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Abstract

I argue that through representations of ‘madness’ in *The Swan Book*, Alexis Wright reclaims and (re-)defines Indigenous sovereignty as embodied, that is, something which for Indigenous people is felt and realised through their corporal being: a form of body-mind connection which includes a reciprocal relationship to ‘Country’. These representations are reflected by a disjointed narrative in which the story and its characters unravel. The novel suggests that the pursuit of social, ontological and psychological stability, is achieved through a relationship to place and accepting responsibility of care for the environment. The quest for sovereignty, allegorised within the novel by Oblivia and her black swans, repositions an Indigenous worldview and connection to Country as central to Indigenous psychic survival. As a result, the Western reader and their world view is destabilised. Repeated exposure to a world in which material and social realities reinforce one’s feelings of inferiority and lack of human-ness, results in a distorted sense of self. A destabilised mental state, a kind of ‘madness’, becomes in truth, the only sane response to the effects of subjugation. Given that racism informs the structural, political and social colonial world, I argue that colonialism is itself a kind of madness. Through its racialised practices and policies Indigenous people have been subjected to violence and trauma that has had and continues to have deleterious effects on their lives. It is this intergenerational trauma and the messy state of internal Aboriginal politics coupled with national politics over sovereignty and land rights that Wright harnesses in order to draw her Indigenous characters as unstable mental entities. Yet, colonialisms’ madness affects all Australians, black and white, evidenced by the anxiety and shame that currently impact non-Indigenous Australian’s identity and sense of place. Australia’s colonial history has rendered Aboriginal people invisible in the national narrative, dispossessed them of their Country (land) and limited their rights to self-determination. Whereas legal and judicial sovereignty seems unattainable for Indigenous people at present in the Australian political climate, the performative nature of narrative/stories opens a horizon of self-identity and self-determination connected to Country which empowers psychological sovereignty.

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Abbreviations

AIHW—Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

BSWM—Black Skins, White Masks

LC—The Location of Culture

NATC—The Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism

SB—The Swan Book

TCT—The Commitment to Theory

WoTE—The Wretched of the Earth

PSYCHIC SURVIVAL: SOVEREIGNTY, MADNESS AND ANXIETY IN ALEXIS
WRIGHT'S *THE SWAN BOOK*

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INTRODUCTION

Madness is already to a large extent an experience of injustice, and more often than not is also the experience of a trauma. Literature narrates the silence of the mad as it narrates the silence of the trauma. Madness in turn is subject not just to the rule of medicine but also the rule of law.

(Felman 6)

The opening quote from Soshana Felman's *Writing and Madness*, frames the interwoven aspects of madness with colonialism, literature and in particular the novel, *The Swan Book*. Literature, according to Felman, allows for the presence and expression of the silenced, invisible, oppressed 'other'. In *The Swan Book*, the central character Oblivia— black, female, indigenous and mute— is incontrovertibly marginalised threatening the patriarchal order. In *The Swan Book*, Oblivia's purpose is to regain sovereignty over her own brain (4). She does this by narrating her story. I argue that through representations of 'madness', Alexis Wright reclaims and (re-)defines Indigenous sovereignty as embodied, that is, something which for Indigenous people is felt and realised through their corporal being: a form of body-mind connection which includes a reciprocal relationship to 'Country'. These representations are reflected by a disjointed narrative in which the story and its characters unravel. The novel suggests that the pursuit of social, ontological and psychological stability, is achieved through a relationship to place and accepting responsibility of care for the environment. The quest for sovereignty, allegorised within the novel by Oblivia and her black swans, repositions an Indigenous worldview and connection to Country as central to Indigenous psychic survival. As a result, the Western reader and their world view is destabilised. This paper does not therefore, relegate colonialism to the past. There is no post as such. It is very much present in the racist mentality of the living, narratives of nationhood and the judicial system.

The history of colonialism in Australia has been fraught with trauma, forced removal of children, disenfranchisement of civil rights, and dispossession of Country¹. These are still ongoing issues for Indigenous people. Centuries of assimilative policies have wreaked havoc on Aboriginal cultural practices, sovereignty and identity. Excluded from national conceptions of what it means to

¹ "Country" is an Indigenous term which will be explained in Chapter Two. It often appears in written form with initial capitalisation to show the significance it has within the Indigenous world-view as a living being. As Alison Ravenscroft explains "'Country', then, can be thought of as a proper name" (2018, 356). It is also a practical means of differentiating this Indigenous concept from the English word country.

be Australian, consistently positioned as ‘other’ and constantly located in a discourse of resistance, the consequences have been debilitating for the Indigenous psyche.

Under colonialism, distinctions between the coloniser and colonised were maintained and implemented by means of a racial infrastructure with the sole purpose of keeping the black man/indigene/colonised in their place. The colonial social and cultural world perpetuated a hegemonic, white, humanistic ideology. This ideology was substantiated by disciplines of knowledge, notably Law and Science. Laws were established in order to contain the undesirable presence of Aboriginals. Exclusion, marginalisation and denial were tools of social control and discipline. Repeated exposure to a world in which material and social realities reinforce one’s feelings of inferiority and lack of human-ness, results in a distorted sense of self. A destabilised mental state, a kind of ‘madness’, becomes in truth, the only sane response to the effects of subjugation. This is because the site of real madness belongs to colonisation. In the pursuit of sovereignty, Indigenous psychic survival becomes immanent.

The structural, political and social colonial world is informed by racism. Repeated exposure to this world in which material and social realities reinforce one’s feelings of inferiority and lack of human-ness, results in a distorted sense of self. A destabilised mental state, a kind of ‘madness’, becomes in truth, the only sane response to the effects of subjugation. Therefore, I concur with other critics that colonialism is itself a kind of madness. Through colonialist practices and policies Indigenous people have been subject to violence and trauma that has had and continues to have deleterious effects on their lives. It is this Intergenerational trauma and the messy state of internal Aboriginal politics coupled with national politics over sovereignty and land rights that Wright harnesses in order to draw her Indigenous characters as unstable mental entities. Whereas legal and judicial sovereignty seems unattainable for Indigenous people at present in the Australian political climate, the performative nature of narrative/stories opens a horizon of self-identity and self-determination connected to Country which empowers psychological sovereignty.

Sovereignty is equally a political and psychological pursuit. This pursuit is two-pronged: firstly it is explored and emboldened in the Indigenous imaginary through narrative, literature and films for instance; secondly, it is experienced in Indigenous daily life through policy changes and self-governing practices. This paper is primarily concerned with the pursuit of psychological sovereignty for Indigenous peoples which can be achieved by the creation of “imaginary homelands”² (4). An “imaginary homeland” for Indigenous Australians may literally be the tracts of land that were taken from them by the colonising British. Metaphorically, it may well suggest an idealised, uncontaminated place which articulates a solid sense of identity. The homeland that

² ‘Imaginary Homelands’ is also the title of Salman Rushdie’s essay, which is concerned with a sense of home or place from the migrant’s perspective.

Wright imagines, however, is not utopian in any way. Instead, it is a post-apocalyptic world devastated by nuclear wars and climate change. Although the swamp/Swan lake to which Oblivia belongs is plagued by drought and dust, it is still her home, her Country, and the principle means of combatting the virus.

In the novel, the virus is a metaphor for assimilation. As a virus, assimilative practices and policies infect the mind. The negative influence of assimilation is evident in the elevated levels of Indigenous suicide and mental health problems which confront the Indigenous community in the twenty-first century. But this virus also infects the body. If, as the novel proposes, that Indigenous sovereignty is an embodied experience, that is, something which for Indigenous people is felt and realised through their corporal being, then by extension, the body can be invaded by a virus which in turn will affect their sovereignty. From an Indigenous perspective, this mind-body-land connection is inseparable.

Each of Wright's three works of fiction present alternative versions of (post)-colonial madness, including possible futures wherein sovereignty can be envisioned. In *Plains of Promise*, Ivy Koopundi, a young Aboriginal girl is taken from her mother and placed in the dormitory at St. Dominic's mission in northern Queensland where they live. Ivy's mother's despair and powerlessness to prevent it, results in her committing suicide. This event precipitates a spate of suicides at the mission. The Aboriginal people confined to the mission are not in control of their own lives. Marriages are arranged for them by the Reverend Errol Jipp who does not respect specific relational ties between the different Indigenous groups, let alone consideration of any personal feelings. Consequently, frustration leads to aggression and violence, exacerbated by alcohol. After the loss of her mother, Ivy is repeatedly sexually abused by Jipp. As a result of these relations with Jipp, she is ostracized by the rest of the Aboriginal community. Eventually Ivy becomes pregnant. After the birth, the child is removed and sent away to be raised by a white family. It is through the adult child Mary, Ivy's daughter, and her desire to reconnect with her Indigenous heritage that we learn the extent of Ivy's psychic disintegration. This novel bears witness to the trauma experienced by the Stolen Generations, offering an uncertain future.

In *Carpentaria*, Wright presents the community of Desperance, a coastal mining town on the Gulf of Carpentaria, divided by racism, with the whites literally living in the centre, and two disputing Aboriginal communities residing on its outskirts. The conflict between these two communities are over claims to Country and opposing attitudes to the mining company. The story follows the Pricklebush mob, in particular Norm Phantom, a pacifist and spiritual leader and his son, Will, the activist who wants to blow up the local mine. Ultimately, a cyclone destroys the town and a fire destroys the mine. The land is thus cleansed from the abusive forces and influences of the mine. This active force of nature, the cyclone, allows for a re-visioning of Indigenous sovereignty.

The Swan Book, is an explicitly political novel that uses history, past and present, to write a post-holocaustic future. Set three hundred years after British ‘invasion’, the main protagonist is Oblivion Ethylene who lives in an isolated, army-run, detention camp of unwanted Indigenous people in the northern-most part of Australia. We are told that ‘Oblivia’ is striving “to regain sovereignty over [her] own brain” (SB 4). Oblivia is initially defined as mad, at least by others in the swamp/prison where she lives, as a result of the trauma of being gang-raped by a group of aboriginal boys and the fact that she is mute. She begins to shape her reality and identity piecemeal from listening to stories (myths, legends, poetry, songs). These stories about white swans from other lands, are told by the white and foreign Bella Donna who ‘rescued’ Oblivia from her hiding place in the ancient tree. Her subsequent communion with the black swans who have relocated to the swamp/lake, results in her assuming responsibility of care for them. Suddenly, Warren Finch, the soon-to-be first aboriginal (albeit half-caste) Australian President, arrives at the swamp unexpectedly. He has come in order to claim his “promised wife” (SB 148). Oblivia is forthwith, unwillingly removed from her ‘home’. Confined to Finch’s apartment in a strange, broken, southern, poverty-ridden city, Oblivia is soon joined by her black swans. After Finch’s assassination, she escapes in order to join her swans on the long, arduous journey home. Oblivia’s responsibility of care and desire to protect the swans, transforms her providing her with a sense of agency, hitherto non-existent. Upon conclusion, Oblivia returns to the desolate swamp area with a single black swan.

Using Felman’s quote as my model, each chapter will discuss how the theory and practice of colonialism, in particular othering, racism and whiteness destabilises the Indigenous psyche or subject and the non-Indigenous one. I have employed an interdisciplinary approach in order to fully develop the evidence for my argument. I recognise that there is a danger in an ethnographic alignment with literary criticism, because the literary world is not a direct reflection of the ‘real’ world. The notion of ‘real’ becomes complicated in Wright’s fiction. In a novel, where the main character can communicate with animals, where dead characters can be seen and interact with the living, where Nature is personified, then the novel is then seen as distinct from reality, and more in keeping with Western conceptions of magic, fantasy or superstition. Nevertheless I felt it was necessary to investigate the actualities of the lived experience of Indigenous people, past and present, to understand better how assimilation has impacted and continues to impact Indigenous peoples. But even armed with this knowledge, my understanding of the novel is provisional—I am after all a stranger to these shores. This paper is a movement towards understanding Australian Indigenous culture, Law and literature.

