoers in the collective past of the non-post-racial American nation. For example, Emmett Till's casket strongly evokes both the history of slavery, segregation, and repeated lynching as well as more current events deriving from that shameful legacy, such as the recent violent deaths of unarmed black males at the hands of police: Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Eric Garner, Akai Gurley, Freddie Gray, and George Floyd, together with other innocent black men, women, and children.[10] This sequence of dire events has aroused an increasingly widespread public engagement in collecting and spreading data, including through social media (Abbamonte 2018), and, as has been well documented in the news and in the literature,[11] in communities' reactions, which reached a climax in the Ferguson riots (2014). Iconic protest phrases, such as "I am Trayvon Martin," "Hands up, don't shoot," and "I can't breathe" have become very popular both as rallying cries and as memes. The protests, partly coordinated by the successful Black Lives Matter movement, are still ongoing in many forms, ranging from the removal of statues related to the history of slavery to college demonstrations, with a variety of political connotations. In the context of these still unsolved controversies and the challenging national conversation, the aim of the NMAAHC founders was to build a living museum where the visitors could recognise and/or represent and reframe their stories and identities, with a focus on resilience.

From an edusemiotic perspective, "Learning presupposes a re-shaping of one's phenomenal world, being a restructuring of complex meaning phenomena" (Olteanu, Kambouri and Stables 2016, 621). Indeed, the way visitors use the NMAAHC, both by gaining significant new insights from the exhibits and by reacting emotionally to them, amounts to a reshaping of their world to varying degrees and to feeling empowered to promote actions for change. Indeed, the museum's numerous initiatives[12] lay a special emphasis on the value of education, which African Americans were historically denied, such as the planned interactive virtual program *A Seat at The Table: The Triumphs and Challenges of Black Education* (4 February 2022). The issues at stake are both the contribution of the founders of historically black colleges or universities during the Reconstruction era and the lingering of the dreadful legacy of the segregated schools, which still resonates in the present condition of black-majority schools.

Overall, we can notice how the museum's well-developed interactive dimension, which effectively engages the national audience (in 2017, for example, about 40,000 visitors recorded video speeches), reveals a changing societal attitude in the US. It is reasonable to expect that the NMAAHC, with its unique synthesis of iconic location, artistic architectural structure, thematic modulation of inner spaces, semiotically-charged contents/artefacts and engaged users, will offer a remarkable contribution to promoting a shared/-able awareness of a number of challenging issues and reasons why talking about race still matters.

Notes

[1] Although the authors conceived the paper together, Lucia Abbamonte is mainly responsible for sections 1 and 4 and Raffaella Antinucci for sections 2 and 3.

[2] From the speech of John Lewis (a former leader of the Civil Rights Movement and US representative), at the opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

[3] The NMAAHC has made a video of the ceremony available at https://nmaahc.si.edu/dedication/video (also retrievable through YouTube). See also, among other sources, Contrera (2016).

[4] "We perceive the environment as, mainly, consisting of objects. What there 'is' is a question addressed by ontology that accounts for the so-called 'furniture of the universe'" (Semetski 2018, 124).

[5] "Humans and animals alike only know the mind-independent *things* of their environment through attributing meaning and value to them: by bringing them within their species specific phenomenal world or Umwelt" (Olteanu and Campbell 2018, 245-246).

[6] In our research domain, there is an increasing tendency to adopt the language of 'hard sciences.' Hence, it could be useful to specify that our data are observational rather than experimental, since in our studies and research we have no control over the variables, i.e. we collect data and make inferences, but we do not change the independent variable to check how this affects the dependent variable unless, for example, we do an experiment in second language acquisition using a control group.

[7] The 14-year-old African American boy from Chicago who was brutally murdered for whistling at a white woman in Mississippi in 1955.

[8] From https://nmaahc.si.edu/visit/maps. Unless otherwise specified, the NMAAHC's website is the source for the images used in this paper. Given its strong socio-educational orientation, the museum generally adopts an open access policy. This is declared, for example, on its Open Access page: "Welcome to Smithsonian Open Access, where you can download, share, and reuse millions of the Smithsonian's images – right now, without asking. With new platforms and tools, you have easier access to more than 3 million 2D and 3D digital items from our collections – with many more to come. This includes images and data from across the Smithsonian's 19 museums, nine research centers, libraries, archives, and the National Zoo" (https://www.si.edu/OpenAccess. Accessed November 20, 2020).

[9] Images of the neoclassical building where the International Slavery Museum is located (at the 3rd floor of Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool) are retrievable at https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/international-slavery-museum. Accessed November 20, 2020.

[10] Among the plurality of sources an updated list of these dire events can be found at https://www.reneeater.com/on-monuments-blog/tag/list+of+unarmed+black+people+killed+by+police. Accessed November 20, 2020.

[11] A concise overview of the phenomenon can be retrieved at https://www.bmj.com/company/newsroom/fatal-police-shootings-of-unarmed-black-people-in-us-more-than-3-times-as-high-as-in-whites/ (Accessed November 20, 2020). It is worth noticing, however, that collecting the data is no easy feat, nor free from controversy.

[12] See https://nmaahc.si.edu/all-events. Accessed November 20, 2020.

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Palestine and the figure of the Palestinian in Lebanese diaspora literature

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ABSTRACT

Research into the field of diaspora literature has become circumscribed by a focus on several recurring elements, namely ideas about home, the homeland, the nation and identity formation. This article, however, suggests that diaspora scholarship looks beyond these elements to gain a broader appreciation of what also is of intrinsic significance to diaspora writing. To illustrate this, it takes the example of the Lebanese diaspora novel and employs Caroline Levine's concept of 'form' to highlight that Palestine, often treated as significant to this fiction in terms of historical context, is intrinsic to Lebanese migrant literature. Palestine orders and shapes Lebanese diaspora writing in pivotal ways, shedding light on how transformations of character, political issues and the impact of authors' diasporic experiences on the narratives they craft are best understood through a considered investigation of Palestine's fundamental forming role in this literature. In doing so, this paper addresses this issue's broader concern with violent aftermaths, in this case the Palestinian Nakba and the Nakba's continued impact on Palestinians in Lebanon. It aims to challenge the demonisation of Palestinian exiles by examining the ways Lebanese diaspora writers deploy fiction to both revise the Lebanese perception of Palestinian refugees and acknowledge the violence that Palestinians have endured in Lebanon.

Keywords

Diaspora literature, form/formalism, Caroline Levine, Lebanon, Nakba, Palestine

According to Hyungji Park, "diaspora literature is not easy to define or identify" because its "boundaries" are "contestable, subjective and downright fuzzy" (2015, 155). As a result, studies of this fiction have relied on a core set of elements to define this fictional field, principally the home or homeland, and the impact of migration and displacement on the formation of characters' identities. Other closely related elements include mobility, the development of a diasporic "state of mind" to fashion homes that are portable (Mishra 2006, 5-17), and the nostalgia for a past home (Park 2015, 157). Diaspora writing is therefore circumscribed by a limited number of elements, which is further complicated by its close relationship with postcolonial fiction. Taking these observations of difficulty as a point of departure, the following article shifts the focus from attempting to define diaspora fiction to examining it as a form of writing that shapes and determines our engagement with it. It uses Caroline Levine's work on form as a theoretical framework to examine the implications of this formalism on definitions of diaspora literature. Importantly, its attentive reading of Lebanese diaspora writing finds that

Palestine is indispensable to understanding this fictional world, not solely because it reflects the social or political aspects of Lebanese-Palestinian history but also because it influences the very form of this diaspora literature.[1] By using a mode of reading influenced by Levine, the paper addresses the special issue's broader concern with violent aftermaths, which here involves the displacement of Palestinians in the 1948 Nakba, and the Nakba's continued tragic impact in a significant location of Palestinian exile, that of Lebanon. It also aims to challenge the toxic erasure and demonisation of Palestinian exiles by examining the ways Lebanese diaspora writers deploy fiction as an avenue to radically revise the historical treatment of Palestinians and how the Lebanese view their Palestinian refugee population.

The influence of Palestine on Lebanese migrant writing can be traced to its significance for Lebanese authors in Lebanon, especially those writing during and after the country's protracted civil war (1975-1990). In his study of the literary style of Lebanese civil war fiction, Norman Saadi Nikro writes it was "resistance movements associated with Palestinian and socialist parties" that shaped the identity and "self-understanding" of Lebanese writers like Elias Khoury, Mai Ghoussoub and Rashid al-Daif (2012, 5). These authors were not only formally affiliated with pro-Palestinian political movements in Lebanon, but in many cases, they crafted narratives that centralised the plight of Palestinians and showcased their commitment to and sometimes "disillusion with the ideological imperatives of […] such [political] attachments" (Nikro 2012, 5). The leftist politics of these writers was tied closely to the Palestinian cause and contrasted sharply with the treatment of Lebanon's Palestinian refugee population in the 1970s, 1980s and beyond. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon number about 450000 and had resided there since the first Palestinian exodus in 1948, with more refugees arriving after the 1967 Six-Day War when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Lebanon's political groups, defined along sectarian lines, rarely agree on much, but on the issue of granting Palestinian citizenship, what is known as *tawtin*, the strong consensus is that Palestinians should not be naturalised. *Tawtin* is one example that reflects the degree of discrimination that Palestinians endure in Lebanon, who, despite having lived there for several decades, are constantly reminded they are not welcome by being refused naturalisation (Kassir 2003, 97).[2] The most significant and tragic highpoint of this discrimination is the September 1982 Sabra, and Shatila massacre where Maronite Christian Lebanese militiamen, aided by the Israeli Defence Forces, brutally killed approximately two thousand Palestinian civilians.[3] The Lebanese have consistently failed to address this massacre, either as a single event or within the context of the broader prejudice Palestinians face in Lebanon (Worth 2010; Lamb 2008).

Like Al-Daif and Ghoussoub, the artists and writers who express their commitment to the Palestinian cause or use their works to convey their alternative politics, certainly hold a minority opinion within Lebanon. However, despite their alignment with Palestinians, these Lebanese

writers have not necessarily prioritised the Palestinian issue in their texts in the same way or to the degree that Lebanon's migrant or diaspora authors have. Part of the reason for this emphasis from the latter body of writers is that the migration and displacement they have endured in some ways approximate the experiences of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. This is not to imply that the experiences are identical; after all, as Nora Stel notes in a similar context, one group is a refugee population with substantially less economic, political and social leverage, while the other is a diasporic community that is not necessarily defined by forced migration or refugee status (2013, 2). However, both groups nonetheless share a sense of loss, a key element of displacement. This shared sense of loss is reflected in the persistent engagement with Palestine found in Lebanese diaspora fiction, as well as the repeated inclusion of Palestinian characters who play a vital role in the development of the narratives.

Beyond this frequency, as Ghassan Hage's research reveals, there appears to be a further distinct significance of Palestine for the Lebanese diaspora. As Hage explains:

> I asked between twenty and thirty Lebanese-born Muslims in France, England, Australia and the USA one […] question […] You are often complaining that your government [in the host state] doesn't do enough to counter anti-Muslim stereotypes and discrimination, and that your government is too pro-Israeli. If […] the government says to you: "[…] either I stop anti-Muslim racism or I stop being pro-Israeli, which one would you choose?" From the 100 or so people I asked, only […] eight […] said that stopping local anti-Muslim racism is more important. (2015, 92)

In other words, Hage's question poses a choice between stemming the discrimination that impacts Lebanese migrants or addressing the loss of Palestine and the forced migration of its people. While the latter is devoid of direct hardships for Lebanese migrants, it is emotionally wounding. That Hage's respondents overwhelmingly elect the latter illustrates Palestine's affective power for Lebanese migrants.