In this paper I present evidence for my argument in two parts. The theory presented in Chapter One illustrates firstly the historical and societal links between madness and the black man,

followed by the relationship between colonial racism and the fragmentation of the Self or ‘madness’. Chapter Two presents cultural, historical and political details concerning sovereignty, Indigenous knowledges and practices, past and present Australian assimilation policies and current mental health statistics in order to show that colonial racism is not in the past and that the violent practices of racism, in particular the loss of Country, has eroded Indigenous sovereignty, rendering Indigenous peoples invisible. This loss of sovereignty categorically affects identity. In the final chapter, my close reading will show how through Oblivia’s “Dreamtime narrative” this cycle of ‘madness’—racism/colonisation, individual victim, Country and sovereignty/identity— is represented and/or resisted in the novel.

CHAPTER 1: Racism, Madness and Anxiety

Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe. For centuries they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience.

(Frantz Fanon *WoTE* 251)

This chapter considers the way in which identity is ideologically constituted under colonialism by means of binary oppositions which positioned the colonised as the 'other'. Descriptions of the other are invariably circumscribed in ethnocentric, essentialist and racist terms. Humanism, as an overriding principle, provided the philosophical foundation for racialised colonial practices and policies. Racism in this instance is concerned with essentialism: it is embodied. This means that it is through the body's pigmentation that racial difference is defined. I investigate how racism underscored the disciplines of science and law, and how violence was integral to its execution. With focus on psychoanalysis, Frantz Fanon provides powerful descriptions of the psychological deleterious effects that these colonialist practices had on identity formations. Fanon pertinently reminds us that this universal humanity is synonymous with white-ness.

Investigating these notions of universal humanity further, and taking into consideration that *The Swan Book's* principle character is stated to be mad, I reference Michel Foucault's work, to demonstrate that the black man and the madman have been subjugated to the same socially ostracising and racialised practices. In order to unveil the madness in the notion of universal humanism, ergo colonialism, I show how Bhabha's ambivalence or anxiety destabilises the psyche of non-Indigenous Australians today. The intersubjective space between coloniser and colonised has reciprocal consequences. It is not merely the colonised who become 'mad'.

Through Bhabha's discussion of stereotypes, we will see how the fantasy of sameness functions to disavow difference. Naturalising stereotypes creates the illusion of stability. However, Bhabha shows that the tension between sameness and difference results in a form of anxious knowledge. Bhabha links this production of meaning/knowledge to psychoanalysis and the work of Lacan. For Bhabha, Lacan's mirror stage provides a model for ways of understanding and producing colonial stereotypes. Lacan's understanding of the role of language in the formation of the Self, is primary to understanding the partialised knowledge and identity that is created through

the coloniser-colonised interplay. Through mimicry, identity is constituted by centrifugal forces of narcissism and aggressivity which occur within the mirror stage and stereotypes.

Fanon - Race

Frantz Fanon (1926-1961) - philosopher, political activist, psychiatrist and revolutionary theorist - developed a theory of race using a phenomenological approach. Fanon used his own experiences as a 'negro' in order to understand how the black man has been defined firstly outside of humanity, then gradually moved inside of this definition, albeit conditionally. The phenomenological approach argues against idealism or empiricism in the formation of knowledge and understanding, advocating instead for knowledge and understanding based on our lived experiences (Fell 476). Objectivity is the empiricist's optical lens which attempts to reduce the world to something that is given and immutable denying the active role human beings have in shaping the world. Idealism, whilst allowing the subject to have an active role, reduces the world to the level of abstraction (Huddart 7). Expressed in another way, phenomenology is a way of relating to the world as a consequence of the way we experience our lives, instead of through thought. When analysing the work of "Monsieur Mannoni" in the fourth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), "The So-called Dependency Complex of the Colonized", Fanon unveils the falsity of Mannoni's³ claim to objectivity whilst clearly stating his own inability to be objective: "I have attempted to touch on the misery of the black man – tactually and affectively" (67). Fanon believes implicitly, that everyone can understand someone else's subjective experience. I understand this to be an invitation for empathy.

For Fanon racism is the organising principle of society, it is socially and culturally constructed (*BSWM* 130). He states that both class and race are dialectically produced, that is, the one does not cause the other, but they both inform each other. This is significant to his work because according to Fanon, the relationship between the Self and one's social context is inseparable. Whilst Fanon recognised that racism was a product of economic and political factors, its ultimate expression through slavery, he was also aware that the effect of racism over time structured our way of thinking and how we see others and our interaction with them. Fanon explored the psychological impact racism had upon colonised peoples (Hudis 10). He also examined how epidermal considerations impacted one's sense of self, relationships with others and gender relationships. From Fanon's perspective, colonialism scarred the psyche of the colonised, manifesting itself in long term "traumatic memory and alienation" (Zinato & Pes 7). Alienation is the result of the vicious cycle of desire and loathing the black man experiences in his relationship to

³This entire chapter is Fanon's response to claims made in Mannoni's work *The Psychology of Colonization* which attempts to establish the "psychological phenomenon that governs the coloniser-native relationship" (*BSWM* 64).

the white man. It is the outcome of a lack of recognition from the Other. The less recognition you get, the more you desire to get it. The more you desire love and acknowledgement, the greater your sense of self-loathing of what you have become. Consequently, the Subject becomes fixated. However, alienation is not an ontological fact (Hudis 39). It is a habit that can be unlearned. Fanon therefore rejected the idea that racism was natural or inherent to the human condition (Hudis 41), maintaining that it was society (human beings) that created it. Race is therefore not essential. It is the habit of a specific way of seeing, creating notions of black-ness and white-ness, a habit that in his view, can be broken.

Within the context of colonialisation, existed what Fanon refers to as colour-blindness (*BSWM* 97): a form of racialized thinking that disrupts the principle of universal humanism. He claims that this idea is itself utopian, to attempt to differentiate human behaviours into human and non-human (*BSWM* 67). Fanon refers to epidermalisation, which is the notion that “essential identity is found on the skin’s surface” (Huddart 29). Considering identity in this way, prevents any form of recognition and coherence of the Self. Fanon rejects Marxism which proposes that the only forms of colonial resistance was in terms of class (anti-capitalist) struggle (Huddart 29) because it discounts other instances of colonial suffering, experienced as a result of asymmetrical relationships based on race and gender. The ‘lack of opportunities’ available to the colonised is not simply economic, social or gender related, but also a result of their appearance: “I am overdetermined from the outside. I am a slave not to the “idea” others have of me, but to my appearance” (*BSWM* 95). For Fanon, the idea of universal humanity implicates a white identity as its ideal or “privileged goal” (Huddart 31). The universalisation of humanity, a fundamental tenet of colonialism, erased its racial character, by making ‘whiteness’ simultaneously an invisible and a universal norm (Moreton-Robinson “Towards” 388). Fanon’s work, in addition to others—Baldwin, Du Bois and Ellison—were major influences towards the development of Whiteness Critical Studies (Garner 258).

Fanon reacted against the scientific racism of a psychiatry/ethno-psychiatry entrenched within the colonial project. Fanon investigated in particular the way in which colonialism instilled an inferiority complex in black people, which then became internalised and resulted in the colonised mimicking their oppressors (Sardar qtd in Zinato & Pes 7). Mannoni’s claim that the coloniser’s ‘inferiority complex’ existed prior to colonisation was emphatically denounced by Fanon. He states that the logical response to the European/coloniser’s superiority is the native/colonised inferiority. Quite simply, “it is the racist who creates the inferiorized” (*BSWM* 73). Fanon assures us that the inferiority complex that beleaguers the black man, arises initially from economic realities and then develops due to an “internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority” (*BSWM* xv).

Critical of psychoanalytical research, by Freud, Adler, Jung and Lacan, which did not take the lived experience of the black person into consideration, Fanon informs us that “a normal black

child, having grown up with a normal family, will become abnormal at the slightest contact with the white world” (*BSWM* 122). Whilst on the one hand this quote explains how psychic disorders are frequently associated with the internal relationships within the family in psychoanalysis. On the other hand, it implies that the family is not the only formative determinant for one’s sense of Self. According to Fanon, it is imperative that other social determinants, economics and race, are not ignored in the psychoanalytical evaluation. In addition, Fanon explains that the colonised subject turns to mimicry in order “to force the white man to acknowledge my humanity” (*BSWM* 78). Through the suppression or “interiorization” of their oppression, the black man is overcome by an inferiority complex, and then attempts to curry acceptance from the oppressor according to his stipulations. Through mimicry, the black man is attempting to show that he is more than just an object. The hope for recognition by the other is about more than equal rights, its purpose is to restore the dignity, the “human worth and reality” of the black man. (*BSWM* 191).

Respect for the dignity of man is pivotal in Fanon’s work (Hudis 60). Man, includes no less, the madman, who for Fanon is first and foremost a man, “affected by madness, by genes; [...] subjected to enemy forces” (Hudis 59). Through psychological studies of trauma patients studied during the Algerian War of Independence from France, Fanon shows that the trauma of madmen and black men are not dissimilar. Fanon believed mental illness meant that the subject was alienated from the world, no longer capable of agency or choice (Macey qtd in Hudis 64). Alienation, officially known as assimilation, is the manner in which the oppressor’s frightening authority is imposed on the native/black man, so that he sees and judges his own form of existence (bodily schema) in a new way (Hudis 62). Fanon argues that this process of alienation causes a dialectical tension between the subject and object, resulting in madness. Curiously, at the Intercolonial Medical Congress in 1889 Dr. Manning pointed out that “before the arrival of Europeans insanity was extremely rare among Aboriginal people in their ‘primitive and uncivilised condition” (Murray qtd in Zinato & Pes 7). Perhaps madness like racism, is simply a different way of seeing and being seen? Definitely Fanon excludes neurosis as a “basic component of human reality (*BSWM* 130). He claims that it is both a socio-economic and psychological problem, which does not inhere in the individual, but society (Hudis 37). Thus it seems, that madness is like race, in the sense that it is a result of a cultural and social situation, created by the act of seeing that ‘others’ the person being seen.

There is certainly correlation between the othering of the mentally disturbed and Indigenous peoples. During colonialism psychiatrists founded their judgements on scientific racism. Science as a monologic discourse, monopolises reason, and uses the language of reason to articulate, quantify and qualify madness. The mad become objectified in this process, losing their subjectivity. This practice extended well into the twentieth century. For example, South African John Collin Dixon

Carother's ethno-psychiatric thesis (published by WHO in 1953 and still in print in 1970) promoted the idea that Africans were biologically and culturally inferior based on his observations of a "supposed inferior development of their brain's frontal lobes" (Keller qtd in Zinato 7). As Fanon explains it, Dr Carothers "puts forward the idea that the normal African is a 'lobotomized European'" (WoTE 244). Australian medical literature described Aboriginal insanity in terms that "maintained hierarchies based on race" (Zinato 6). These narratives favoured or upheld white madness as superior to black madness: "there is mania and melancholia, but the varying lights and shades and the half-tones of the white are missing" (Murray qtd in Zinato 6). Hence, through science the justification for the perpetuation and normalisation of racialised, colonial practices is maintained. This is not viewed by the colonialist as racism but "quite simply a scientific appreciation of the biologically limited possibilities of the native" (WoTE 244). Science, as a modern objective shrine of knowledge, shapes our way of seeing, which permeates our ways of knowing and being.

Similarly, colonial laws were established in order to contain the undesirable presence of Aboriginals and the insane. Exclusion, marginalisation and denial were tools of social control and discipline. In a colonial setting, these laws were enforced through acts of violence, hence legitimising violence as a colonial practice. Since Enlightenment, the legal system has increased its control over violence. In turn, this control has increased societal and political expectations that violent trespasses will be treated according to laws and judgement passed on them in a court of law (van Rijswijk 238). Violence is the utilisation of control over a person or group involving physical and/or psychological force (Atkinson 11). It is "both an activity and an experience" (Atkinson 11) in which both the perpetrator and victim of violence, experience violence. Colonisers also suffer from the effects of the violent acts they commit in the name of colonialism. Whereas the devastating impact of their violent behaviour on the colonised is unquestionable, by enacting violence the coloniser has also been subjected to violence. For instance, whilst working with primarily Algerian mental illness patients at the Blida-Joinville Hospital in Algeria during the war of Independence, Fanon treated some French paramilitaries who were suffering as a result of their work as official torturers (Hudis 66). Given that colonisers have not considered their actions as acts of violence, because they were within the ideological and legal parameters of colonisation, they have been ordained as above the law. Whereas, disputes or demonstrations of Indigenous resistance have been defined as violent, undoubtedly because they lay outside the parameters of colonial legal systems. Similarly, violence perpetrated upon Aboriginals by Aboriginals has been explained as customary practice by white officials. This is true even today, despite Indigenous communities stating the opposite (Atkinson 12).

Foucault - Madness

Racism and madness have existed since the Ancient Greeks. Based on a practice of domination and marked by distinguishing the animal from the human (Moreton-Robinson, "Whitening Race" 77), racism has throughout history equated the slave with the beast. As Aristotle expresses it:

It is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate, is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful. The same holds good for animals in relation to men. ...When there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals [...] the lower sort are by nature slaves and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of the master. (Hage 18)

Aristotle makes clear that the rational mind is favoured above a passionate, that is, a mad one, and that the slave and the animal are equally inferior to the superior male human. Given that during the Enlightenment, the writings of the Ancient Greeks were upheld as ideals to be embraced, it is not surprising that Foucault, also recognised that the animalisation of the mad was an important indicator of their unreasonable-ness. Human-ness, equates to the quality of reason, which as a universal principle, excludes inhuman and unreasonable qualities. Thus the madman and the slave/colonised/indogene are situated in a liminal position, which is neither human, nor animal (Moreton-Robinson, "Whitening Race" 77). It was the development of what Foucault called "social sensibility" based on white, middle class, social and juridical morals, which enabled the normalisation of whiteness as the measure of being truly human. Whiteness, defined by what it is not (animal, unreasoned or liminal), becomes the inferred, theoretical position of epistemological and ontological knowledge.

In *Madness and Civilization* (2001), Michel Foucault (1926-1984) explores the history of madness and its connection to the history of reason. He also demonstrates how madness is a social construct. Foucault discusses the events and changes that occurred to varying degrees in France, Germany, England, Spain and Italy, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which have shaped our modern conception of madness as mental illness. He refers firstly to the Great Confinement, in which large numbers of "unproductive and deviant people" were confined or removed from the city. These people were either mad, unemployed, or were considered to be of morally dubious character, such as sexual offenders, free-thinkers, or those guilty of religious profanity. Over a period of six years, 5000-6000 people in Paris (equating to 1 percent of the population) were displaced. On a practical level, this confinement was meant to deal with economic

problems of poverty, begging and unemployment. However, on another level, it was a way of dealing with persons who behaved in a manner that did not comply with the moral expectations of the bourgeoisie. Neither punishment, nor treatment was administered because they were not considered ill, but lacking in morality. This morality was not judged by religious standards, but those of society. Their behaviours were seen as threatening the “secular, social order” (Gutting 58). During the Age of Enlightenment, madness was considered in terms of a wider category of “unreasonable” people. Thus begins a “social sensibility” which, according to Foucault, led to the modern conception of madness as mental illness.

It must be noted that prior to the Age of Enlightenment, mad people were interned and some medical assistance given, for example in Spain in the early fifteenth century. However, its import is that during the Enlightenment, the focus was on internment not treatment because “the madman was not perceived as a sick man” (MC 69). They were believed to have totally rejected their human nature and as a result reason and truth. Instead they were treated like animals and displayed to the public:

The animality that rages in madness dispossesses man of what is specifically human in him; not in order to deliver him over to other powers, but simply to establish him at the zero degree of his own nature. For classicism, madness in its ultimate form is man in immediate relation to his animality without other reference, without any recourse. (MC 69)

The madman’s animality, it was believed, gave him a form of animal strength and resistance, enabling him to endure endless, unmerciful, physical difficulties, such as hunger, heat, cold and pain. In addition, Foucault, explains that madness played a new role in Christian thought. Previously, Christian faith was considered to be an abandonment of reason or a “glorified form of madness” (Gutting 61). With enlightenment, this perception changed and Christian faith was paralleled with reason and knowledge. Madness exhibited the basest depths to which man has stooped. Like Christ, who was also considered mad by assuming the flesh of man, and who showed mercy to lunatics, madmen could also find salvation. In this view, “unreason” becomes a choice (Gutting 65) between bourgeois morality and “animal fury”. By imprisoning madness, one confines its immorality.

Foucault is not attempting to describe specific perceptions, beliefs and practices of individuals, that is, what they thought or did. On the contrary, he is trying to demonstrate the fundamental categories or repressive ideologies that were at their core. What I am attempting to show is that the categorisation of human beings founded on bourgeois moral principles within an

increasingly secularised society became epidermalised under colonialism. This resulted in ethnocentric and racist ideologies which defined difference in terms of skin colour.

By exploring the history of madness, Foucault shows how madness came to be seen as reason's antithesis. For Foucault, madness relates to passion or excess which includes the ever present menace of violence, amorphousness and chaos (Whitebook 326). Stemming from the age of reason, psychiatry objectifies or externalises madness, placing it outside of society and civilization (Felman 3), confining and locking it up within mental institutions. Madness thus becomes another 'other': ostracised, marginalised, enveloped in silence, spoken for and interpreted by an authorial, objective knowledge. The mad are "robbed of subjectivity" and madness, like racism, becomes the "symptom of a culture" (Felman 3). The separation of reason and unreason allows for society to reassert itself as sane. In a colonial context where madness was even racially defined, this ensured white superiority and dominance.

Lacan – The Mirror Stage and Language

In order to explore aspects of Homi Bhabha's colonial discourse it is necessary to present two fundamental concepts developed by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981): the mirror stage and the structure of the psyche. The mirror stage is important to understanding how colonial stereotypes are produced and Lacan's explanation of the psyche's structure is important to Bhabha's understanding of colonial anxiety.

Lacan's theory of the Subject is comprised of three stages: the first is the mirror stage, between six and approximately eighteen months, in which the child is defined by the parameters of its body; the second is when the child acquires language; and the third is the Oedipus complex. The Symbolic order is considered the coming of age of the Subject and is marked by access to language and the Oedipal stage. Each of these stages is defined by lack, which is a central feature in Lacan's development of the Subject (Silverman 109). However, it is only through this Symbolic order that the Subject learns the notion of lack. Lacan's theory is based on the assumption that the human Subject has been divided from an originating, androgynous whole. Divided into two halves, one female and one male, the subject's objective is the pursuit of its complimentary half (Silverman 110), in order to become this unified, idealised version of itself. The Subject believes therefore, that it is always incomplete or lacking.

According to Lacan the psyche is comprised of three interrelated levels which are equally important: the Real (originary unity, primordial, beyond language); the Symbolic (the structure of language which enables the illusion of the ego); and the Imaginary (the process of identification) (Huddart 43). Prior to the Symbolic order there is the Imaginary. The Imaginary dimension is

constituted by the relation between the self and its idealised image, which is typically exemplified by the mirror stage.

The mirror stage occurs at the early stages of infancy and explains the way in which a child interprets the first time it sees its reflection in a mirror. The ideal-I or the primordial form (Real) of the child is prior to language. The child understands its reflection as both its Self and not its Self. By identifying with this image in the mirror, the child discovers the possibility of being physically separate to another body (typically the mother). However, this identification process is not that straightforward. The child's view of himself as autonomous, is at odds with what it physically can master or imagine itself capable of. Lacan expresses this as an "organic insufficiency" in the child's "natural reality" which is a result of "a certain dehiscence at the heart of the organism" (NATC 1166). Mis-recognition (*méconnaissance*) is then a consequence of the child's physical limitations conflicting with this autonomous image of itself: a conflict between the child's inner and outer world. The child experiences, simultaneously self-recognition and misrecognition with this 'other'. Unification of the same but not same image, becomes an impossible task and the self remains divided. Reality for the child/Subject is essentially defined through self-alienation. Stated another way, this love-hate relationship between the Subject and its objects or images is endemic to the Imaginary. Trapped within this world of binaries, the Subject will fluctuate between identifying with these two extremes (victim/victimiser, exhibitionist/voyeur, master/slave) as it privileges one over the other (Silverman 114).

Throughout its life, the child will attempt to reconcile these forms/images in order to return to an original unity. This idealised form of the ego or 'I' acquires meaning through a system of values which are formulated through social norms. During the *mirror stage* these norms are mediated typically by the child's mother, who interprets for instance, the child's mirror image. It can also be introduced to the child through numerous representations, such as toys and picture-books, which contribute to the way in which the child will eventually see itself (Silverman 116). The Subject's identity will be sustained during its lifetime through the repetition of these mediated initial objects/images. It is through language that these images are realised. It is at this time that the Subject sees its self as 'other' or object. Although Lacan states that the mirror stage is prior to the Symbolic order, it is dependent upon language. In this way, the Imaginary and the Symbolic dimensions overlap, informing each other.

Signification is explained as the matrix of language, desire and cultural value (Silverman 119). Signification occurs when the Subject acquires language. Language is the system of difference in which the subject-position 'I' is constructed. Identity depends on difference. The subject identifies its Self, whilst also recognising its difference from others (Rice & Waugh 120). However, the Subject experiences a loss or lack. The position to which it is subjected to by

language, is predefined by human culture (laws, social conventions ...) and beyond its control. Furthermore, it is at this moment of enunciation that desire and the unconscious are also created. The subject mediates through the desire of an external 'other' for a sense of self-certainty and completion which should "correspond to natural maturation" (Lacan 1168). Looking at the representation of himself, the "mirage", one senses a "maturation of power" that results in permanence and alienation. There is both a sense of self and non-self. This maturation of the 'I' is equally dependent upon social and cultural situations which shape desire. This desire is narcissistic, it is a desire for an ideal representation or unified Subject which is beyond reach (Silverman 128). The unattainability of this unity, the alienation, means the Subject experiences a loss or lack. It is this lack which for Bhabha drives colonial anxiety.