This significance of Palestine to the Lebanese diaspora is imprinted onto the Lebanese diasporic literary field, evident in the way it explores questions of displacement and dispersal through and alongside the issue of Palestine. Lebanese migrant writers craft their diaspora narratives often by mobilising the loss of Palestine or the plight of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and elsewhere, even when the novel is primarily concerned with, for instance, the Lebanese civil war or Lebanese migrant characters. Existing studies of Lebanese diaspora writing have not necessarily overlooked the presence of Palestine and Palestinian characters, but none have carefully examined how Palestine has shaped this literary mode of writing. What these studies have focused on, instead, when they have paid at most passing attention to the Palestinian presence, is Palestine's contextual relevance. In other words, literary critics have understood fictional engagement with Palestine primarily as an index of the social world or a representation of the political history and context that surrounds Lebanese and Palestinian relations.[4] For instance, in Tony Hanania's *Unreal City* (1999), the inclusion of the Palestinian

refugee character Layla is noted by literary critics in terms of her complicated romantic relationship with the unnamed male Lebanese protagonist, who, like Lebanon, betrays this Palestinian refugee by refusing to fulfil his promise, year after year, to remove Layla from the Shatila camp and take her to the UK where he resides. She in turn betrays both the protagonist and, importantly, her Palestinian community by becoming the lover of a Maronite militia leader, the same militia that committed the violence in the camp. Layla thus reflects how Lebanon and the Lebanese failed the Palestinians to both protect and accommodate them, especially in reference to the Sabra and Shatila massacre.

While not inaccurate, what is marginalised in this sort of assessment is how the relationship between Layla, a discarded and uncared for Palestinian refugee, and the protagonist shapes the transformation of his character. Nor does it reveal the influence of the Palestinian issue on the guilt the protagonist exhibits for abandoning Layla and escaping the war and the testimonial form of the novel. Literary analysis of this novel and the general examination of Lebanese diaspora writing have been driven by those elements outlined earlier that are seen to underpin diaspora fiction. The motif of the home is one of those elements, which in the case of Hanania's novel is transposed onto Beirut, the protagonist's once cosmopolitan and chic home city that is dramatically altered in the novel's present into a war riddled hell-scape. Identity is another element that is probed in relation to *Unreal City*, especially as the protagonist transforms from an urbane, western-educated artist who is highly mobile to a jihadi and a killer. The result of such an analysis is that this novel, like much Lebanese diaspora literature, has been critically assessed in a rather formulaic manner or approached as a particular *form* of writing that can only be read in terms of a set of pre-determined elements or characteristics. Such a limiting practice has been identified by Caroline Levine in her work on form in literature, which explains "form" as "*an arrangement of elements – an ordering, patterning, or shaping*" (emphasis in the original text). The "work of form" is "to make order" or to make sense of narrative structures through the elements or issues that recur within literary texts (Levine 2015, 3-4).

As I have suggested, making sense of narrative structures has not, in the case of Lebanese diaspora literature, included a considered investigation of the place of Palestine. However, by recognising that the incorporation of Palestine does not simply reference 'real world' political or historical events, such as the role of the Lebanese state in perpetuating Palestinian suffering, the vexed relationship between Lebanese and Palestinian refugees and the horror of Sabra and Shatila, should trouble existing, formulaic approaches. In this mode of reading, Palestine is not simply of extra-textual significance but is also intrinsic to the literary text. While it may seem contradictory, given the definition of form quoted above from Levine, her notion of formalism remains helpful because it proposes a more capacious framework for apprehending the (formal) influence of Palestine in this literature. This can be seen in form's

varied uses and applications. For instance, form not only reflects how narratives are shaped and ordered but also exposes the limits of each form. As Levine suggests, "a specific form [like a sonnet or a novel] can be put to uses in unexpected ways that expand our general sense of that form's" capacities (2015, 6).

Taking this approach, focusing on the unobserved significance of Palestine in Lebanese diaspora fiction will shift analysis of this literature's engagement with Palestine as driven by external political or historical contexts to one where Palestine is considered as intrinsic to a text in terms of its narrative shape and the structure of its language. Doing so will shed light on the unobserved potential contributions of this fiction that operate at two levels. The first relates to the transformation of certain characters and the capacity of this literature to mediate or challenge aspects of Lebanese political culture, which has failed to address its violence against Palestinian refugees. The second involves a recognition of the displacement that shapes the fiction of these writers, highlighting the particular "forming" capacities of these authors as diasporic subjects.

The literary relationship between Palestine and Lebanon

As noted, Palestine and Lebanon share a particular history complicated by the presence of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, to which the Lebanese state refuses to extend citizenship. For Palestinians, their experience in Lebanon has been a particularly tragic one, exemplified by the violence of Sabra and Shatila. This history, the nature of the relationship between the Lebaneses and Palestinians, and the violence of the 1982 massacres are amply narrated in novels set during Lebanon's civil war by many of its diaspora writers, notably the award-winning *De Niro's Game* (2006) by Rawi Hage. What is distinctive about this text is that it engages explicitly with the treatment of Palestine by Lebanese Maronite Christians. In doing so, the novel highlights that Palestine is not an extrinsic element drawn in by the author narrating a series of events that must contend with Palestine, but that Palestine is a key element in the novel in terms of character development and in relation to how the presence of Palestine exposes the weak foundations on which the Maronite imagined identity is built.

De Niro's Game, set during Lebanon's civil war in the Christian enclave of East Beirut in the early 1980s, has been critically lauded for its portrayal of the way war seeps into people's daily lives, impacting every aspect of it from the dangerous exercise of dodging the bombs that explode across the city to maintaining intimate relationships. The novel's particular focus on its two male protagonists – the childhood friends Bassam Al-Abyad and George Al-Faransawi – and how they negotiate their friendship in the distorting and pressurised war environment that surrounds them is a key way that this is explored. Their relationship is initially defined by shared youthful lawlessness – "War is for thugs ... like us, with guns under our bellies, and stolen gas in our tanks" – but the straining effects of the war and the Maronite Christian political

culture that surrounds them soon damage their strong friendship (Hage 2006, 13). This is reflected as Bassam begins to register a strong desire to escape Lebanon and the conformist Christian milieu of East Beirut, while George argues that, like himself, Bassam should stay to fight in the local Christian militia. Bassam openly rejects the Christian culture of the city typified in his declaration to a shocked neighbour that "God is dead" (98). Conversely, George is eager to remain precisely to defend the Maronite enclave. He even attempts to recruit Bassam into the militia, arguing, "we are alone in this war, and our people [the Maronite Christians] are being massacred every day. We will unite with the devil to save our land. How are we to make the … Palestinians leave?" Despite George's pleas, Bassam remains resolute in his mission – "I am fleeing and leaving this land to its devils" (78).

George reflects on the need to defend Maronite culture and identity at various points in the novel, not only because his community is under attack but also because Maronite culture is unique to the Middle East region. When he tells Bassam the "whole *ummah* [Muslim community] is against us" he casts the Maronites as completely 'other' to or outside the Muslims that surround them (Hage 2006, 123). While it is true that Maronite Christians are not Muslims, there is an added dimension to George's comment that hints at the exclusive identity that Maronites believe they espouse. Numerous scholars who both uphold this idea of a distinct Maronite identity and culture, like Matti Moosa (1986) and Walid Phares (1995), as well as those who question it, such as Ghassan Hage (1996), Sami Ofeish and Sabah Ghandour (2002), argue that Lebanon's Maronite Christians have long defined themselves, unlike their Muslim counterparts, by rejecting an Arab identity. The case for the Maronite's non-Arab status has been used mainly to safeguard Maronite existence as a distinct community against what is perceived to be Arab-Muslim aggression.[5] This is why Maronite political elites fiercely agitated the French imperial powers for a separate Lebanese state. When the state was created in 1923, it contained a sizable Muslim population that the Maronites could not ignore. In negotiating with Muslim leaders in the 1940s about what would constitute Lebanon's post-independence national character, the Christian political elites insisted that the country would be neither Eastern nor Western in orientation and would only retain an 'Arab face'. It was in this environment of Maronite anxiety regarding their own survival that the Palestinians entered Lebanon. They became the focal point of the threat from the Maronite perspective not just in 1948 when they arrived in Lebanon as refugees, but also later with their militaristic presence in the 1970s in their war against Israel. George registers this anxiety when he insists to Bassam that the Palestinians have set up a state-within-a-state in Lebanon, claiming "There are fucking black Somalis fighting with those Palestinians" (Hage 2006, 123).

As suggested earlier, Bassam does not share George's views on the matter of protecting the Maronites or endorse that they are under siege from the Palestinians and an array of other Muslims. There are various scenes where Bassam's inner thoughts reflect his own implicit

questioning of Maronite culture. This is made clear in the novel's opening sequence as Bassam observes a particularly dangerous burst of violence from his bedroom. Rather than describe the falling bombs, Bassam fixes his gaze on the stray "Christian cats walk[ing] the narrow streets nonchalantly, never crossing themselves or kneeling for black-dressed priests" (Hage 2006, 12). By noting the Christian cats' refusal to maintain the very Christian-like attributes of kneeling and crossing, Bassam ridicules the city's Maronite residents for their religiously supplicant behaviour. This strong criticism of Lebanon's Christian culture is further reinforced when Bassam recalls how his communist uncle, Naeem, had schooled him during his childhood that Palestinians were not enemies to be pushed out of Lebanon by the Christians, and ultimately that "there was no God [as] God is man's invention" (45).

Where this criticism is most strongly pronounced and reaches its fullest expression of undermining Maronite culture is through the novel's engagement with Palestine, and in particular in the scene where George recounts to Bassam in horrific detail the brutal murder of many refugee Palestinians. His account, one of the darkest in Lebanese civil war literature, is highly troubling as it depicts the tortured satisfaction George experienced while in the camp. He narrates this experience to Bassam with a combination of clipped sentences – "People were shot at random. Entire families killed at dinner tables. Cadavers in their night-clothes, throats slit; axes used, hands separated from bodies, women cut in half" (Hage 2006, 174-5) – and drawn-out prose –

> We rounded up more men against a wall, women and children against another wall. We shot all the men first. The women and children wailed, and we changed magazines and them as well. It was their cries that made me shoot them. I hate kids' cries. I never cry; have you ever seen me cry? The rest who came after, when they saw the corpses on the floor, they panicked. Some pissed their pants. I saw three fleeing from the back; we chased them in the narrow alleys. I became separated from the others, and I lost everyone. (177)

It is notable throughout George's account that the only people he describes as being killed, the women, children and men, are civilians. If the aim of this Christian militia is to protect the Maronite community from annihilation, the details of George's account beg the question of how the militia is fulfilling this by targeting so many unarmed refugees. In light of this, the massacres must be seen as, at best, an act of projected protection against a perceived and overestimated threat. The accelerated syntax and lengthy prose that capture George's tormented excitement highlight the notable lack of evidence that the camp residents posed a threat to the Maronites, their existence in Lebanon or their culture. This illustrates that the carnage George describes is no longer just a fictional rendering of a particular historical event but is subsumed into the fraught question of Maronite identity politics through the narrative process crafted by Hage.