When the Subject takes on the pre-defined meanings available in language it has to repress its desire to control meaning. This repression is then housed in the unconscious (Silverman 119). However, it is not possible to control meaning because of the nature of language. Lacan argues that there is no one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified, since "the signifiers of language cannot fix the arbitrary field of the signified; signifiers slide across the continuum and hence the desire for mastery of meaning is unsatisfiable" (Silverman 124). This continuum of meaning is possible due to metaphor and metonymy which allow signifiers to be continually substituted or replaced. The use of metaphor involves a process in which similar or related terms are selected. Whereas metonym combines signifiers that are associated, due to spatial and/or temporal proximity (Huddart 41). Within the field of speech and language, signifiers can be marriage ceremonies, hysteria, conventions of dress, and neuroses (Silverman 118-119). As a consequence, the Subject is completely "contained within a network of signification" (Silverman 119). However, language has an elevated position, as it mediates all signifiers.

Since language and desire work together, it is through language, in which the Subject, is constituted as both subject and object. The subject of enunciation is never exactly in the same place as the subject doing the enunciating. The resultant gap, means that the I/Subject is unstable. The I, the Subject that we know and speak, only resides in language. As the child matures, s/he will be continually constituted via social and linguistic interactions with the other, which will, in turn, give the child the particular characteristics of their personality, including of course, their neuroses.

If psychoanalysis is a "talking cure", then the importance and an understanding of language and speech is fundamental to this cure. This was something that was implicit in Freud's work but never explored until Lacan's efforts to explain how we identify ourselves in society through language. How does the 'I' work in language? Part of his theory is that every truth, every reflection, is partial (Žižek 4). The loss of the one-to-one correlation between signifier and signified means that the humanist notion of a unified and stable Subject becomes ambivalent (to use Bhabha's term).

This contradiction results in a de-stabilised Subject (Rice & Waugh 120). Similarly, this undermines the stable conception of stereotypes and their fixity.

Bhabha – Stereotypes and Mimicry

In *The Location of Culture* (1994/2004) Homi K. Bhabha (1949-) Bhabha resists the notion of binary opposition within colonial discourse, manifested by the use of stereotypes. Instead, he explains that the power struggle between the coloniser and colonised is anything but simple. Mimicry provides an opportunity for resistance by exploiting stereotypes and ambivalence. Through the unitary power of stereotypes, nations and cultures impose their authority and power, by reducing national and cultural identities to a homogenous and essential core. Stereotypes, as a system of categorisation, circumscribes non-white people and social minority groups, in order to sustain their inscribed subordinate position. Stereotypes, thus become norms, deemed 'natural'. Stereotypes establish a sense of identity based upon the "certainty of difference" which is comforting (Ashcroft 202). This certainty of difference attempts to fix or stabilise identities on the one hand, while rejecting or disavowing *différance*⁴. Stereotypes are therefore typically perceived as fixed or unchangeable.

For Bhabha, stereotypes involve the process of seeing and being seen. Colonial power uses surveillance in terms of the "scopic drive" (LC 109). The scopic drive "represents the pleasure in seeing" (LC 109), often referred to as the gaze. Bhabha locates the object under surveillance within Lacan's the mirror stage. In the Imaginary order, the child sees an image that it recognises as itself and the object of its mother's desire. It is at this stage that the Subject sees its Self as 'other' or object. This image is comforting in its sameness as well as alienating, even confrontational. It is this idea of narcissism and aggressiveness which the power of colonialism exercises in the stereotype. The stereotype provides certainty of difference whilst simultaneously disavowing or masking it. Analogously, the stereotype is the illusion of a stable, unified identity, its "'fullness' [...] is always threatened by 'lack'" (LC 110).

However, stereotypes are not singular but multiple. This multiplicity is a result of metaphor and metonymy (which Bhabha refers to as the "tropes of fetishism" (LC 110) and the Imaginary's narcissistic and aggressive identifications. The conflictual positions of these four terms constitutes the Subject in colonial discourse. Typically the metaphoric or masking function is paired with narcissism, and the metonymic representation of lack with aggression (LC 110). In order for the meaning of the stereotype to be successful, it relies on metaphor and metonymy to perpetuate a series of stereotypes that can be continually repeated (LC 110). This "doubling" as Bhabha calls it,

⁴ Term derived from Derrida which plays on two French words "to defer" and "to differ".

is a different way of imagining the certainty of colonial knowledge viewed as norms, which is always in a state of ambivalence or anxiety. Ambivalence caused by the stereotype, simultaneously expresses the aggressive domination of the other and exemplifies the Self's narcissistic anxiety. In the colonial context, through the stereotype the coloniser asserts his aggressive superiority, all the while anxiously aware of his own identity, which is never as stable as he imagines. Moreover, there is always a danger that the object of the gaze will look in return (both literally and figuratively), thereby substituting the coloniser's image of himself with one that is alienating and fixed. Yet, there is always the element of loss or lack/absence. The stereotype forces the colonial subject to identify with what it is not – the other – undermining the notion of an original identity. This leads to an ambivalence of the stereotype's authority and a splitting of the ego of the colonised subject. For both Bhabha and Fanon, there is no 'fact' of blackness or whiteness. If these facts are founded on a belief of a singular fixed identity, then at the moment you believe you have fixed it, that you can control difference, then identity/meaning begins to slip away.

The stereotype presumes knowledge about the 'other' – limited knowledge which the colonial discourse impedes and articulates as fetish. For the colonial subject this fetish is his skin. Skin is the most visible and recognisable of stereotypical 'knowledges'. As a fetish, it is both an object of love and hate, though in disproportionate amounts, which allows for a wide range of disparate stereotypes: from dignified and obedient servants; savages; child-like innocence; simple-minded; oversexualised; to liar (*LC* 118). Skin becomes a "signifier of discrimination" (*LC* 113). In spite of its repressed status it remains visible, thereby reminding us of it and reinforcing its difference whilst simultaneously occluding its contrived production (*LC* 114). The recognition of difference is obtained by concealing the way in which it is produced, via discrimination, giving it a seemingly 'natural' configuration. Colour then, equates to the 'sign' of inferiority or degeneracy in the colonial cultural/political context, and "skin as its natural 'identity'" (*LC* 114). Stereotypes of Indigenous people were that were infantile, uncivilised, "inherently weak" and expected to "die out" (Smith, 68) and inferior to the coloniser. They were ranked in terms of their humanity: 'nearly human', 'almost human' and 'subhuman'. These assessments were based upon whether they were deemed to possess "a 'soul' and could be offered salvation and whether or not they were 'educable' and could be offered schooling" (Smith, 60). The Indigenous 'Other' was thus created through oppositional, biological and racial essentialist distinctions which were circulated by stereotypes and substantiated by disciplines of knowledge, notably Law and Science.

From Fanon's perspective, the assimilation of the "native" into white society requires "a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?'" (WoTE 200). These processes of identification, desire and

derision, circulated by stereotypes, subject both the coloniser and colonised to an epistemological and ontological crises. The stability and certainty suggested by fixed identities conjure an idealised Self that can never be realised. Stereotypes cannot fill their apparent function and consequentially alienation is introduced into our sense of Self (Huddart 44).

In response to this crisis caused by alienation, Bhabha explains that the colonised use mimicry. Mimicry is not the process of assimilation through the acquisition of language, culture, behaviours and ideas into the dominant culture. Instead, the acquisition of these cultural knowledges is imitated by excess and difference: exaggeration, repetition and mockery. He explains that:

colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.
(*LC* 122)

Bhabha offers mimicry as a counterbalance to anxiety. Mimicry can never make the black man, white. He can be “almost the same but not white” (*LC* 128). As a possible form of parody, mimicry contains the suggestion of mockery. It transforms the colonial subject into an uncertainty, which on the one hand is simultaneously reassuring, due to its similarity to the coloniser, and on the other hand unsettling, due to its dissimilarity. The identity of the coloniser is constantly destabilised, slipping away in the doubling of resemblance (129) and menace (131). Bhabha equates the effects of mimicry in Lacanian terms as the effect of camouflage, the ability of something or someone to blend in with the background, which is itself not entirely there (*LC* 12). Mimicry does not repress difference harmoniously. It is resemblance, since it re-presents identity and meaning partially and metonymically. Mimicry reveals the gap in the certainty of colonial domination, and in the coloniser’s certainty in his ability to control the behaviours of the colonised. In this respect it is menacing because it highlights the limitations of colonial authority.

Mimicry becomes a tool of resistance to colonial authority: “the observer becomes the observed and “partial” representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence” (*LC* 89). In other words, the notion of an essential, unified subject becomes obsolete, since mimicry reveals and causes an incomplete and mythical identity. Fixed identities are a myth. “Slippage” or the slipping away of identity for the colonial subject is constant. By challenging the coloniser’s notions of essential identity, mimicry threatens colonial power. Therefore mimicry creates the possibility for agency (Huddart 76). By extension, the nation’s belief in the totality or sovereignty of their power is never complete, but rather replete with anxiety. It is this anxiety which

presents an opening for the colonised to act. Unlike Fanon, agency for Bhabha is not witnessed by revolution or violent acts. Instead, he investigates agency in literature, where opposition is displayed linguistically, demonstrating that fixed differences between the coloniser and colonised are impossible to maintain. The menace of post-colonial writing is not just the disruption to colonial authority, but it is that in mimicry there is the possibility of mockery beneath the surface. Mimicry provides the colonial subject with the possibility of creating something new, a “hybrid identity” (*NATC* 2352).

By resisting the ideas of fixity and sublation (assimilating a smaller entity into a large one (OED), Bhabha rejects essentialist and unitary definitions of the subject and tries to show that the world is not simply polarised into the self and the other. He uses the term hybridity to emphasise the mixed nature of cultures and identities. Hybridity is an ongoing process. People and cultures are always in contact with one another, an intersubjective relationship, and therefore always in the process of “hybridisation”. This process leads to a fluid sense of identity or cultural mixed-ness (Huddart 7). Bhabha is not promoting multiculturalism or diversity of cultures, resulting in the comfortable synthesis resulting in hybridisation. Synthesis has the notion of fixity which Bhabha rejects. Instead, Bhabha is trying to conceptualise “‘contradiction’ or the dialectic as that state of being or thinking that is “neither the one nor the other, but something else besides”(Mitchell): an in-between space, a third space or time-lag— “that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (*TCT* 2372). Bhabha is rejecting binary distinctions, insisting instead on plurality. One could argue that via opposition (refused participation in social or domestic ideologies) and referral to his/her difference(s), the subject comes to know him/herself. However, Bhabha would argue that meaning or knowledge is fleeting, only partial, because hybridisation is inherent to and a matter of, continual negotiation.

Stereotypes in and of themselves may well be merely seen as an example of how identities are produced. However, when they are naturalised, encapsulated within a political and legal framework that no longer sees their racial bias, it is then, beneath the camouflage, that mimicry thus prompts the reassessment of “normative knowledges of race, writing, history” (*LC* 130) which inform the Western world. Mimicry, which is never identical, is ambivalent and creates ambivalence, rupturing the grand discourses of humanism, Enlightenment and racism upon which colonialism is based (Huddart 60). Ensuring that difference is maintained is important to justifying the colonial ideology of superiority, which explains how one group of people can dominate another.

Anxiety and Shame in Post-Colonial Australia

Bhabha's analysis of colonial discourse is a way of interpreting modernity and the nation state. Bhabha offers an analysis of modernity to uncover colonialism's unconscious, its hidden presence and to show how colonialism still affects us today. Like the colonial subject, the narrative of modernity, of "democratic and technological progress", seems to be stable and unified in purpose and meaning (Huddart 9). Yet it is similarly troubled by anxiety. The coloniser's anxiety is not a thing of the past, but a reality which permeates the contemporary Australian psyche. In post-colonial Australia, the past haunts the present.

In post-colonial discourse events and people are perceived in terms of us and them, the centre and the periphery. In post-colonial Australia, white Australia is in the centre and black and migrant Australia on the fringe. However, in order to keep white Australia in the centre, *terra nullius* must be maintained (Callahan 140). According to David Callahan, the reclassification of someone else's home as one's own, reclassifying as "nowhere" what was once the centre of a people's world, has left all Australians, First Nation Peoples and the descendants of settlers, with disabled and broken identifications. Australians have Callahan claims, lost their centre: they have become "ex-centric" (140). Yet in actual fact, Indigenous Australians know where their centre is, as the Australia's original custodians, they have simply been decentred. So it is white Australians who are primarily ex-centric. White Australians' lost centre is not the Empire or Europe (as has previously been the tenet in post-colonial discourse) but Australia itself. In the wake of a lost centre, a centre that they in fact never had, non-Indigenous sense of belonging and consequently their psychological stability/identity is threatened.

The ramifications of the incommensurability of white Australia's own history is felt in terms of identity formations but equally in terms of its own belonging. It is not only culture that separates non-Indigenous people from the land, but "the burden of history" (Brady 243). This refers to the genocidal impact colonialism has had on Indigenous peoples. Recently in Australia, a major characteristic of modernity has been "the politics of regret" (Olick qtd in Callahan 141-142). This is a way of facing the atrocities of the past with the intention that the state or society at large will acknowledge them. Timothy Bewes extrapolates this idea to explore "shame". Shame is an irrational, catastrophic event which leaves the subject deeply disorientated when presented with an object (Australia's history) it cannot comprehend (Bewes qtd in Callahan 141-142). Callahan explains that "shame" is a position in which white Australian writers find themselves. For Bewes, addressing or writing "shame" is not a redemptive process, in which one can move beyond the past, the damages of history. Rather, it is "a materialization of the discrepancy between content and form, of the inadequacy of form with respect to content" (Bewes qtd in Callahan 142). I understand this to

mean that it is not possible for the novel to represent the colonial world. It is not possible to write out of the past, or write beyond shame, because all postcolonial writing manifests shame (Callahan 142).

Shame is another factor which complicates the non-Indigenous experience and sense of belonging. Bewes notion of blame can be extended to the Australian society at large—witness examples of regret and shame through the “say sorry” petitions signed by everyday Australians (myself included) which served as a catalyst for the Sorry Speech by President Rudd on 13 February, 2008. In one respect the formal apology was significant as evidence of symbolic reconciliation and the hope of actual reconciliation (Johnson, “Intertextuality” 37). However, these actions did not, in effect, assuage the guilt or result in any concrete action of import or betterment for Indigenous peoples. It did not result in greater self-determination or offer reparations to the Stolen Generations (Gunstone 309). It did not result in greater stabilisation or re-centring of the self for either Indigenous or non-Indigenous peoples. Significantly, however, shame does relocate focus from the guilty perpetrator to the shamed subject’s victimhood as a consequence of violence (Leys qtd in Callahan 148). Thus Callahan states that shame is an entirely reasonable response to Australia’s history. Furthermore, Australian history makes it reasonable to draw parallels between “the site of shame and the site of madness” (Callahan 148). Not acknowledging that shame is like madness, a symptom of colonialism is the unreasonable option. Hence, ‘madness’ is an apt response to Australia’s colonial history for anxiety stricken white Australians.

Conclusion

Fanon, Foucault, Lacan and Bhabha focus on the problems of identity. For Fanon and Bhabha identity is examined specifically with regard to the colonial subject. Both recognise that the colonial subject is formed on the basis of difference, with particular emphasis on race. The objective of colonial racism is to justify conquest and subjugation, thereby allowing systems of administration and instruction to be established. However, as Fanon asserts, there is no difference between colonial racism and other racisms (*BSWM* 69). Whilst both Fanon and Bhabha refer to mimicry, Fanon sees it as a means of obtaining recognition from the coloniser, a way of being seen and therefore validated as human beings. Mimicry for Fanon provides the opportunity for the black man/colonised to redress his inferiority complex. Bhabha expands on Fanon’s notion of reciprocal recognition between coloniser and colonised to include anxiety. He considers mimicry (imitation of cultural knowledges) as an ambivalent phenomenon, in which neither the coloniser nor the colonised has a fixed, foundational identity, that can be mimicked or that is betrayed through the act of mimicry (Huddart 71). Mimicry is not attempting to create an identical replication of the

coloniser, but rather a re-presentation, a manipulation of representation that borders on mockery (LC 89). Within this borderland of mask and image, subversion emerges threatening colonial power and authority. This authority is always speculative in Australia as it is based on the ambivalent claim of *terra nullius*.

Racism for Fanon and Bhabha is not essentialist. For Fanon it is a habitual way of looking. Bhabha observes how racism functions to naturalise the stereotype through the skin, camouflaging its artificially constructed status. Foucault shows us that that racism is not only about epidermalisation, as Fanon refers to it, but includes qualities or attributes which are deemed inhuman. This investigation reveals the moral bourgeois sensibilities which influenced practices of containment also serving to reinforce humanist unifying principles. These principles were then incorporated into the colonial processes. The notion of universal humanity where “to be white is to be human, and to be human is to be white” (Montag qtd in Gunew 1724) still holds sway over modern society. Through Foucault we see that parallels between the othering of the mentally deranged and the othering of Indigenous peoples are unequivocal.

For Bhabha and Lacan there is no unitary subject. The illusion that society mirrors the Subject’s inner world is refuted. However, for Lacan, it is through language that society is mediated. Language is the means by which the Subject attempts to reconcile itself with reality. The tropes of metaphor and metonymy are used to show the way in which meaning in language is never fixed. Meaning is infinite and slippery. Bhabha confirms this with his analysis of stereotypes, stating that there is always slippage in representation: there is always something that eludes “the psychic, political or legal bounds” of representation (Potter 38). Consequently, these theorists include notions of lack. Lack is both the impetus and the result of desire for of the other. For Lacan and Bhabha, the desire to meet the demands of representation, the ideal-I or stereotype, is unattainable. Identity is constantly destabilised due to this lack, resulting in splitting. Foucault attacks the demands of psychoanalysis which interrogate our inner world (Whitebook 313). He claims that psychoanalysis constituted “a split subject with an inner world - as their object” (Whitebook 314). His disavowal of self-reflection was paralleled with his refusal to reflect on his own theoretical position. He attests that the inwardly directed gaze or self-observation is inherently violent and malevolent. There is no benign self-exploration in the distinction between an observing ego (driven by a desire to know) and the observed part of the self (Whitebook 320). There is only paranoia in the gaze. Refusing to partake in the interminable verification of herself between her inner and outer worlds (NATC 1167), Oblivia in *The Swan Book* similarly chooses not to reflect, seeing it as an act of violence: “pillaging” her mind (SB 50).

All four theorists assert the importance of society and culture as a determinant of identity. They all recognise that ‘madness’—psychic alienation and aggression—is the meeting point of

nature and culture (*NATC* 1169; *LC* 62). Through his psychoanalytical approach, Fanon avers that madness is not a natural condition of the human psyche but a condition of modern society. Foucault explains how madmen were shunned from society, robbed of their subjectivity. Bhabha argues that mimicry results in excess, partial knowledge and alienation, leaving the Subject destabilised. Colonialism, it seems, is a font of madness. By maintaining the hierarchy between blacks and whites through racialised discourse, colonialism justifies “the existence of a civilized (even when mad) white Australian society” (Zinato & Pers 6). It also helps to naturalise the political and imperial ideology at work in the colonial process, couching it in Darwinian terms of the survival of the fittest. Colonialist inhumane treatment of and power over Indigenous inhabitants, illuminates how anxiety and psychological instability are caused by the conditions of colonialism itself (Callahan 142). Thus, colonialism emboldens the coloniser to perpetrate intense and violent acts, subjecting the colonised to said acts, from which madness is a reasonable outcome. The discourse of discrimination, Bhabha assures us, leaves its mark not only on the victim but the perpetrator.

CHAPTER 2: In the Pursuit of Sovereignty and Identity: Madness a Prerequisite for Psychic Survival

If you take the land you take the ground of our culture...
If you take the children you take the future of our culture...
If you keep on taking there will be nothing left to take...⁵

Sovereignty is an ongoing emotive and political debate within black and white Australia. It is inextricably intertwined with land-rights. Sovereignty, as this chapter will illustrate, has a plurality of meanings. Much modern Indigenous literature is concerned with reclaiming and (re)-defining sovereignty. Generally, this involves eschewing or modifying the hegemonic sovereignty model of the Anglo-European nation. In this chapter, I will present definitions of sovereignty from both a non-Indigenous and Indigenous perspective. This involves investigating the influences of history, politics, law, etymology and ontology on these definitions. For both groups sovereignty relates to the notion of ‘belonging’ and in concrete terms it is connected to land ownership and/or accessibility. Many critics, historians and psychiatrists claim that having a sense of place is fundamental to our psychological well-being. Whilst displacement has been the outcome of colonialism for Indigenous people, for non-Indigenous people emplacement has been their relentless colonialist goal. I explore the way both groups of people suffer from psychological poverty, due to conflicts over access to place, in spite of the fact that white Australians have been ‘controlling’ that space for nearly three centuries. However, for Indigenous people the compounding effects of historical racism and violence inherent in colonialist policies and practices, which includes but is not limited to land deprivation, has been exacerbated by current day racism and violence. This has resulted in disturbing levels of physical, emotional and mental health problems within the Indigenous community. Loss of sovereignty, which for Indigenous people incorporates loss of land and the right to greater self-determination and self-government, culminates in the pursuit of psychological freedom via a textual world.

⁵ Mick Dodson’s (former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner) speech at the launch of the National Enquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families at the Australian Reconciliation Convention, Melbourne, 26/5/1997. www.artlink.com.au/articles/3359/learning-to-be-proppa-aboriginal-artists-collecti/.

Sovereignty

Western definitions of Sovereignty

As a term, sovereignty has evolved over time and still continues to do so. Historically sovereignty has been perceived as “the power and authority to govern” (Brennan et al. 308). This definition perhaps aligns more with a Western view than an Indigenous perception of sovereignty. On January 1st 1901, Australia became a sovereign nation. Gaining independence from Britain allowed Australia to govern in its own right. By means of a Constitution, Australia became a Federation, which means that powers are divided between the Federal government and the governments of the six colonies, which were renamed states. Designated areas of legislative power were divided among the states and the Federal government. The States were allocated legislative power over matters that transpire within their borders, such as police, hospitals, education and public transport. The Federal government was allocated taxation, defence forces, foreign affairs and postal and telecommunications services⁶. These designations still exist today and are important when qualifying sovereignty further.

Distinctions can then be made between external and internal sovereignty. External sovereignty is related to Australia’s status as a nation-state, in particular international relations, including international law and foreign affairs. It is concerned with who has the power to represent Australia when dealing externally with other political, nation-states (Falk and Martin 39). Internal sovereignty relates to constitutional law (public laws within a country) and domestic politics. It is concerned with how and where power is distributed within Australia’s physical borders, that is, her six states and two territories. In the light of these definitions, we can see that Western definitions of sovereignty are concerned with nations, borders, politics and law.