Significantly, Hage's novel illustrates, most clearly, its undermining of Maronite culture through the Maronite militia's encounter with the Palestinians. If we were to understand the

presence of Palestine in these texts as mere "reflections or expressions of prior social [or political] … forms" (Levine 2015, 122) we would overlook the degree to which Palestine shapes our perception of these novels. Recognising the 'intrinsic' presence and forming significance of Palestine in these texts is important because it enhances the expected or formulaic ways that Lebanese diaspora fiction is appraised. For Hage, this means the troubled and tragic place of Palestine in relation to Lebanon is not simply represented by the novels but integrally shapes the formation of characters and determines how a narrative can explore the flawed foundations on which Lebanese Maronite culture is built.

The diasporic lives of authors: Lebanese migrant writers and Palestine

The intrinsic significance of Palestine to Lebanese diaspora narratives has further implications alongside those discussed above. It helps us to understand how this mode of writing is shaped by the diasporic sensibility of the authors. Levine's understanding of social and literary form is again helpful as it invites a reframing of the influence of Palestine for displaced authors in their writing process. As Levine states, "Literary forms and social formations are equally real in their capacity to organise materials, and equally *un*real in being artificial, contingent constraints" (Levine 2015, 14). In light of the equal weight Levine gives to literary and social forms, the question "how does Palestine shape characters or critique fundamental ideas about Maronite culture?" addressed above, can be extended to "how does Palestine illuminate the writerly sensibility of authors whose lives have been altered or even determined by migration and border transgression?"

Part of the important work done by several diaspora researchers has been to identify particular themes or issues that diaspora fiction engages and renders into narrative form. According to Ato Quayson, "genealogical accounting," that is "stories of […] 'how-we-got-here'" which narrate a family or community's migration through the lens of one or a few key characters, is distinctive of diaspora literature (Quayson 2013, 151). Genealogical accounting is a narrative or storytelling device and, as Quayson intimates, informs the diasporic writerly disposition. In other words, the migrant writer's work is shaped or formed by their experiences of displacement, so that, to continue with Quayson's example, a diasporic novel is structured by narratives of journeys that account for "how-we-got-to-here" (151). In this part, I will extend Quayson's contribution and apply it to Lebanese diaspora fiction, shedding light on how writers' engagement with Palestine is determined by their experiences of displacement and how Palestine, in turn, shapes their narratives of dispersal or dislocation. *Ports of Call* (1999) by Amin Maalouf highlights the interplay between the social world of the author and the literary text to expose alternate models of coexistence within national borders.

The establishment of geographical borders and the creation of states underpin the tragic separation of the central characters in *Ports of Call*, the married couple Ossyane Ketabdar and

Clara Emden, in 1948. As the text is narrated from Ossyane's perspective, in 1976, looking back on the events that led to the partition of Palestine and his separation from Clara, readers are most privy to his experience of exile from his wife, daughter and their family home in Haifa, Palestine. Significantly, his narrative of exile is immediately bound up with the changes taking place in the region in the decade of the 1940s that lead to Clara and Ossyane's separation, as well as the regional transformations of previous decades beginning with the decline of the Ottoman Empire in 1919 and the interwar period in Europe up to World War II. These historical events form the backdrop to the novel's sustained investigation of concepts like the homeland and the nation. Through his narrative, Ossyane conveys that he possesses rather unorthodox understandings of these concepts, informed by the author's views.

Maalouf is mainly known for his fiction, but he has also written a memoir, *Origins* (2008), and an extended essay, *On Identity* (2000), where he outlines elements of his particular diasporic sensibility. Two key interrelated elements are his rejection of roots and his scepticism of the link between national identity and territory. Regarding roots, Maalouf expresses his apparent dislike of them because of their imprisoning nature: "Roots burrow into the ground […] they hold their trees in captivity […] Trees need their roots for nourishment […] Men do not" (Maalouf 2008). For "men," it is roads that matter: "roads hold our promises, bear our weight," and afford mobility. He attributes his preference for routes to his "nomadic clan," specifically his paternal family, whose home is "as wide as the world" (2008). Maalouf's preference for routes challenges one of the key pillars of orthodox diaspora thinking, which posits "roots" or places of origin as central and a return to them as the organising principle of all dispersed communities.[6] His dismissal of roots and his embrace of a "nomadic" and figurative deterritorialised existence underly his challenge to the assumption of a supposed fundamental relationship that ties national identity to the territory. This is best demonstrated by Maalouf in his forceful response of "Both!" each time he is asked, after having migrated to France in 1976, whether he feels more French or more Lebanese (Maalouf 2000, 3). Having always felt "poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions" (3), Maalouf's response is a more succinct version of what Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin refer to as the "lesson" of diaspora, "namely that peoples and lands are not naturally and organically connected" (1993, 723).

Where these sentiments are most effectively displayed in *Ports of Call* is in Maalouf's indirect, though no less powerful, way of exposing the fallacy of the separation of Palestinians and Jews and instead modelling the possibility, or the sole remaining viability, of a single bi-national state. In other words, the novel's approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict is informed, or ordered and structured, by the author's diasporic acceptance of routes and his disaggregation of nationalism and land. This diasporic outlook allows Maalouf to critique, in fiction and through narrative, the assumption that national identity can only be singular, and

must be fixed or tied to territory. Maalouf's protagonist makes clear that he rejects narrow or highly orthodox ideas regarding national identity, a rejection that is derived primarily from his peculiar familial circumstances:

> What I loathe [...] is racial hatred and discrimination. My father was Turkish, my mother Armenian, and if they were able to hold hands in the midst of the massacres [the Armenian genocide in WWI], it was because they were united by their rejection of that hatred. That is my inheritance. That is the place I come from. (60)

While this passage is an unequivocal statement against racism, it also stresses that Ossyane's origins, the place he comes from, are not bound by some physical place or a commitment to a national homeland. Place here is unanchored; it is a vantage point that encourages a kind of critical detachment from the potential conformism that being at home, or belonging to one's home nation, might provide. The dangers of taking "home […] for granted" are raised by Edward Said, where he urges us to "stand away from 'home' in order to look at it with an exile's detachment" lest its "underlying assumptions recede into dogma and orthodoxy" (Said 2002, 185).

The novel's attempts to model bi-national coexistence between Jews and Arabs is driven by its espousal of this kind of critical detachment. In terms of political activism, Ossyane's disavowal of partition sees him, a Muslim Armenian-Turk born and raised in Lebanon, and his wife Clara, an Austrian-Jew who relocated to Palestine after surviving the Holocaust, establish the Palestine Arab and Jewish United Workers Committee in the 1940s, an organisation dedicated to demonstrating that Arabs and Jews "should be on the same side, fighting" for a single state in Palestine (Maalouf 1999, 106). At a personal and intimate level, Ossyane and Clara's union models the possibility of cohabitation for these two communities. Together, they enact this possibility by developing a dialogic mode of communication that transcends self-representation and self-interest.[7] Rather than argue from their respective positions of Muslim and Jew, Arab and European, Ossyane and Clara's debates are framed by a kind of "moral elegance" where "Clara tried to understand even the Arabs' worst shortcomings, and to show no unjustified indulgence to the Jews, and I, with no prejudice for the Arabs, kept always in mind the persecutions that the Jews had endured" (130). The duality of conflict, of Palestinian versus Israeli, Arab versus European or Muslim versus Jew, is seen as vulgar and uncivilised by Ossyane:

> A few days ago, in Paris, I had occasion to hear a discussion on the radio between an Arab and a Jew, and I confess that I was shocked. The idea of staging a confrontation between two men, each speaking in the name of his own tribe, vying in the displays of bad faith and gratuitous cunning I find shocking and revolting. I find such duels vulgar, uncivilized, in bad taste [...] and inelegant. (130)

These "inelegant" debates, where each side speaks in the name of their "own tribe" enforces a model of segregation that stands in stark contrast to Clara and Ossyane's dialogic model.[8]

The resistance to partition displayed in this work of fiction, through the relationship and love affair of its central characters, illustrates how a Lebanese diaspora novel's engagement with Palestine participates in a highly political debate and suggests ways through and around the political impasse and complexity that have perpetuated the Israel-Palestine conflict. Gregory Jusdanis, a critic of the role of culture and literature in political debates, argues that scholars like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha exaggerate culture's "importance … as an agent of oppression (national culture) or of resistance (cultural difference)" if they fail to take "into account the actual institutions [that run and govern] the state" (Jusdanis 1996, 151). Jusdanis is right but only insofar as his perception of literature, as fiction that can only ever reflect the "real world" experiences of migration, of postcolonial and diasporic movement, does not change. However, if we acknowledge the formal aspects of literature, which structures, shapes or patterns itself within, against, alongside – not after or before – social or supposed 'real world' formations (such as Jusdanis' "actual institutions"), then we can better see how literature not only participates but offers alternate models to think through and about political issues and conflicts.

In relation to the diaspora, Jusdanis is just as sceptical. He wants to know if "diasporic identity promises to free people from the confines of the nation-state" how can "diaspora do this? […] what would be the political basis for such a world?" (155). Jusdanis' appreciation of the political is just as narrow as his understanding of literature. He fails to consider that the political basis of a world freed from the confines of the nation-state may not be predicated or modelled on existing nation-based political or state institutions but could approximate the dialogical "moral elegance" of Ossyane and Clara, drawn and derived from the diasporic literary form Maalouf develops. As Pheng Cheah argues, literature is "not merely a product of human imagination or something that is derived from, represents, or duplicates material reality"; instead, it is an "opening through which one receives a world and through which another world" or other possibilities become apparent (2008, 35). Indeed, for a conflict that is entering its eighth decade, one that policymakers, politicians and politics have been unable to solve, perhaps it is time to take seriously what cultural formations can "open" to us. Through its engagement with Palestine, Maalouf's *Ports of Call* illustrates how a Lebanese diaspora novel both recuperates the toxic erasure of Palestinians and offers, or to borrow from Levine, affords insights into alternate pathways to address the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Diaspora literature and form

The challenge that a Lebanese diaspora novel poses to Jusdanis' dismissal of culture and diasporic form provides a fitting conclusion to a paper concerned with recovering the erasure

of Palestinians since their violent displacement and challenging their demonisation in Lebanon. It does so by exploring and expanding the limitations of diaspora writing from several Lebanese authors. Diaspora literature is ordered, or – to use Levine's term – formed by elements like identity, displacement, home and nostalgia. However, there are other elements that also shape or have a formal impact on diaspora writing that we risk overlooking in our quest to define this fictional field. As the case of Lebanese diaspora fiction illustrates, the specific feature of Palestine shapes, determines or moulds this literature. Palestine is not just important to Lebanese migrant writing because of the history it shares with the Lebanese, an extrinsic or extra-textual historical context that is merely reflected in a narrative. Instead, it has an intrinsic textual significance that impacts narratives and shapes them in terms of character development or tracking how authors' diasporic experiences influence their writing. What this mode of analysis highlights is how diaspora literature can become a site to reckon with past violence, so that the aftermath of that violence is acknowledgement, acceptance of responsibility and, perhaps in the future, healing and reparation.

Notes

[1] The novels in this article are defined as diaspora fiction because their authors are members of the Lebanese diaspora. Like Syrine Hout (2012), I understand Lebanese diaspora fiction as works by writers who have migrated from Lebanon or are descendants of Lebanese migrants and continue to engage with issues of displacement, alienation, longing for home and negotiating life between the home and host state.

[2] According to the late journalists Samir Kassir, the issue of Palestinian *tawtin* is an obsession not just of Christian Lebanese who have had the most difficult relationship with the Palestinians, but also of the Palestinians' supposedly staunchest ally, the Shi'a Muslims and Hezbollah (2003, 97).

[3] Estimates on the number of Palestinians who perished vary. The Lebanese government records a number of 2000, the International Committee of the Red Cross, 2750, and the Lebanese Red Cross, 3000 (Al-Hout 2004, 296).