Challenging the general definition of sovereignty as absolute power and authority, is the conception of sovereignty as divisible. This implies that sovereignty can be shared, either across different political entities or geographical locations (Brennan et al. 312). This definition can apply to both external and internal sovereignty models. Shared sovereignty in an external model could mean the creation of a separate nation-state. This nation-state would be recognised internationally as distinct and independent from the Australian nation-state, bound by the international system of governance (the law of nations). Alternatively, an internal sovereignty model can be compared with the status of a “domestic dependent nation” currently in effect in America and to a different extent in Canada. This is where Indigenous peoples’ inherent right to self-government and self-determination is recognised by governments and courts via a treaty. Discussions in Australia

⁶ www.australia.gov.au/about-government/how-government-works/federation

concerning an Indigenous treaty or treaties have been broached. A treaty would require a change to the Australian constitution, from which Indigenous people are presently excluded. Currently, no progress has been made. As part of the Commonwealth, Australia is the only one of the fifty-three member-nations who do not have a treaty with their Indigenous peoples.

There are, of course, other definitions of sovereignty which challenge this generalised understanding. Many people will probably reject the definitions discussed above, asserting that sovereignty is about the power of the people who can elect their government as part of the democratic process and via referendum produce constitutional changes (Falk & Martin 35). In contrast to this political and legal angle, others may well extoll a grassroots understanding of sovereignty which does not stem from any law or institution but from an inherent human quality, granting us autonomy over our individual, day-to-day lives. This perspective of sovereignty encapsulates the notion of free will, reason, knowledge, experience and, to a lesser degree, emotion. This understanding derives from ideas of rationality from Enlightenment and the discourse of humanism, which favours the individual, consciousness, language and knowledge gained via socialisation, education and lived experience. It also resists notions of identity centred on essentialism, where the essence of the human individual is located in biology and natural science or in social structures. This humanistic perspective of sovereignty is based on assumptions of a shared common humanity or sameness, with shared basic rights and needs. The United Nations is the institutional manifestation of humanism, working towards universal human rights for all. However, this “sameness” was not the experience of every person living in colonial nations, and it is not the lived experience of people in the world today where race, class, gender privileges are not identical or equally distributed and shared. Societies are splintered. The dynamics of power relationships between race, class and gender socially constitute subjectivities and identities in ways that resist the unified and rational assumptions of humanism. In spite of the realities of our World shown every night on the 9 o’clock news, people still uphold this humanistic approach to sovereignty.

Terra nullius

Terra nullius is an international law that works within the parameters pertaining to an external model of sovereignty. When the British Captain, Arthur Phillip arrived with his fleet at Botany Bay in 1788, he was authorised by the British crown to declare sovereignty over what would become the Australian continent. He achieved this by claiming *terra nullius*, which meant that the land was unoccupied. However, historical records from 1800s onwards reveal that there was an understanding among the colonial settlers that Aborigines did exist everywhere on the continent and according to one Governor are “the real proprietors of the soil” (Falk & Martin 37). From the early 1880s to the 1970s, this notion of *terra nullius* has been legally challenged. At each turn, the

meaning of *terra nullius* has expanded, ensuring the Crown's sovereignty. From its original meaning, it transformed to being unoccupied and unsettled. Then, it was reinterpreted to mean "without settled inhabitants or settled law". This was then redefined to represent "a territory which by European standards, had no civilised inhabitants or settled law" (Falk & Martin 37). In 1992, Edward Koiki Mabo, challenged the Queensland's Government's sovereignty over the island of Mer in the Torres Strait. Mabo and the Meriam people of the island were able to prove through continued occupation, that they had title to their land and had never ceded it to the British. Although, *terra nullius* was overturned and Eddie Mabo had paved the way for native title, the Federal Government reduced the possibility of success for other Indigenous peoples claiming their land, by replacing its assertion of sovereignty as being an Act of state. As a result, the legality of the Crown's sovereignty cannot be subjected to trial in an Australian court of law. Criticism by Indigenous peoples has unsurprisingly been directed towards the Australian government (past and present) who have been able to manipulate the law, changing definitions to determine specific political outcomes regarding Indigenous sovereignty over land. Many view this as an example of judicial racism (Falk & Martin 38). On the other hand, the Mabo decision showed that "Indigenous sovereignty was never extinguished, and that sovereignty could be dispersed or shared" (Potter 33). Providing hope for Australia's First Nation peoples, Mabo was a catalyst in striving for alternative forms of Indigenous sovereignty.

Indigenous definitions of Sovereignty

Indigenous people have different interpretations of "sovereignty" from their white counterparts. Within the Indigenous community the notion of sovereignty is problematic. Despite being categorised by non-Indigenous people as a homogenous group, Indigenous people of Australia consist of many different nations within the Australian landmass. There is no overarching political body that represents the entirety of the Indigenous people of Australia, in spite of the Australian Government's attempt to create one with ATSIC, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (Watson 25). From one critic's point of view, "Aboriginality is constructed in discourse and varies across tribal groups from ancient times to the present, and is not – contrary to some white legal definitions – the same thing from one federal state to another" (Johnson, "Elision" 57). Each group or nation has its own geographical space which does not align with the borders of the states and territories created under Federation. Each Indigenous group or nation has its own law, language(s), spirituality, geography, economics, and kinship relations connected to particular areas. For example, Alexis Wright is a member of the Wannji nation of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Gulf Country straddles the boundary between Queensland and the Northern Territory. Within Gulf Country there are multiple tribes (Wannji, GudANJI, Binbinga, Wagaya ...) each connected to different tracts of land.

These tribes, the names of which are also synonymous with the language they speak, are like jigsaw pieces that together become one mob (Martin et al. 331).

Even though the Indigenous community is not homogenous, Aboriginals have adopted Western legal and political conceptions of sovereignty discussed in the previous section. For instance, there are those who advocate for a separate nation state (an external sovereignty model). In 1990, the Aboriginal Provisional Government was established. Their vision is “for Aboriginal people to take [their] place among the nations and peoples of the world, not beneath them”⁷. In 1992 they proposed a model for the Aboriginal Nation which would have exclusive jurisdiction over its communities and economy and whose land base is at least all crown lands (public lands).

This overtly political version has not been unanimously embraced, because for many, recognition of Indigenous sovereignty is a recognition of their rights. Internationally, these rights are not expressed in terms of sovereignty. Article 3 of The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination”⁸. The expression “self-determination” has been favoured by Indigenous communities as a means of attaining recognition of “local Indigenous sovereignty” which could coexist within a nation-state. This would mean having the freedom to manage and complete rights to make decisions that affect their lives. Sovereignty then becomes more than a way of attaining legal and political justice, it is a way of claiming an “innate sense of identity” (Brennan et al. 314).

Having shown that the term sovereignty resists any legal or semantic definition, it is perhaps time to consider it as a “wholly emotive term” (Akehurst qtd in Falk & Martin 35) which inscribes itself upon the Australian physical and mental states. The following Indigenous definition of Western sovereignty exemplifies this, claiming that it is concerned with “Western systems of legislature, enactment, principle, enforcement, courts and incarceration” (Atkinson 27). This negative view indicates that the legal apparatus connected to sovereignty does not serve and protect Indigenous people, but restricts and contains them. This critique alludes to the way in which Western sovereignty (past and present) enacted and enforced by laws, moral certitude and white supremacy, has appropriated Aboriginal land, displaced and imprisoned Aboriginal people, firstly in mission stations and then later into prisons (Watson 18). Indeed, it responds to equally negative and resistant public reactions to claims of Indigenous sovereign rights from white Australians (Moreton-Robinson, “Sovereign” xi). Questions of indigenous autonomy appear to threaten white Australian’s conception of national identity and security, challenging their right of belonging to the Australian land-mass.

⁷ www.apg.org.au

⁸ www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

Divisive opinions surrounding political issues such as sovereignty and land-rights, have been used by non-Indigenous peoples to demonstrate the implausibility of Indigenous political arguments (Elder 350). What is of importance here is not which argument is correct or true, but that Indigenous people should be seen to be a unified group of people with a single purpose. Why are Indigenous people delimited to a single story when non-Indigenous people are not? These idealistic essentialist restrictions imposed on the Indigenous community make it difficult for land-right's issues to gain traction among the non-Indigenous community. It also makes it difficult for non-indigenous people to understand the motivations of Indigenous people. Motivations, which for many, Alexis Wright included, couch sovereignty within 'native-centred consciousness', rather than a legal framework.

Perhaps, one could describe this 'native-centred conscious' (NCC) sovereignty' from a cosmological or spiritual perspective as this critic does: "the plenitude of indigenous spiritual, cosmological and historical connectedness with the land" (Anne Brewster 86). Whilst this description highlights the importance of a geographical space and a metaphysical awareness that links the past with the present, it does not provide sufficient complexity. In addition the use of cosmological and spiritual are problematic. From a Western perspective, these words may result in associations with New-Ageism, running the risk of it being discredited. An alternative explanation of NCC sovereignty is that it is an embodied experience which is simultaneously ontological and epistemological and is "grounded in the complex relations derived from the intersubstantiation of ancestral beings, humans and land' (Moreton-Robinson "Sovereign" 2). From my point of view this definition encapsulates the fundamental elements of NCC sovereignty which I understand to be

- the intimate connections of ancestral beings (animate and inanimate), humans and material features of place or Country
- that these connections or relationships are reciprocal and inform each other and include a responsibility to care for all life within place or Country
- that the Indigenous experience of place or Country is something that inheres, that is, exists essentially or permanently, though the body and mind.
- entwined with Indigenous ways of being and knowing that are informed by Indigenous Law, Stories and Country which include a notion of 'all-time'

From this embodied perspective, accessibility to land or Country is understood as central to Indigenous concerns, and vital to enacting and obtaining NCC sovereignty.

Native - Centred Conscious Sovereignty

Law and Time

In terms of NCC sovereignty there are three terms which are central: Dreamtime; Law; and Country⁹. All three concepts are imbricated and interwoven. Dreamtime is the overarching concept of the Indigenous worldview which, in the form of stories, are handed down from generation to generation. These stories are a set of origin myths which join to create the environmental, cultural and legal backbone of Indigenous society. Considered secret and/or sacred, the Dreamtime is “given in custody to its members as country-mapping “songlines” guarded by totemic Ancestors” (Renes 103). Stories of belonging or songlines explain Indigenous society: connections between peoples, land and Ancestors. Songlines can be envisaged as a complex map (Elder 237) that criss-cross each nation’s Country, revealing the paths travelled by the Ancestors. It is these stories which are commonly referenced when talking about the Dreaming.

Law explains how to sustain country, that is, “how to maintain and renew the network of connections between all life” (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina 203). All life includes geographical features, animals, the elements and Ancestors. These laws, which interconnect and overlap, are determined by Country and therefore specific to it. The laws are not hierarchically structured. They do not invalidate each other, nor exist apart from the others. Linking Aboriginal peoples, the law and songlines are unique to each country and thereby that Country’s source of truth. For example, the Pleiades is a star cluster in Western Astronomy which is located to the North-West of Orions’s belt. The seven stars that can be seen there are part of a Dreaming story which explains how seven sisters became stars. These seven sisters are related to a particular Aboriginal nation and are therefore their Ancestors. Ancestors, do not have to be human or have been human. Ancestors can include everything and anything that exists and has existed in Country: geographical features, animals, the elements. Whether alive or dead (ghosts) they are still Ancestors.