[4] For examples that demonstrate Palestine as contextually relevant to Lebanese fiction or of marginal importance and hardly examined, see Hout (2012); Lang (2016), especially pp. 148-152; Mostafa (2011).

[5] Ghassan Hage argues that "regardless of what else the conflicts between Maronites and Muslims in the last four or five centuries have been about, there is no doubt that a large majority of Maronites have experienced those conflicts as a struggle for their very survival" (1996, 128).

[6] William Safran (1991) is the strongest advocate of roots and return, and others like Robin Cohen (1997) do not argue for return but also do not overtly challenge it.

[7] My use of dialogic is a register of the various associations that, according to Linda Hutcheon, have been derived since Bakhtin's initial use. Dialogic refers to "flexibility, a willingness to engage conflicts […] a resistance to closure, […] and a keen sense of 'otherness'" (2002, 30).

[8] The author has worked on this topic in a previous essay. See Bayeh (2010, 173).

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https://www.fesjournal.eu

Live from Gaza[1]

Sarah M. Saleh

September 2021

funeral these headlines
their insidious &
the facts
the theatricality of chaos
our lands
our traumas
right to self-defence
until ‘complete quiet’
yesterday &
today &
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report the stories of
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monster
mayhem
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the buildings is
humanitarian crisis is
strip is
ceasefire is
freedom is
sand is
world is
cage is
murder is
ours is

In memory of[2]

In memory of Baraa al-Gharabli
In memory of Mustafa Obaid
In memory of Yazan al-Masri
In memory of Marwan al-Masri
In memory of Rahaf al-Masri
In memory of Ibrahim al-Masri
In memory of Hamada al-Emour
In memory of Ammar al-Emour
In memory of Mahmoud Tolbeh
In memory of Yahya Khalifa
In memory of Fawziya Abu Faris
In memory of Muhammad-Zain al-Attar
In memory of Amira al-Attar
In memory of Islam al-Attar
In memory of Suheib al-Hadidi
In memory of Yahya al-Hadidi
In memory of Osama al-Hadidi
In memory of Abdurrahman al-Hadidi
In memory of Yara al-Qawlaq
In memory of Hala al-Qawlaq
In memory of Rula al-Qawlaq
In memory of Zaid al-Qawlaq
In memory of Qusai al-Qawlaq
In memory of Adam al-Qawlaq
In memory of Ahmad al-Qawlaq
In memory of Hana al-Qawlaq
In memory of Dima al-Ifranji
In memory of Yazan al-Ifranji
In memory of Mira al-Ifranji
In memory of Amir al-Ifranji
In memory of Dana Ishkontana
In memory of Lana Ishkontana
In memory of Yahya Ishkontana
In memory of Zain Ishkontana
In memory of Tala Abu Elouf
In memory of Tawfiq Abu Elouf
In memory of Rafeef Abu Dayer

In memory of Dima Asaliyah
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Notes

[1] This poem was first published in 2022 in *Rabbit: A Journal for Nonfiction Poetry* 34 (January): 48-53. The last section of this poem was inspired by M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* #24.
[2] This list with names of children killed in Israel's attack on Gaza in May 2021 is not exhaustive. There were dozens more Palestinians, including children.

Sarah M Saleh is the daughter of migrants from Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon, living on Gadigal land. A human rights campaigner, poet and writer, her pieces have been published in English and Arabic in various national and international outlets and anthologies including the *Australian Poetry Journal, Cordite Poetry Review, Meanjin, Overland Journal, The Sunday Paper,* and *Rabbit Poetry*. She is co-editor of the 2019 anthology *Arab, Australian, Other: Stories on Race and Identity.* Sara is the first poet to win both the Australian Book Review's 2021 Peter Porter Poetry Prize and the Overland Judith Wright Poetry Prize 2020. She is currently developing her first novel *Songs For The Dead and The Living* as a recipient of the inaugural Affirm Press Mentorship for Sweatshop Western Sydney.

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Caught in the crossfire

Neilab Osman

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ABSTRACT

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and the devastating images of individuals desperately clinging for their lives off planes have permeated the media in 2021. This article aims to draw on the personal experience of an Afghan-Australian undergraduate student who is engaging in forms of activism to help her family, and many others, in Afghanistan. Through conversations with family members in Afghanistan, the author aims to outline the lives of her family before the Taliban re-emergence, their obstacles into seeking humanitarian visas in Australia, and the role of engaging in activism as a beacon of hope.

Keywords

Afghanistan, humanitarian crisis, humanitarian visas, activism

Introduction

Living as a second-generation immigrant in a Western nation has always posed its challenges. While decades of academic research have explored this notion, for me, the crux of it can be summed up in a quotation by journalist Tiziana Ratcheva (2016), "I am a foreigner in my parents' mother-land and I am a foreigner in the country to which they came almost thirty years ago." However, rather than just asserting my personal experience, in this piece I also want to bring forward the experiences of my cousins and aunties who have been 'caught in the crossfire' in Afghanistan for the last forty-three years. In light of the current crisis in Afghanistan, I hope that I can give a voice to the feelings, emotions and perspectives of those who have lived lives that would be unimaginable to most – and the perspective that can only be shared by the first-generation Afghan diaspora. Over the last few weeks, I have spoken with my Khala Nahid and four of my cousins, Shazia, Kaynat, Arman and Hamid, while also reflecting on the obstacles I faced in finding them a 'road out' to Australia.[1] This is our story.

'Appreciating the little things in life': living in Afghanistan before the current crisis

Over the last twenty-two years of my existence, I have lived with the fact that my entire maternal family resided in Afghanistan. As someone who has never left Australia, let alone visited Afghanistan, my knowledge of my parents' homeland was influenced heavily by Western media outlets and the anecdotes of my family members. While Western media have

presented Afghanistan as a dirt-ridden and unliveable country, until a few months ago my cousins and aunties lived – what you would call in third-world standards – a 'decentish life'. They had a roof over their heads, my female cousins were innocuously able to attend school and university, visiting the bazaar was relatively safe, and on occasion, one could purchase and devour a burger. Recently, I asked my 30-year-old cousin Shazia what her opinions were on living in a country that was constantly in a state of flux. To my surprise, she expressed that, up until the Taliban took over, "Afghans lived their life as they could – they danced, they ate delicious food and tried to enjoy life's little moments, like trekking the beautiful mountains or putting their feet in the water." For my Khala Nahid, "living in Afghanistan was difficult, but manageable." While it seems unbelievable for many of us in the West, for my family and many Afghans, Afghanistan was *home*, and they would continue to consider it *home* until otherwise.

'They're Back': the re-emergence of the Taliban in 2021

In August 2021 it was evident that the Taliban were back, and more powerful than ever. While the announcement of the withdrawal of US forces had caused suspicion about the Taliban's potential re-emergence, many were dismayed at how rapidly they re-occupied Afghanistan. It was a matter of days before television screens flashed with the words "Kabul Has Fallen." While the Taliban have claimed that they have 'reformed' and will 'uphold women's rights', many of my relatives in Afghanistan are not quite convinced. As my Khala Nahid says, "we know what the Taliban are like, we have lived through it before so who is to believe them now." My mum and her sisters experienced the five years of turmoil that was the Taliban regime in the late 1990s. While my mum was able to escape it by marrying my father in 1997, the others were not quite so lucky. With the harsher immigration policies that followed the Howard and subsequent governments in Australia, my parents were dissuaded from even attempting to start a visa application process to assist my maternal family in leaving Afghanistan. And quite frankly, my Khala Nahid says that she "didn't actually want to leave." In light of the re-emergence of the Taliban regime in 2020, what many do not realise is that, for Afghans, fleeing their country from the Taliban is not a choice, it is a necessity. Afghans have historically called Afghanistan 'their motherland' and for my cousin Shazia, "leaving your entire life behind and the land that you were born in, the smell of the dew in the morning – nobody does this by choice. We do it because we have to."

In the last twenty-one years, my family in Afghanistan, like many others, were passionate about 'rebuilding their country'. Following the fallen Taliban regime in the late 1990s, many Afghans chose to stay in Afghanistan in order to contribute to their local communities. Global politics aside, it was evident to my relatives that they have always merely wanted two things: peace and opportunity. My cousin Kaynat stated that she always wanted "a life free from conflict" and "with the option to get an education, be employed and to enjoy life." While this

may seem like a simple pursuit to many of us in the West, the aforementioned has been difficult for many Afghan nationals, and will be even more challenging to obtain with the re-emergence of the Taliban regime. As my Khala Nahid asserts, "I wanted something good to happen to my nation, but the regime has made me hopeless. We are not allowed to help, we cannot even try." For my family, the Taliban regime's re-control of Afghanistan epitomises the destruction of what Afghans had worked for in the last twenty-one years. And for my Khala Nahid, it signifies the end of what many of us take for granted: "I want the simple things; I want to go to work, I want to go to the shops, and I want my children, especially my daughter, to go to school." The constant image of "bearded men, holding rifles packed in cars" and the perpetual "sound of gunfire" has inevitably made my family feel as though "enough is enough".

'The difficult road out': obstacles when obtaining an Australian humanitarian visa

At the time of writing this piece, I have submitted two 'humanitarian' visa applications to the Department of Immigration in Australia. I put 'humanitarian' in quotation marks as the process is almost 'in-humanitarian' in its current design. On a scheme that has an estimated waiting time of "many months to years" (Department of Home Affairs 2021), it is inevitable that one may feel apprehensive in anticipation for a result. As someone who has lived a relatively comfortable life in Australia, hearing sentiments such as "when are we going?", "I packed my blue suitcase!" and "do you think my bike will fit on the plane?" from my 7-year-old cousin in Afghanistan is simultaneously heart-warming and heart-shattering. Since applying for my family's visa, my little cousin has been sleeping next to his little suitcase. When asking my Khala Nahid why she wanted to leave Afghanistan, aside from facing persecution by the Taliban for her work in humanitarian aid, with despair and hope in her voice she stated: "I just want my daughter to be able to go to school, I want to be able to sleep in peace, I don't want to hear the sounds of bombs and I don't want to see another dead body." The sentiment shared by all family members in Afghanistan is that they are simply "tired of fighting." It would be conventional to believe that these are satisfactory reasons for the Australian government to accept an individual on 'humanitarian grounds', however, it seems that this is not the case.

The Western world's suspicion of refugees, particularly those seeking refuge from the Middle East and Central Asian countries, is reflected within Australia's current refugee 'humanitarian' visa options. To be eligible for the visa options, an applicant (in this case, an Afghan refugee) must be registered with United Nations, hold certified identity documents, hold a passport, be able to prove residence, provide a history of employment and education and be able to provide character statements and health checks, among a whole other list of criteria (Department of Home Affairs 2021). For four out of five of the visa subclass options, applicants must lodge their documents "in paper only" and "outside of Australia" (Department of Home Affairs 2021). What the Department of Home Affairs in Australia has failed to consider in the

emergency and unprecedented situation that has unfolded in Afghanistan is that, with no consular embassies, no UN office and a non-existent administration, obtaining the aforementioned documents is almost completely impossible for many Afghans. I felt embarrassed and ashamed to ask my cousin if she "had an English translated version of her degree," or if my Khala Nahid could re-call in detail all the scattered years it took her to complete secondary school. What the Department of Home Affairs in Australia has failed to understand is that these individuals have lived their entire lives in war, and that such criteria are like 'asking a fish to climb a tree'. On a good day, I struggle to produce an original copy of my birth certificate and when a new employer asks me for '100 points' of identification, I go on a quest to produce these documents. While the notion of 'national security' is a valid one, the hurdles that the Australian government has presented refugees in their visa process highlight many questions. Is Australia concerned about 'national security' or are there current policies just blatantly Islamophobic? Many academics, members of parliament, journalists and the greater Australian community have argued the latter (Bridge Initative Team 2019; Bouma 2011; Briskman 2015; Morgan 2016).

'Think global, act local': activism as a beacon of hope

When the news of the Taliban's re-emergence hit my family in Australia, I was approached by my mother who asked me "what should we do?". At a moment of utter despair and hopelessness, I did what I thought was within my control by starting an online crowdfunding fundraiser on the Australian website mycause.com. I entitled the fundraiser campaign "Help my family in Afghanistan," with the hope that I could gather a small amount of proceeds to support my large amount of family who are living in Kabul. While I had initially thought that nobody would care, I was left completely surprised with the overwhelming support. Within only a few days, my fundraiser garnered donations from well over 100 people, reaching a total of $7550. Among these individuals were my colleagues at work, my university professors, my friends, my extended family in Australia and many who I am not even acquainted with.

Over the course of a few days, I was met with nothing but support. I was reached out to by the Australia Broadcasting Corporation (Handley 2021), the *Daily Telegraph* (Armstrong and Benns 2021) and *Monash University News* to comment on my family's situation and to call on the government 'to do more'. Members of parliament responded to my pleas to escalate the humanitarian visa applications I had lodged, and they even went as far as to offer me personal advice on the matter. In response to my concerns, my local member, John Alexander, broke ranks by urging the Federal government to increase the intake of Afghan refugees from 3000 to 20,000, stating that Australia has "a duty to provide sanctuary" and "if we can accept 12,000 from Syria, we can certainly accept more than that for our brothers and sisters now suffering in Afghanistan" (Yosufaszi 2021). My social media pages were flooded with

individuals sharing and re-posting to create awareness about the events in Afghanistan and ways to help. Above all, what was evident to me was that people did indeed care. And like me, they also acted.

Today, I continue to use activism and advocacy as a coping mechanism. And to be quite frank, I use it as a tool to overcome my feelings of despair, sadness and helplessness. I have created email templates, petitions, and compiled links to various organisations, disseminating this all to my network. I was even privileged enough to speak to former United Nations aid worker and war crimes investigator David Savage, to discuss ways in which we can support Afghans and put pressure on the government to 'simply do more'. And I am definitely not alone in this pursuit. Many individuals within the broader Australian community have mobilised, and continue to mobilise, using social media as a tool to heighten awareness, pressure governments and raise money to assist the people of Afghanistan. For example, the *Camp4Afghanistan* (2021) campaign was created by Eren Ozenir and her peers to support Mahbooba's Promise, a Sydney-based charity, to raise funds for Afghans who were displaced as a result of the current crisis. On the evening of the 28 August 2021, over 600 Australians registered to camp in their backyards, or to sleep on their floors, in solidarity with displaced Afghans. Furthermore, over 200,000 Australians signed the "Action for Afghanistan" (2021) petition which called on the Australian government to act more generously in granting visas and resettling Afghan refugees in Australia.

The activism, advocacy, support, solidarity, empathy and generosity are coming from every corner of society. For my family in Afghanistan, knowing that there are individuals "on the other side of the world" (as my Khala Nahid puts it) willing to support and advocate for them offers a sliver of optimism amidst all of the uncertainty and the desolation. For me, activism serves as a beacon of hope.

Conclusion

While the last forty-three years have not been without their challenges, for many Afghans, in Afghanistan and all over the world, 2021 has been a year of utter turbulence. Among it, many Afghans felt as though their voices had been supressed amidst all the noise and global politics. For my family in Afghanistan, the question that looms in their minds is "what about us?". Hence, amidst all the political tension and unrest, it is fundamentally important that individuals take responsibility as global citizens. We must give Afghans a voice and support them in their pursuit to living a life of peace and opportunity, whether this is inside of Afghanistan, or in their pursuit to seek refuge in another country. At the crux of it, we must remember the Afghan people are tired of being treated like political pawns. I believe that as individuals we can mobilise, by sending an Instagram post or an email to our local member of parliament, to

support Afghans so that the horrors of the late 1990s are not repeated. We must not allow Afghans to be 'caught in the political crossfire' any longer.

Notes

[1] *Khala* is Persian for 'Auntie'. It is a term of respect and admiration that one uses before addressing elder women, or their maternal aunties. Nahid is my mum's sister, and I call her 'Khala Nahid'.

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Sulla razza, i razzismi e le nostre pratiche di studio

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Annalisa Frisina, *Razzismi contemporanei. Le prospettive della sociologia*, Roma: Carocci 2020 (232 pagine)

ABSTRACT

On race, racisms, and our methods of study. The first part of Annalisa Frisina's book *Razzismi contemporanei* (contemporary racisms) provides a historical overview of how sociology has dealt with the category of race and how that has contributed to solidify racism or, more often, how the work of prominent sociologists has critically engaged the concept by pointing out its cultural basis. The second part of the volume deals with an analysis of different aspects of our daily lives (school, work, the police, etc.) where people are exposed to forms of structural racism.

KEYWORDS

Sociology, racism, race

Razzismi contemporanei. Le prospettive della sociologia fa il punto sul lavoro ormai più che decennale di Annalisa Frisina sul razzismo, una nozione tanto invisibile quanto attiva nelle nostre società, risultato di un'idea di razza che la studiosa cerca di decostruire e spiegare nella sua pratica di sociologa e di attivista. Utilizzando una prospettiva storica e comparata, Frisina analizza il razzismo come un concetto cardine della storia del Novecento e del nuovo millennio, con cui la sociologia si è confrontata sin dagli albori della disciplina. Partendo da Max Weber, Robert Ezra Park e W.E.B. Du Bois, attivi all'inizio del secolo scorso, la studiosa organizza il volume attraverso una prospettiva cronologica, mettendo a confronto differenti tradizioni nazionali che hanno contribuito a far emergere la razza come un costrutto più o meno visibile nelle pratiche politiche, sociali, culturali, lavorative ed economiche delle nostre società.

Frisina ricostruisce la storia degli studi sulla razza a partire da Weber (1864-1920), il sociologo tedesco che per primo ha sottolineato la differenza fra questa categoria e quella di etnia. Mentre "l'etnia sarebbe basata su pratiche socio-culturali," scrive Frisina spiegando il pensiero di Weber, la razza "avrebbe le sue fondamenta in tratti biologici, nella costituzione fisica delle persone" (19), da cui il tradizionale divario fra etnia come aspetto culturale e razza come controparte biologica delle differenze nel genere umano. Fra i sociologi attivi a cavallo fra Ottocento e Novecento spicca lo statunitense Du Bois, intellettuale nero il cui pensiero,

secondo Frisina, mantiene la sua attualità nella sociologia post e decoloniale (35), tanto da farne, assieme al martinicano Franz Fanon, uno dei padri più illustri della disciplina e, in generale, del pensiero antirazzista e punto di riferimento per pensatori e attivisti posteriori, da Martin Luther King a Malcom X. Du Bois è infatti promotore di un raffinato ragionamento sull'umano, che egli elabora proprio alla luce delle discriminazioni vissute e all'idea di razza che sviluppa anche grazie ai soggiorni all'estero. Per esempio, l'esperienza in Germania, dove si trovava per motivi di studio, permise a Du Bois di esperire il mondo e se stesso secondo nuove categorie visivo-interpretative; la comparazione fra la realtà degli Stati Uniti e quella europea favorì in lui una comprensione critica del razzismo, che comincia a definirsi già a inizio Novecento come un'interpretazione culturale, piuttosto che biologica, della diversità umana.

Come emerge più volte nel volume, la razza è quindi un elemento legato alla visualità e non categoria scientifica; gli studiosi di *visual studies* e *critical race studies* hanno infatti evidenziato come anche la biologia, a cui spesso si fa riferimento nella percezione popolare del colore, non è un elemento neutro ma culturalmente creato. Il compito della sociologia contemporanea, diversamente dai primissimi studi sulla materia, sarebbe quindi proprio quello di alzare il velo sulla differenza fra la presunta visibilità della razza e i significati più o meno oscuri che quotidianamente si riscostruiscono attraverso le nostre pratiche visuali, culturali e sociali. Bianco e nero sono, ribadisce Frisina, sempre categorie "politiche, frutto di processi storici: esse rimandano dunque a rapporti sociali e asimmetrie di potere" (10) e mai a un semplice riferimento cromatico. Sarebbe allora corretto parlare, come fanno Omi e Winant, di "formazione razziale" invece che di razza, per riuscire a veicolare in un'unica espressione quel "processo socio-storico attraverso il quale le identità razziali sono create, vissute, trasformate e usate politicamente" (78). Oppure, per usare un'espressione di Robert Miles diventata ormai comune, bisognerebbe occuparsi di "razzializzazione, cioè dei processi che producono gruppi razzializzati in specifiche condizioni sociali e storiche, per meglio comprendere l'ideologia del razzismo al servizio di specifici processi economici e sociali, quali la difesa del dominio, la subordinazione e il privilegio" (47). Frisina ricorda dunque che "parlare di razzializzazione è analogo a mettere 'razza' tra apici," come si fa in questo volume, al fine di segnalare graficamente "che ciò di cui si parla non ha significato biologico, ma è un prodotto di processi sociali, economici, politici, culturali e psicologici" (49).

Il volume prosegue con un resoconto del lavoro del Centro di studi culturali di Birmingham, in primis con la figura di Stuart Hall, e prosegue fino a studiosi cronologicamente più vicini a noi come Sara Ahmed, bell hooks, o Miguel Mellino. Una parte importante dei capitoli che compongono *Razzismi contemporanei* è riservata all'intersezione fra razza e genere, un nesso già messo in luce da Du Bois (36) prima della teorizzazione dell'approccio intersezionale a partire da Kimberle Creenshaw in poi. Si passa quindi a un'altra statunitense, la sociologa e scrittrice Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964), al femminismo francese di stampo

materialista di Colette Guillauimin (1934-2017), da cui emerge "una storia parallela e conflittuale tra la lotta delle donne per il diritto di voto e quella abolizionista nella prima metà del XIX secolo" (57), di cui è un emblema la figura di Sojourner Truth, ex-schiava abolizionista e femminista. La disamina degli studi sulla razza da un punto di vista di genere si conclude con le teoriche del femminismo nero del Novecento quali Hazel Carby, Angela Davis e Audre Lorde, che all'articolazione di razza e genere aggiungono la dimensione dei rapporti di classe.

Dopo la ricognizione storica degli studiosi e studiose che hanno prodotto i lavori più significativi sulla razza, i rimanenti capitoli del volume sono dedicati all'analisi delle azioni che riproducono o contestano i razzismi contemporanei, da quello che avviene nelle scuole a quello che succede nelle pratiche del sapere. Ciò che questi capitoli evidenziano è come il razzismo sia un elemento portante della modernità occidentale e delle sue forme economiche, come è dimostrato dal nesso capitalismo-schiavitù. Nel concreto, si domanda Frisina, come si perpetua il razzismo? Attraverso la sua forma 'strutturale', ovvero in tutte quelle pratiche della quotidianità che lo rendono esteso ma invisibile, una forma di discriminazione che penetra molte – se non tutte – le istituzioni delle nostre società. Fra queste, si pensi all'uso della violenza contro i corpi neri spesso praticata dalle forze dell'ordine, come è ampliamente ormai provato dagli studi che si occupano dei casi del pestaggio di Rodney King, nella Los Angeles degli anni Novanta, o come quello più recente di George Floyd, ma anche esempi più lontani nella storia, come i numerosi fatti di linciaggio di inizio secolo scorso su cui era intervenuta con studi importanti Ida B. Wells (1862-1931). Il razzismo si perpetua quindi nei media, nel lavoro, nelle politiche abitative, a scuola. A questo riguardo, Frisina allerta i lettori che se quest'istituzione tratta "i discenti da uguali anche se di fatto disuguali" corre il rischio di "sancire le disuguaglianze iniziali di fronte alla cultura e all'istruzione" (88), contro le quali si può tuttavia intervenire attraverso quelle che bell hooks chiama le "pedagogie della resistenza" – un sapere che non deve semplicemente appiattire verso l'uguaglianza, ma farsi de-colonizzato.