Variations of this tale are told by many different Aboriginal nations. From an Indigenous perspective the variations do not indicate an absence of truth, instead they show how each variation is true according to the perspective from which it is told. Each Aboriginal nation inhabits a different Country from which one views the sky differently. For instance, Anita Heiss belongs to Waradjuri Country and Gdgal and Dharawal land where she spent a great deal of her youth (45). Alexis Wright belongs to Golf Country. Although, Country is a term known and used by all Indigenous people, what Country refers to, is specific to each person and Aboriginal group. This specificity, shapes the stories and Law pertaining to that Country. Thus, “Every story is true, within its own

⁹ In order to distinguish the Indigenous concepts from words in the English language, the initial letter of these concepts have been capitalized.

space” because “country shapes all meaning” (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina 203). This acceptance of multiple truths, contrasts markedly with Western knowledges and their singular approach to truth.

Aboriginal Law is not imposed in the same way that Western law is with rules and regulations via government institutions. The location of power, if you will, are with individuals, whether human or non-human (Ancestors). Rights and responsibilities are determined by kin relations (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina 204). Aboriginal Law is passed down through generations via Aboriginal stories and songs, containing vital knowledge about the Dreamtime and about relationships between people and their relationships with Country. Aboriginals use myths and stories to pass on their indigenous history, to educate themselves about Aboriginal history prior to white invasion and Western literacy (Tompkins 490). Whilst these myths and stories are traditionally oral in form, they circumscribe Aboriginal education in an equally concrete way as Western myths and stories (Greek myths, the legend of King Arthur and Avalon, the Ark of the Covenant and so on) have informed Western education and literature. This argument validates the use of myth as historical source, counterpoising Indigenous with Western mythology. As Wright explains

It is this deep feeling for the stories of country that comes from our ancestors which not only tell us who we are, it also tells us where we have been, and provide us with the template and fundamental principles to imagine what will be important to us in the future. (Mabo lectures qtd in Mead 3)

The Ancestors are the ultimate law makers. As a gerontocratic society, Law is maintained by a group of respected Elders, who are deemed to have “grown into knowledge and wisdom by their involvement in life and the incremental ritual stages of ceremony” (Atkinson 38). Typically, the Elders are the oldest in the community and are assigned specific responsibilities. Order is maintained by nurturing relationships with the natural world and relationships between people. Relationships determine responsibilities. For example, who is able to tell a specific law-story; who is responsible for caring for sacred places or administering punishment when laws are not adhered to; and who is capable of interpreting or modify specific laws (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina 204). The ability to adapt or change kinship relationships has helped Indigenous families deal with colonial trauma.

The discourse of “law” dominates the polemic over land ownership in Australia. In 1983 the findings of a non-governmental “white” committee¹⁰ to investigate “the possibility of Aboriginal

¹⁰ The Senate Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs led by H.C. ‘Nugget’ Combs was established in 1979.

sovereignty” concluded “that sovereignty does not now *inhere* (my emphasis) in the Aboriginal people” (Stratton vii) and that what was needed was a change in the Australian Constitution. The inclusion of “now” in the statement is representative of Western perceptions of time and exemplifies a colonial tactic whereby Australia’s cultural and legal history begins with the British fleet’s arrival and all Indigenous peoples cultural heritage and history is erased (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina 199). This causes “a temporal and spatial year zero” (Rose qtd in Potter 36). In an Australian setting this meant that time began anew when the British arrived in 1788. The first of these tactics of course being *terra nullius*. It also reveals that modern temporality is perceived to be nothing more than a system of cause and effect, connecting particular moments in time. This reminds us that Western temporality inhabits our laws. It establishes clear “programmatic breaks” with the past, culminating in an “homogenous” time (Benjamin qtd in van Riswijkeven 250). This re-setting of time, makes the past ‘white’, whilst erasing any Indigenous presence, allowing for past ‘wrongs’ to be forgotten. It denies any historical precedent for sovereignty, ignores Indigenous concepts of Law, and disavows the ‘other’.

In opposition to Western measurable and linear conceptions of time, Indigenous ‘time’ is non-linear. This perspective views all times as perpetually interconnected and of equal significance. One cannot distance oneself, or escape from the consequences of past wrongs. On the other hand, discerning time as linear, means that the past and the future are less connected to the present, and presumed unalterable. Events are relative, interpreted in relation to the present. It is the “now” which is most important. Western notions of time are couched in a philosophy of progress, the pursuit of individualistic material and technological betterment. In contrast, Indigenous concept of time is relative to maintaining the balance of Country for the benefit of all life. NCC consciousness it can be said, takes us beyond the time and space defined by Western logic and knowledge systems, beyond “the imperialist dream of power and supremacy” (Brady 246).

Non-Indigenous Australians continue to secure both their sovereignty of and their relation to place through legal perpetuation of a white nation state. When Indigenous peoples have been ‘given’ land ownership, it has been with limited control and ownership of resources, including restrictions that are not in keeping with Indigenous epistemological and ontological conceptions of sovereignty (Moreton-Robinson, “Sovereign” 4). Thus these disparate notions of sovereignty are key to the future relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia (Behrendt qtd in Falk & Martin 33) and any genuine attempts at reconciliation.

Country

The notion of Country lies at the core of NCC. It is the nexus of Indigenous Law, stories, songs, space and time. It is irrevocably bound to a place including all its inhabitants, both human

and non-human, animate and in-animate. Space is connected to Country and comprises both physical (place) and metaphysical elements (Dreaming). The web of relationships within Country between all-life, give meaning to humans just as humans give meaning to space. Space is both alive and conscious. It is not passive. For example, Kings Park¹¹ which overlooks the Swan River in Perth, Western Australia, is a popular tourist destination. It is both a Botanical Garden, displaying over three thousand species of unique flora and a four hundred hectare park of protected bushland. According to Nyoongah and Ingebundi man Noel Nannup, Kings Park has always been an important place for Aboriginal people. The fact that this prime real-estate was excluded from development, Nannup attributes to the “spirit in that land” which saved it (Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina 202). As with human beings, land is understood to have agency.

From a Western perspective, however, space is something concrete and tangible, geographical, which can be tamed and bent to one’s will, conquered and owned. It is inanimate, unable to act or have a will of its own. When the British settlers arrived in Australia, they assumed no one owned the land, because there were no visible signs of property ownership (houses, fences or barriers) to which they were accustomed (Deborah Bird Rose qtd in Kwaymullina & Kwaymunilla 201). The settlers had an absolute belief in a singular expression of how to occupy space, in order to represent culture and civilisation. In the absence of these visible signs and in conjunction with the assumption that anything else was inferior, *terra nullius* was instated. These beliefs sanctioned British invasion and Indigenous dispossession.

Possession of land or Country is central to Aboriginal identity and wellbeing. By means of a ‘reciprocal bond of responsibility’, the land and its people mutually nurture each other. One way Indigenous people do this is through ceremonies. Ceremony is perceived as an obligation and a manifestation of maintaining relationship with the land and their social obligations in maintaining relationships with each other (Atkinson 26-27). For example, the women of the Walpiri people of the Central Desert, carry out Yawulyu Dreaming ceremonies that are intended to rejuvenate and revitalise specific places, species and persons (Ravenscroft, “Eye” 37). Traditionally, the women’s rituals included painting patterns on their breast, but in a contemporary setting the paint is applied to canvas. The anthropologist recording this ceremony, insists that it is performative, that is, that the marks make or bring into being that which they name. This ceremony combines bodies, movement, painted signs, dust or ground and singing, which together nourishes Country: “this is ground – country – which is enlivened by the pounding of the dancers’ feet, the slapping of the breasts in rhythm with the singers’ voices and the swirling of the dust” (Ravenscroft, “Eye” 38) which gives

¹¹ www.bgpa.wa.gov.au/kings-park

the impression that the dust/ground/Country is an “active partner to the dancers”. The women’s bodies “liven-up” (Biddle qtd in Ravenscroft, “Eye” 37) Country as they in turn are enlivened.

From a Western perspective the women participating in the ceremony may be interpreted as having an intimate relation with their Country. But this is not an adequate description. The question is where does the body begin and the country (dust) end? The Warlpiri women’s dancing bodies are comprised of and by Country— "her bodiliness is already countriness" (Ravenscroft, “Eye” 39). The implication is that the boundaries between these two substances, dissipate. So that the dirt is part of their body and their body is part of the dirt.

In order to accept this idea of embodiment we have to consider that the materiality of the body is not universal. The body "is made differently in different places, and that country, too is made differently in relation to different bodies" (Ravenscroft, “Eye” 39). This would mean that the body is different in each Country. This is understandable as each country has its own unique landscape, flora, fauna, geographical features which require unique ceremonies to maintain life within it. Therefore, embodying Country is a different experience depending on which Country you live in or belong to and the ceremonies you are obligated to enact. From this example we can explain embodiment as cultural practices by means of rituals that permeate the body, remaking it into a different body (Ravenscroft, “Eye” 35).

Perhaps the performative gestures of these women imprint the boundaries around body and country differently than white bodies. This may occur because the boundaries between body and space or Country for a white body does not or cannot dissipate. In other words, the 'whitefella'¹² is not affected, cannot experience the same bodily sensations as the Desert women. What is certain is that Indigenous and Western embodied subjectivity is delimited by the stories they are told and tell and by cultural practices. These stories with the performative practices of ceremony makes a body different, in its very substance (Ravenscroft, “Eye” 40). However the reverse also applies, that is, should you harm or not meet your ceremonial obligations, Country, then the land will not provide and will create natural disasters, floods or droughts. Which is of course, exactly what has happened in *The Swan Book*.

We are all embodied subjects. Our beliefs or knowledges, possess us as much as we possess them. To live in a place, within a cultural context, makes us a particular kind of body/subject. However we do not it seems, experience our place in the same way Indigenous people experience their Country. ‘Whitefella’ bodies and place are not the same as ‘Blackfella’ bodies and place. For instance, it is not common practice for me to say “I am Australia” or “I am Perth” or “I am 58 Purdom Road, Wembley Downs” (the places I used to live in Australia before I moved to Norway).

¹² ‘Blackfella’ means ‘Aboriginal’, ‘whitefella’ means ‘non-Aboriginal’ in Aboriginal English which is a separate language to Australian English.

When not using Google Maps, I locate myself visually by street names and numbers, which via fences or walls mark the place to which I belong. By contrast, Indigenous people can say and do say “I am Country”¹³. For Indigenous people, boundaries do not exist between the human and the spirit worlds (Ashcroft 190). Spirituality or having a sense of place is not only available to Aboriginal people according to Anita Heiss. But, as she says: “we can’t give you ours and we can’t help you find yours” (45).

Knowledge

At the heart of the polemic over land “rights” in Australia lies two distinct world views, Western and Indigenous (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina 195). Whereas white Australians are concerned with “ownership” of the land, Indigenous Australians are concerned with its “custodianship”. This polemic pinnacles a cultural clash between distinctly different perceptions of knowledge, time, space and legal systems. In contrast to a Western reductionist, human-centred worldview, Aboriginal philosophy is holistic¹⁴. As a term holistic, is perhaps slightly misleading, since from a Western perspective it emphasises the connections between the parts which constitute the whole. However, this is not entirely what is meant from an Indigenous view in which everything is interconnected and inclusive. By this Ambelin Kwaymullina means that “the whole is more than the sum of its parts, and the whole is in all its parts. This is the pattern that the Ancestors made. It is life, creation, spirit, and it exists in country” (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina 196). Aboriginal knowledge is a system. Relationships between all life and times inform Aboriginal knowledge systems. These systems are never decompartmentalised like Western disciplines (Science, History, Anthropology and so on) because from an Indigenous perspective one cannot separate the different ways of knowing the world. One understands the Indigenous world intellectually, emotionally, physically and spiritually (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina 196). Since everything in a NCC perspective is interrelated, then the relationships between all of these knowledges are seen to inform and shape one’s understandings and to maintain balance between everything in the universe. Knowledge comes from reciprocal relationships not causality.