Infine, il volume dedica uno spazio all'attivismo, che contraddistingue la carriera dell'autrice. Frisina ricorda che sin dall'inizio della disciplina, la sociologia si è dimostrata capace di "collaborare e dialogare con i movimenti sociali antirazzisti" (165), dai primi anni del Novecento come dimostrano i lavori del già citato Du Bois fino a esperienze a noi più vicine, come quella che vede protagonista Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. Ex-presidente della American Sociological Association, dopo i fatti di Charlottesville del 2017 Bonilla-Silva si è espresso in maniera chiara e perentoria su "che cosa significa fare ricerca sui razzismi. […] Perché non si tratta solamente e semplicemente di indicare chi è razzista e chi no, ma [interrogare] lo sguardo, le pratiche che ci permettono di vedere il mondo" (165). L'invito è allora di "sovvertire il nostro habitus classificatorio" (169): "[n]ella sociologia contemporanea diventa infatti fondamentale interrogarsi sui processi che producono gruppi razzializzati, sulle circostanze e

sulle modalità attraverso le quali determinate classificazioni razziali si intrecciano a pratiche discriminatorie" (43).

In conclusione, *Razzismi contemporanei* di Annalisa Frisina è uno strumento utile per ripercorrere le tappe del pensiero anti-razzista, per coloro che entrano in questo filone di studi per la prima volta o, più in generale, per chi è interessato a fare il punto e ritrovare, in un unico volume, una esaustiva bibliografia sugli studi sulla razza a cui fare riferimento. Esiste una vera e propri 'sociologia del razzismo' nella ricostruzione che ne fa Frisina, che racchiude in questo volume una genealogia dei pensatori più importanti che si sono occupati del tema in chiave antirazzista.

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Poesie di lotta e di sopravvivenza: i testi di Oodgeroo Noonuccal in traduzione

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Oodgeroo Noonuccal, *My people, la mia gente*, con un testo di Alexis Wright, a cura di Margherita Zanoletti, Milano: Mimesis 2021 (342 pagine)

ABSTRACT

Poems of struggle and survival: Oodgeroo Noonuccal's texts in translation. Oodgeroo Noonuccal's *My People* is considered a classic of postcolonial literature, in that it reconstructs the memory of an older Indigenous past and intertwines it with official and hegemonic Australian history. The first critical edition in Italian of her 1970 anthology, which gives voice to the experiences of Australian Aboriginal people, is now available to the Italian reader thanks to the thorough work of Margherita Zanoletti. The volume *My People, La mia gente* (Mimesis 2021) featuring the original poems by Oodgeroo alongside the Italian translation, includes a detailed introduction, an extensive glossary, and a text by Alexis Wright suggesting that Oodgeroo's poetry can crack the nexus of indifference that characterizes these times of planetary rupture. In introducing her poems to the Italian audience, Zanoletti highlights the fusion of protest and language as well as the profound communicative intent of Oodgeroo's poetry and takes into consideration her own experience of translation.

KEYWORDS

Letteratura aborigena, scrittura 'poetemica,' ecologia, ibridismo linguistico, traduzione

Nel 1970 usciva in Australia la raccolta di poesie *My People*, "La Mia Gente," dell'autrice aborigena Oodgeroo Noonuccal[1] (1920-1993), figura chiave del passato coloniale australiano e protagonista cruciale della lotta per l'affermazione dei diritti degli aborigeni, per la giustizia sociale e per la tutela dell'ambiente. *My People*, che raccoglie in ordine sparso i componimenti delle due raccolte precedenti *We Are Going* (1964) e *The Dawn Is at Hand* (1966), più alcune nuove liriche e due brani in prosa, diventa presto il testo più diffuso e conosciuto dell'autrice: dal 1970 al 2020 vedrà ben cinque edizioni, ed è oggi considerato un "'classico' della letteratura postcoloniale," che per la prima volta "dà voce al popolo aborigeno, marginalizzato, decimato e sfrattato dalla sua stessa terra con l'arrivo dei colonizzatori" (32). La tragedia del genocidio delle popolazioni aborigene, e la loro lotta per la sopravvivenza e per il riconoscimento dei diritti fondamentali, sono ancora questioni poco note in Italia: Margherita Zanoletti, che negli ultimi anni ha curato anche la prima edizione in italiano di *We Are Going*,

insieme a Francesca Di Blasio, colma in maniera estremamente ricca e attenta questa lacuna, proponendo una traduzione con testo inglese a fronte che rielabora il concetto di "cura" oltre l'accezione editoriale del termine.

Il volume si apre con un testo inedito in italiano della scrittrice aborigena Alexis Wright, che esprime l'importanza e attualità dell'opera di Oodgeroo Noonuccal a oltre 50 anni dalla prima edizione di *My People*. Lo scritto di Alexis Wright è tratto da un discorso pronunciato il 9 novembre 2020 in occasione della *Fryer Lecture in Australian Literature*, che ha commemorato il centenario della nascita di Oodgeroo, e si chiede in che modo la prima autrice di poesia aborigena racconterebbe i nostri tempi. La poesia di Oodgeroo, scrive Alexis Wright, ha raccontato l'esperienza aborigena più comune nell'interazione con l'Australia coloniale, caratterizzata da schiavitù, sottomissione, massacro, e furto delle terre tradizionali. Ma non solo: ha anche raccontato di un popolo che combatte e sopravvive da tempo immemorabile. Ha parlato di perdita, disperazione e tristezza, ma anche di speranza, legami, e profondo amore per il proprio paese: ha parlato agli aborigeni australiani contrapponendosi alle narrazioni contro di essi radicate nella nazione. La sua voce è stata la loro voce, un megafono per raccontare le loro verità; la sua poesia ha guidato molti e molte di loro in una nuova era di lotte sociali, diventando strumento di sopravvivenza.

Ma cosa direbbe la poesia di Oodgeroo in questi tempi in cui in molte zone del paese gli aborigeni sono ancora oggetto di razzismo e violenze e devono lottare per la sopravvivenza e per i diritti sovrani? Come racconterebbe la minaccia della crisi climatica che potrebbe costringere diverse comunità a lasciare la propria terra d'origine, in un'Australia che negli ultimi anni ha registrato temperature superiori ai 50 gradi centigradi? Nell'era dell'Antropocene diventa sempre più urgente creare "una poesia e una letteratura così grandiose da spezzare il nesso dell'indifferenza" e raccontare "storie che corrispondano alla portata delle incertezze radicali del futuro" (24). Per Alexis Wright la crisi climatica non è la crisi della cultura e dell'immaginazione che racconta Amitav Ghosh (2016): il riscaldamento globale, al contrario, sta già "espandendo la nostra immaginazione, sta già eclissando ogni normalità nelle nostre attuali preoccupazioni" (24). La poesia di Oodgeroo Noonuccal, che ha ribaltato l'immagine dell'Australia come *terra nullius* proponendo una visione della terra come forza ed entità che l'essere umano deve custodire, racconta di vite presenti e future, umane e più che umane, che non sono sacrificabili; racconta storie della fine dei tempi, ma non le accetta come realtà del popolo aborigeno. Se "il futuro ci richiede di pensare in modo più fantasioso e di essere molto più visionari su come continueremo a vivere in un mondo di grande cambiamento," scrive ancora Alexis Wright, le poesie di Oodgeroo parlano oggi in modo straordinariamente attuale.

Il volume prosegue con la ricca introduzione di Zanoletti, divisa in tre momenti: una parte iniziale dedicata alla biografia dell'autrice nel contesto della storia australiana e della nascita della letteratura aborigena; una panoramica per tempi e temi sulla sua opera; e un saggio

traduttologico sull'ibridismo linguistico che contraddistingue *My People* e sulle sfide per la traduzione italiana. Le pagine sulla figura di Oodgeroo Noonuccal sono volte a sottolinearne il parallelo tra l'attività letteraria e l'impegno politico: Oodgeroo, scrive Zanoletti, è protagonista attiva delle lotte per la libertà promosse negli anni Sessanta dalle minoranze razziali australiane e di tutto il mondo. In questo decennio, Oodgeroo sviluppa un coinvolgimento sempre più vivo nella lotta per l'affermazione dei diritti degli aborigeni, diventando membro del FCAATSI, l'organizzazione per i diritti civili degli aborigeni australiani e degli abitanti delle isole dello stretto di Torres. È proprio in simbiosi con l'impegno sociopolitico che avviene l'esordio artistico: nel 1964 esce il suo primo libro di poesie, *We Are Going*, la "prima raccolta poetica pubblicata da un autore indigeno, e la prima opera letteraria pubblicata da una donna aborigena" (37). Negli anni successivi, l'impegno politico si intensifica in parallelo con l'attività letteraria, e l'esito positivo dello storico referendum del 1967, con il quale gli aborigeni diventano cittadini australiani, è in parte collegato alla sua attività propagandistico-letteraria. Zanoletti si sofferma poi sulla scelta della poesia da parte dell'autrice per veicolare il suo messaggio politico: la poesia è uno strumento scelto ad hoc per il suo legame con il canto, intrinsecamente costitutivo dell'identità del popolo aborigeno, le cui radici sono nel *tjukurrpa*, "dreamtime" e "dreaming" nella traduzione inglese e "Tempo del Sogno" in quella italiana. Con una scrittura che affonda le radici nell'oralità, Oodgeroo si fa quindi portavoce delle istanze di una comunità, che ha per la prima volta una voce scritta. Zanoletti conclude la sua introduzione biografica soffermandosi sulla fondazione, nei primi anni Settanta, di Moongalba, un centro educativo e culturale che diventerà un punto di riferimento fondamentale per la cultura aborigena: all'attività politica e letteraria Oodgeroo aggiunge infatti quella pedagogica, e gli anni seguenti vedranno il passaggio "da un attivismo sociopolitico a tutto campo a un focus quasi esclusivo sull'educazione di bambini e ragazzi e sulla salvaguardia ecologista" (44).

Segue una lettura d'insieme dei testi di *My People*, volta a sottolinearne il contesto di produzione, le caratteristiche fondamentali della raccolta, e infine la periodizzazione e i temi. Ancora una volta, è sull'impegno di Oodgeroo per il riconoscimento dei diritti fondamentali per le popolazioni indigene e per i diritti sulla terra che Zanoletti pone l'attenzione, indicando come l'intreccio tra le campagne per i diritti civili e le battaglie ecologiste sia palese già a partire dalle dediche inserite nelle prime due edizioni. Segue una disamina dei temi affrontati nella raccolta, la cui ampia campionatura di testi consente a lettori e lettrici di "acquisire una visione totale della sua opera" (57). Zanoletti individua tre macrocategorie: i temi di attualità e denuncia sociopolitica, narrazioni e personaggi legati all'immaginario aborigeno del Tempo del Sogno, e componimenti più memoriali e autobiografici. Così come le tre macrocategorie si prestano a intrecci e contaminazioni, la sequenza originale delle poesie nelle singole raccolte risulta sovvertita in un apparente disordine, che Zanoletti legge tuttavia come una voluta narrazione anti-lineare rispetto ai canoni imperialisti: è proprio il suo paratesto introduttivo a guidare lettori

e lettrici nella procedura di ricostruzione filologica che *My People* richiede di fare. Nell'accurata analisi dei temi proposta dalla curatrice si nota, ancora una volta, l'attenzione per il legame tra poesia e politica – lo scrittore e critico australiano Mudrooroo ha infatti definito la scrittura di Oodgeroo "poetemica," un miscuglio di "poetry" e "polemics" (1994) – che trasforma l'arte per l'arte in una contro-narrazione sulla visione aborigena del mondo. È un tipo di poesia, aggiunge Zanoletti, che si inserisce in un contesto "internazionale, interetnico e trans-indigeno" (68), dal momento che il paesaggio storico-letterario a cui la raccolta appartiene è "surriscaldato dalla protesta a livello mondiale" (68). Uno spazio importante è inoltre dedicato alle poesie di denuncia ecologista, che Zanoletti, guidata dalle illuminanti riflessioni di Alexis Wright in apertura del volume, rilegge alla luce di questioni contemporanee legate alla sostenibilità ambientale. La curatrice sceglie infine di dedicare uno spazio a sé a un sottogruppo di poesie narrative che introduce diverse figure femminili, le cui voci si sovrappongono a quelle di Oodgeroo: il genere diventa quindi una delle lenti attraverso cui leggere l'individualità complessa dell'autrice, che riallaccia l'universo femminile "a un archetipo orale e immateriale, spirituale e mitologico, all'autobiografia e alla storiografia" (75).

Zanoletti propone infine una testimonianza del proprio lavoro traduttivo, in cui, attraverso l'analisi dei componimenti "Cookalingee," "Biami," e "Kiltara-Biljara (Eagle Hawk)," si rende ragione delle scelte intraprese nel passaggio dall'inglese ibrido all'italiano. Se da un lato Oodgeroo si appropria della "lingua dei colonizzatori" per "'colonizzare' un pubblico ampio" (57), la lingua inglese standard è intrecciata a parole aborigene e ad elementi della varietà indigena dell'inglese australiano. Lo stile ibrido che ne risulta, e che volutamente destabilizza lettori e lettrici, viene reso in italiano scegliendo di lasciare invariati i lemmi afferenti al mondo aborigeno, segnalandoli con un asterisco e spiegandoli nel glossario in calce al volume. Un'altra caratteristica della poesia di Oodgeroo di cui la traduzione italiana deve tenere conto è l'immediatezza del testo di partenza, che vuole essere letto non solo da critici e politici, ma anche e soprattutto dagli "esclusi, i senza voce della società" (82). Oodgeroo stessa, sostiene Zanoletti, va considerata una traduttrice a una mediatrice, e la sua opera va intesa come una trascrizione diamesica (dall'oralità alla scrittura) e interlinguistica (dalle lingue aborigene all'inglese) di "un mondo umiliato e distrutto, che sta cambiando o scomparendo" (58). Sull'opera di mediazione linguistica operata da Oodgeroo si innesta l'ulteriore passaggio dalla lingua inglese a quella italiana: un processo, scrive Zanoletti, né "privo di difficoltà né tantomeno neutrale" (83). Si tratta di una traduzione che sceglie come strategia etica ed estetica l'avvicinamento del testo al pubblico d'arrivo e allo stesso tempo l'interpretazione di un'alterità: in altre parole, la pratica traduttiva trasmette qui "il patrimonio culturale, l'intento politico e la dimensione emotiva inerenti all'originale, in modo creativo" (81-82). Lettori e lettrici italiani sono accompagnati in un mondo altro, di difficile comprensione, che l'attenta cura di

Zanoletti aiuta a ricostruire e interpretare mantenendo tuttavia intatta la carica emozionale ed evocativa della parola di Oodgeroo Noonuccal.

Note

[1] Oodgeroo della tribù Noonuccal (la tribù originaria di Minjerribah, Stradbroke Island) è il nome scelto da Kath Walker nel 1988, l'anno delle celebrazioni del bicentenario dello sbarco di James Cook in Australia. Il nome Oodgeroo, scrive Zanoletti, è una "pubblica dichiarazione di appartenenza": l'autrice intende infatti affermare il proprio retaggio culturale indigeno e allo stesso tempo rigettare il proprio sé europeizzato (47). Il nome significa inoltre melaleuca, una pianta endogena australiana la cui corteccia è usata da millenni dagli aborigeni come supporto per dipinti cerimoniali e didattico-narrativi: la melaleuca è dunque "emblema non soltanto del suo legame con la natura e con la sua terra, ma anche della scrittura, intesa come atto del tramandare storie e memorie" (48).

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Un affare (anche) di famiglia: memorie del colonialismo nell'Italia del presente

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Vittorio Longhi, *Il colore del nome*, Milano: Solferino 2021 (280 pagine)

ABSTRACT

A family affair (and more): memories of colonialism in present-day Italy. In *Il colore del nome* published by Solferino, Vittorio Longhi tells his own story and that of his family, between late 19th century Eritrea and the Italy of the 2013 Lampedusa shipwreck. After a lifetime of not questioning his roots, the protagonist of the memoir is confronted with a distant relative who contacts him on Facebook and begins a journey to reconstruct his family history and his own identity.

Keywords

Italian colonialism, memoir, race, identity, post-colonial migration

Vittorio Longhi è un giornalista che si è occupato principalmente di esteri e migrazioni, scrivendo per la stampa italiana (*il manifesto*, *la Repubblica*) e straniera (*The Guardian* e *The International New York Times*). Longhi ha anche pubblicato il saggio *The Immigrant War* (2012, Policy Press) e per anni ha lavorato per le Nazioni Unite, formando giornalisti. Nel memoir *Il colore del nome* racconta la storia della sua famiglia che si dipana per circa 130 anni tra Eritrea e Italia, quasi interamente in sincronia con la storia dell'Italia unita stessa.

'Protetto' per quarant'anni da un nome 'bianchissimo' e 'italianissimo' ("è nato. È maschio! È bianco!" [165] grida la nonna in ospedale, appena Vittorio nasce), Vittorio entra in contatto in modo del tutto casuale con una cugina eritrea che si mette in comunicazione con lui tramite un social media, mentre si trova per lavoro in un campo profughi in Giordania. Un incontro virtuale che lo porterà sulle tracce del giovane sottoufficiale piemontese Giacomo Longhi, suo bisnonno partito alla volta della colonia Eritrea nel 1890 con il Regio Esercito, dove si fermò per alcuni anni, facendo due figli con una giovanissima ragazza eritrea per poi abbandonarla con i due bambini, e a riconsiderare la sua stessa identità di italiano di origini eritree. "Una storia — scrive Longhi nel prologo — che ormai credevo di avere cancellato. E dimenticato" (11). Una parte della nostra storia in quanto italiani — il nostro passato coloniale — volutamente ignorata, ma che è con noi, 'nascosta in piena vista' nei nomi delle strade,

negli oggetti contenuti nei musei e nelle nostre storie familiari, dove (a volte) colonizzatori e colonizzati si incontrano.

Storie di vita nelle colonie italiane che, come nel caso di Longhi, riemergono attraverso fotografie, album o diari, passati di mano in mano, di genitore in figlio, in grado di trasmettere la 'dimensione privata' del colonialismo. Nel 1992 Angelo Del Boca apriva il suo *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani* (Laterza) proprio con alcune considerazioni su di un immenso 'museo privato' che si troverebbe in Italia. Del Boca, infatti, calcolava che una famiglia italiana su dieci possedesse nella propria casa un oggetto di provenienza coloniale, riportato da padri o nonni a seguito del tempo speso in colonia, per lavoro o come militari: bracciali, pugnali, dipinti, talleri di Maria Teresa affollavano dunque le case di italiani più o meno ignari dell'origine di tali oggetti, andando però di fatto ad agire profondamente sulla loro coscienza. Così agisce la storia dell'altro Vittorio Longhi italiano ed eritreo, figlio di Giacomo e di Gabrù e nonno dell'autore del memoir, ucciso in Eritrea negli anni Cinquanta, sul Vittorio che, a Lampedusa nel 2013 per coprire da giornalista la vicenda del tristemente noto naufragio, è definitivamente messo davanti alla sua 'identità negata'.

Nel naufragio del peschereccio partito dal porto libico di Misurata morirono oltre 360 migranti, quasi tutti eritrei: Vittorio si trova davanti ai loro corpi portati all'aeroporto di Lampedusa e lì si rende conto di "non poter più scappare" (208), prendendo la decisione di recarsi in Eritrea, per scoprire la sua seconda patria. Il tentativo di distogliere lo sguardo, di dimenticare quanto il colonialismo sia parte della nostra identità di italiani (ed europei), dall'impero coloniale all'Amministrazione fiduciaria della Somalia e ben oltre, è sbattuto in faccia all'autore (e al lettore) davanti alle file interminabili di sacchi blu e verdi nell'hangar, in attesa che arrivino le bare.

E proprio in Eritrea Longhi incontra l'eredità più tangibile del colonialismo italiano: le persone. I nipoti e bisnipoti degli italiani che lì vissero, si sposarono, ebbero figli. Tanto in Libia quanto nel Corno d'Africa i diretti testimoni dell'epoca dell'occupazione italiana sono ormai anziani. All'inizio del 2009 l'Italia, nel quadro del *Trattato di amicizia, partenariato e cooperazione* siglato dal governo di Silvio Berlusconi e da Mu'ammar Gheddafi a Bengasi nel 2008, si impegnava a riconoscere una pensione ai libici (o ai loro eredi) che avevano collaborato con l'amministrazione coloniale italiana dal 1911 al 1942, o combattuto sui fronti delle guerre coloniali e della Seconda guerra mondiale. Ma se a chi collaborò con l'occupante italiano si promisero dei compensi, gli eritrei che potrebbero ricevere la cittadinanza in quanto discendenti di italiani si vedono negati i propri diritti.

Proprio all'incontro con loro, e in particolare con Salvatore, receptionist dell'hotel di Massawa dove Longhi alloggia, nipote di un italiano che non ha mai conosciuto, è dedicata l'ultima parte del libro. Nel 1997 il Presidente della Repubblica Oscar Luigi Scalfaro durante la sua visita in Eritrea promise di occuparsi della questione, senza che ciò portasse poi ad

alcuno sviluppo effettivo; dopo dieci anni di attesa, nel 2007 la richiesta venne reiterata al Presidente Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, ancora invano. Salvatore comunica a Vittorio di aver accertato la presenza di circa 300 eritrei con origini italiane che potrebbero dimostrare la fondatezza della propria richiesta di cittadinanza, impresa del resto tutt'altro che facile a causa della mancanza di documenti (i figli cosiddetti 'meticci' spesso non vennero riconosciuti, soprattutto durante il periodo fascista) e dell'impossibilità dei nipoti eritrei di fare ricerche su parte della propria famiglia in Italia.

Nel libro di Longhi sono dunque i flussi migratori nel Mar Mediterraneo a metterci davanti alla nostra storia coloniale, intrecciandosi con le vicende di una famiglia italiana, ricordando in questo aspetto *Sangue giusto* di Francesca Melandri (2017, Rizzoli), un altro mosaico familiare che si dipana su tre generazioni e si intreccia alla storia del paese. Ne *Il colore del nome* la narrazione delle vicende familiari dell'autore si mescola con quelle dell'Italia, prima Regno e poi Repubblica, e con l'attivismo di Longhi in favore dei figli di italiani e donne eritree, attori e vittime di un controesodo verso una madre patria che non li riconosce e li fa sentire stranieri e indesiderati. Longhi, insieme all'avvocato Paolo Farci e a Padre Protasio Delfini, è infatti impegnato nella richiesta di riconoscimento formale dei diritti di cittadinanza per gli eritrei discendenti di italiani. La richiesta è stata presentata al Presidente della Repubblica Sergio Mattarella, per ora restando ancora una volta senza risposta. In un paese che rifiuta la memoria del colonialismo Longhi pare dirci che, anche se non vogliamo vederle, anche se rifiutiamo di vederle, anche se lui stesso le negava, le sue tracce sono ovunque intorno a noi, siamo noi. Una vicenda dolorosa e urgente, che Longhi restituisce al lettore in modo dettagliato e articolato, anche nei suoi momenti più tragici. Il memoir restituisce tuttavia uno squarcio di speranza rappresentato dalle figure femminili, coraggiose 'donne che oltrepassano i confini' a cui è dedicato il libro, madri che da sole crescono i figli, dimenticate dai libri di storia, a cui Vittorio Longhi riconsegna un ruolo centrale.

Beatrice Falcucci è assegnista di ricerca presso l'Università dell'Aquila dove lavora sulla vicenda e le collezioni dell'ex Museo Coloniale di Roma. Le sue ricerche vertono sulla costruzione dell'alterità coloniale attraverso musei ed esposizioni nell'Italia liberale e fascista, le continuità istituzionali e culturali postcoloniali, i rapporti tra scienza e colonialismo in Italia e in Europa. Email: beatrice.falcucci@univaq.it

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Scrivere dalla/sulla Nigeria. Spazi di indagine futuri ed eredità presenti

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Alessandra Di Maio. *La letteratura nigeriana in lingua inglese*, Firenze: Le Lettere, 2021 (144 pagine)

ABSTRACT

Writing from/about Nigeria: spaces of future investigations and present legacies. Alessandra Di Maio's essay *La letteratura nigeriana in lingua inglese* (2021) focuses on the literary production of three great Nigerian authors: Amos Tutuola (1920-1997), Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) and Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka (1930). The work provides a tool that is useful not only in academic contexts but also allows readers to approach Nigerian literary production in an analytical way, taking into account the specific historical and artistic coordinates in which the different works are positioned. This is in contrast to an editorial practice in Italy that tends to present everything that can be labelled as African as a single, undifferentiated body.

Keywords

Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Alessandra Di Maio, Nigerian Literature, African Literature, Translation

A differenza che in passato, non è raro oggi imbattersi in saggi e romanzi di scrittrici e scrittori africani tradotti in italiano. Basti pensare a Chimamanda Adichie o a Damon Galgut, per citare solo due nomi ampiamente recensiti anche dalla stampa mainstream. Sono frequenti, inoltre, i testi scritti direttamente in italiano da autori d'origine africana, come Antonio Dikele Distefano, Igiaba Scego o Ubah Cristina Ali Farah. Recentemente, tra le proposte editoriali, sono comparse anche antologie orientate a dare una visione ampia, seppur discrezionale, della produzione letteraria del continente (*Africana*, Feltrinelli, 2021) o anche centrate sulle nuove generazioni di *scriventi* afrodiscendenti (*Future*, Effequ, 2019).

Si tratta di un quadro in divenire, interessante ma, come prevedibile, influenzato in vari casi da logiche di marketing (leggasi attenzione alla vendibilità di personaggi e prodotti anche in termini di apparizioni televisive e in previsione della vendita dei diritti cinematografici). Sul valore letterario delle opere proposte mancano ancora dibattiti e indagini letterarie più approfondite.

Su questo sfondo si registrano tuttavia due mancanze, per molti versi collegate l'una all'altra. Mancano, in primo luogo, la possibilità e probabilmente gli strumenti metodologici per approcciarsi a questo enorme patrimonio – la letteratura africana – in modo analitico. Sembrerebbe più facile e promozionalmente vantaggioso accostare autori e autrici su base continentale o, peggio ancora, su quella del colore della pelle, tralasciando le differenze che intercorrono non solo tra le diverse nazioni, regioni e comunità, ma anche tra i generi, le forme espressive e le poetiche: come se le coordinate storiche e letterarie rispetto alle quali le diverse opere si posizionano (per non parlare delle distinte stature letterarie) fossero elementi accessori. Mancano, d'altra parte, strumenti critici, solidi dal punto di vista accademico, ma godibili anche fuori dalla nicchia degli africanisti, che permettano un altro approccio a chi lo desiderasse.

La letteratura nigeriana in lingua inglese, volume di Alessandra Di Maio (esperta di studi postcoloniali e docente di letteratura inglese e anglofona all'Università degli Studi di Palermo), uscito nel 2021 per la casa editrice Le Lettere, rappresenta da questo punto di vista una felice eccezione. Si tratta di un testo pensato in prima battuta per studenti universitari, ma in grado di rivolgersi a quanti, giovani e meno giovani, siano interessati alla letteratura in generale e alla scoperta della ricchezza creativa della Nigeria in particolare.

Di Maio si focalizza, infatti, su tre autori che possiamo considerare i padri nobili della vivace letteratura nigeriana in lingua inglese e li presenta al lettore conciliando il rigore argomentativo e documentale con la fluidità del racconto e il piacere dell'aneddoto. I tre sono: Amos Tutuola (1920-1997), Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) e il premio Nobel Wole Soyinka (1930).

Pubblicati nel nostro Paese già da anni, i lavori di questi scrittori non sono mai usciti dai cataloghi dei loro editori italiani. L'autrice tiene molto a sottolineare questo dato. La letteratura africana oggi riscuote finalmente interesse, e fa piacere che a essa si dedichino convegni, dibattiti e pubblicazioni. Ma la grandezza di Tutuola, Achebe e Soyinka, sembra dirci Di Maio, è indipendente dalle mode, e si rivela lungo direttrici universalmente letterarie e collegate a una visione universale della letteratura.

A ciascuno dei tre, in ordine cronologico, è dedicato un capitolo del saggio. Di Tutuola, che con le sue opere ha segnato il trasferimento della tradizione narrativa yoruba dall'oralità alla scrittura, si ricostruisce la biografia e il contesto di riferimento, al fine anche di evidenziare la portata della sua scelta linguistica: un *broken english* piegato all'espressione della visione del mondo propria del territorio di appartenenza, la regione yoruba appunto.

Di Maio si sofferma in particolare sul primo romanzo, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, che già nel titolo ci offre un saggio di questa rivisitazione originale e meticcia della lingua coloniale e che in Italia fu pubblicato per la prima volta nel 1954 come *Il bevitore di vino di palma* (Franco Bocca Editore). Riferisce inoltre dell'accoglienza ostile riservata all'opera da parte di

numerosi intellettuali africani dell'epoca, preoccupati di non apparire all'altezza dello *standard English*. L'autrice suggerisce un accostamento molto interessante tra la struttura dell'opera e quella del *Decameron* di Giovanni Boccaccio o dei *Canterbury Tales* di Geoffrey Chaucer e riporta le riflessioni di Achebe e Soyinka, che con Tutuola dialogano in senso letterario, evidenziando da subito quelle connessioni che danno senso e spessore alla locuzione *letteratura nigeriana* prima ancora che al saggio che stiamo esaminando.

Il capitolo dedicato ad Achebe comincia con la ricostruzione dei vari passaggi che hanno portato i romanzi dello scrittore (*Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* e *Arrow of God*) a essere, dal 1976 a oggi, sempre presenti nei cataloghi italiani, passando attraverso le edizioni di diverse, importanti case editrici. Achebe, che scrive in un inglese raffinato e colto, è presentato come colui che inaugura il romanzo storico africano ricostruendo la saga degli igbo, ossia del suo gruppo etnico di appartenenza, minoritario rispetto agli yoruba ma conosciuto sulla scena internazionale per via della guerra del Biafra. I tre romanzi citati costituiscono una trilogia che, come evidenzia Di Maio nel saggio, "si propone di raccontare non solo le fasi storiche cruciali dell'esperienza coloniale britannica nel territorio africano conosciuto oggi come Nigeria ma soprattutto le diverse implicazioni che queste hanno avuto sulla vita e la cultura della gente igbo" (51). Inoltre, la trilogia si propone anche di rispondere da un punto di vista narrativo a opere come *Mister Johnson* di Joyce Cary e *Heart of Darkness* di Joseph Conrad, che hanno letterariamente ridotto l'Africa, come afferma lo stesso Achebe, "a uno stereotipo che deumanizza la gente" (54).

Con Wole Soyinka, di cui Di Maio è la traduttrice italiana, incontriamo una molteplicità di scritture (teatrale e poetica, ma anche autobiografica) messe sempre al servizio di una visione militante della letteratura. Di Maio racconta come è iniziata la sua collaborazione con il primo premio Nobel africano. Descrive la prassi personale da lei adottata per misurare la riuscita di una sua traduzione di Soyinka, ricordando come sia sempre ardua la trasposizione della poesia in una lingua diversa da quella originale. Si sofferma sull'aneddotica molto più di quanto non faccia con gli altri autori. D'altra parte la sua prospettiva ravvicinata le permette di condividere questo privilegio di familiarità e consuetudine con i lettori. Non a caso una parte consistente del capitolo è occupata dalla trascrizione di una lunga conversazione tra l'autrice e Soyinka, un testo che sarebbe riduttivo definire intervista e che permette ai due di toccare e approfondire vari temi ricorrenti nella poetica dello scrittore: il significato della traduzione, la portata esistenziale e politica delle migrazioni e dell'esilio, ma non solo. Troviamo in questo dialogo la visione del mondo e la spiritualità yoruba, considerate anche nelle loro evoluzioni sincretiche presenti in Brasile, a Cuba, a Portorico, in Colombia. Troviamo una formulazione dinamica dell'identità, che si esprime attraverso la consapevolezza di essere africano, che comprende senza sovrapporsi quella di essere nigeriano ed è preceduta da quella di essere yoruba ed essenzialmente umano. Ci sono il

dolore e la preoccupazione per la violenza e la lacerazione della Nigeria, l'esodo di chi deve migrare, la relazione con l'Occidente e con il potere.

Il capitolo dedicato a Soyinka si presenta per forza di cose come un testo ancora aperto: lo scrittore, benché anziano, è attivissimo e produttivo; la sua relazione con la scrittura è in corso, la sua produzione è in divenire. Chi legge è implicitamente invitata a guardare avanti, per prestare attenzione alle altre opere che verranno, da Soyinka e da eventuali altri autori nigeriani che potranno essere considerati in relazione a riferimenti più specifici e diacronici. Il saggio di Di Maio non esaurisce ovviamente il discorso su Tutuola, Achebe, Soyinka, e tantomeno sulla letteratura nigeriana, ma fornisce finalmente una chiave per entrare e provare a muoversi con più cognizione in un contesto al quale non è dignitoso o sensato continuare a rivolgere sguardi vaghi, casuali e approssimativi.

Stefania Ragusa è giornalista professionista specializzata in arte e culture africane. Collabora con diverse riviste di settore (tra cui *Africa Rivista*, *Africa e Mediterraneo*, *Nigrizia*) ed è titolare del corso Professioni della Comunicazione presso l'Università degli Studi di Pavia.