By contrast, Western knowledge systems can and have been compartmentalised, supporting a reductionist worldview, where the whole is never more than the sum of its parts. It also reflects impulses stemming from Enlightenment, where the individual, progress, the observability and impartiality of Science and its associated technology is valorised as the “yardstick of truth” (Peat 564): where knowledge is power and authority. Through colonisation, such impulses have allowed

¹³ As exemplified in Alexis Wright’s Poem “Hey, Ancestor!” written in connection with Australia Day Celebrations 2018. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/26/alexis-wright-hey-ancestor

¹⁴ It is important to note that I am presenting a generic view of Aboriginal cosmology which may or may not be held by the many and varied Aboriginal peoples of Australia.

for the privileging of Western epistemological and ontological worldviews and the devaluing of ‘other’ worldviews. Yet, Quantum Physics, which offers an explanation of the mechanics of this world and a new source of meaning, is one example that offers parallels between Indigenous knowledges particularly with relation to the “wholeness of nature” and “notions of continuous space and time” (Peat 572). On a global basis, Indigenous knowledges are being investigated to see how they may be able to assist with the problem of climate change.

Sovereignty, Identity and Literature

Sovereignty is the key to Indigenous subjectivity. Much of the complexity surrounding the concept of ‘Aboriginality’ or ‘Indigeneity’ is derived from the language which has been used in order to define it. Terms, such as Aborigine and Indigenous are derived from Latin, the former meaning ‘original inhabitant’ and the latter meaning ‘native to’ and both are colonialist constructions imposed since British settlement of Australia in 1788 (Heiss 2012, 4-5). Language is ideologically pregnant and serves to position the interlocutors. For instance, informal definitions of Aboriginals, include ‘abo’, ‘boong’, ‘coon’, even the American term ‘nigger’ occurs in the Australian vernacular. Defining the ‘other’ in this manner unveils a racist national psyche whilst excluding Aboriginals from the overarching notion of Australianness. Aboriginals are therefore invisible in terms of an Australian identity, positioned as marginal and inferior.

Language, like other representations of cultural identity— literature, visual arts, film and television—gives concrete forms to ideological concepts and exposes the colonial structure of power and history enmeshed within it (Johnson, “Empathetic” 12). By way of resistance and reversal, Indigenous people mimic this language of representation by applying their own nomenclature, which is the same “but not quite”. “Koori, Goori, Murri, Noongar, Nunga” (Heiss 4) are terms which refer to different Aboriginal nations. Each name encapsulates connections pertaining to family, Country and language. The name for each nation is usually based on the Indigenous word for that nation’s language. For instance, Alexis Wright comes from the Wannji nation which is also the name of the language they speak. In this way, specificity and individuality is given to the idea of Aboriginality, counteracting white Australians tendency to view them as one amorphous entity. The Indigenous words are both familiar and unfamiliar. A plethora of Aboriginal words have already been incorporated into the Australian vernacular, notably in relation to place and animal names. By introducing these words into the English-Australian language, Indigenous people subvert the language of the coloniser and destabilise what the user of Australian vernacular believes they know about Indigenous people. As a result, Indigenous identity is re-centred.

Historically, Aboriginal difference, ergo identity, has been defined in terms of the body or biology which was an efficient way to maintain colonial control. In an examination of more than 700 pieces of legislation, 67 different definitions of Indigeneity were found (Paradies 24). Indigenous peoples were categorised according to their blood quantum (half-caste, quarter-caste, full-blood, quadroon) (Heiss 123). Essentialising notions of Indigenous identity have over time been connected with authenticity. Authenticity comes to embody a form of physical and cultural purity – “who is free from contamination from western influence. Who is worth saving” (Smith 74) – which is derogatory and divisive. Essentialising indigeneity allows neither for the Indigenous community (urban or rural), nor Indigenous culture to evolve. In an attempt to ossify Indigenous culture, to rediscover some authentic pre-colonial culture in order to combat the effects of Colonialism is not only futile but a misunderstanding of the connection between culture and identity. Culture is the representation and expression of the way in which a group of people inhabit the world and interpret it. “All cultures move in a constant state of transformation” (Ashcroft 3). It is something that is made, used and practised.

In Australia there have been attempts to in-authenticate urban Aboriginals who are not ethnographically black, living in the bush, materially poor and living off the land. These stereotypes marginalise urban Indigenous people and those who have a diverse racial background. As Brisbane-based artist Richard Bell explains, Aboriginal populations during the twentieth century were symbolically divided along a North-South axis of authenticity, sustaining the belief “that only Aboriginal people living in remote communities are ‘real Aboriginals’ [...] leading authentic cultural lives with attendant authentic cultural expressions”¹⁵. This has been reflected by the tendency of non-Indigenous policy makers to focus on reserves (Proulx 40). Equally, in a cosmopolitan world, these essentialist notions of authenticity are inane. As Proulx argues, Indigenous peoples can be “rooted” cosmopolitans, meaning they can have “feelings of loyalty and commitment to particular cultures and openness toward difference and otherness” (Roudometof qtd in Proulx 59). Aboriginal youth, have indigenised the global music form of hip hop for example, by incorporating local Indigenous languages, customs and knowledge into their songs and videos (Proulx 58). Thus the youth are immersed and exposed to other Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, where information (aided by the internet) can be accessed and identity becomes hybrid. Non-Indigenous essentialist notions of Aboriginality influences non-Aboriginal’s perceptions of Aboriginality, whilst simultaneously prescribing them. Considering that 79% (in 2011) of Indigenous Australians live in urban areas (*AIHW Report 8*), these primarily non-Indigenous

¹⁵ www.artlink.com.au/articles/3359/learning-to-be-proppa-aboriginal-artists-collecti/, 2003.

discourses founded on cultural appropriation, invention of tradition and authenticity, are racist, restrictive and misplaced.

However for those people who assert a multi-racial Indigenous identity, who identify as both coloniser and colonised (Paradies 25), they are often caught between a rock and a hard place. Yin Paradies explains that as an Aboriginal-Anglo-Asian Australian there is an expectation within both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, that she choose to be exclusively Indigenous or exclusively non-Indigenous (Paradies 26). Since she chooses not to fulfil this expectation, she is frequently not accepted as Black and derided for being “half different and [...] partially familiar” (Paradies 26). Paradies does not speak an Aboriginal language, nor does she have a connection to “ancestral lands or a unique spirituality” largely due to her grandmother being one of the Stolen Generation. This is not uncommon as according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008 Report only 6.7% of Indigenous households have extended families. For Indigenous people aged 15 years or more, 60% do not speak an Aboriginal language and 38% do not identify with a particular tribal or language group (Paradies 26). If you are in addition middle class and educated, you are suspected of wanting to be white. Racial essentialism, irrespective of which community it emanates, becomes the repressive politics of identity. As a consequence, these non-authentic Aboriginals either become homogenised, voiceless and invisible, or inhabiting ‘a strange in-between space’ (Paradies 26). If Indigenous people had maintained a pristine, primitive identity, they would not have survived colonialism. Like all marginalized cultures they have survived through adaptation and change.

By contrast, essentialising notions of Indigeneity can also be connected to the idea of ‘essence’ in a spiritual sense. From an Indigenous perspective a person shares the “same life essence with all natural species and elements” (Atkinson 28). Intimate relationships with place, the land and landscape, and all things in the universe are based on a shared ‘essence of life’ (Smith 74), which link across lifespans, are dynamic “movements of activity and energy” (Rose qtd in Atkinson 29), and are interactive, transformative, reciprocally nourishing and evolving.

In terms of Indigenous literature, whiteness informs notions of authenticity, which means what constitutes acceptable representations of Indigenous literature for a white audience. Thus, what an Indigenous author can write must conform to generally recognised traits or a genre of writing, such as life writing, to mark it as authentic. Of course, what represents knowledges about authenticity for an indigenous writer and his/her community, may not reflect the knowledges that the white audience expects. The indigenous writer is thus caught in a conflict of representation. Conformity to white knowledges and expectations, can also enable resistance and Indigenous agency. “One can conform and resist simultaneously because conformity enables access to certain knowledges about whiteness which can be appropriated to use strategically in the act of writing

itself” (Moreton-Robinson 86). This is true of *The Swan Book*, in which the narrative employs and resists a chronological storyline. In so doing, the narrative draws on two different experiences of time, which rely on two distinct epistemologies: linear, the Western perspective of time, and “circular – all time” the Indigenous perspective.

In his ego-histoire, Oliver Haag, a German national, investigates perceptions of race whilst carrying out research in Australia. Having interviewed both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, he noticed that whereas non-Indigenous people were more interested in his national heritage, Indigenous people were more interested in his racial background. Haag who is of Romany descent, felt that this interest was not seen in essentialist terms, but biographical. He states that Indigenous conceptions of race indicate “a profound flexibility” in which race is seen as “a biographical journey” (134), in which racial identity is flexible. Interestingly, whilst Indigenous Australians considered Haag’s Romany heritage as a racial category, non-Indigenous Australians considered his whiteness as a racial category. Whilst this is Haag’s individual experience, it does reveal that from an Indigenous perspective, race, as a category, is “neither dominating nor excluding” (Haag 134) but simply a way of connecting people. This is a far cry, from Western essentialist understandings and practices.

Today, Aboriginal people resist being defined by non-Aboriginal Australians. Since the early 1980s, government agencies and Indigenous community organisations have adopted the three-part definition of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person proposed by the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs. An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is someone who can claim descendency; who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; and is accepted by their community (Heiss 123)¹⁶. Self-definition is an act of sovereignty.

In addition, Aboriginal writers since the 1960s, have been using literature as a means of publicly defining themselves and as a tool to defend their right to their own identity defined by their own terms. In the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature, Heiss and Munter explain that the “nexus between the literary and the political” is now a characteristic element of Aboriginal literature (2) – of which *The Swan Book* is a striking example¹⁷. Wright addresses the idea of blood quantum in her novel, sustaining the sovereignty of indigenous continuity. Blood is a doubled figure in the colonial imaginary. On the one hand, it bestows the power of “an indigenous people and its proprietary traditions” (Christie 39), whilst representing on the other hand, the threat of alienation from said Indigenous traditions. Indigenous claims to difference, allows for the plurality of Indigenous sovereignties and disrupts the myth of a homogeneous nation-state.

¹⁶ Taken from the ‘Report on a Review of the Administration of the Working Definition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders’ Department of Aboriginal Affairs

¹⁷ Wright has written several essays in relation to this topic. For instance, “Politics of Writing” 2002.

By using their right to represent themselves and by discussing these representations, Indigenous literature is a part of sovereignty. It helps to keep sovereignty alive because it comprises “a people’s idea of themselves, their imaginings of who they are” (Womack qtd in Arias 620). It is meaningful because representation is defined from within, rather than prescribed from outside the Indigenous community. Furthermore, as language it is as an ‘invocation’. As Creek scholar Craig S. Womack claims (emphasis original): “Indian writers are trying to *invoke* as much as *evoke*” (Arias 619). The idea behind ceremonial chant is that language, spoken in the appropriate ritual contexts, will literally produce a change in the physical universe. Words in the indigenous world are deeds. The language of stories are capable of effecting change, even capable of redressing land rights (Arias 620).

From a Western perspective, literary theory has a similar concept known as performativity. Performativity highlights the effects of language and raises questions about identity, meaning and the nature of the Subject (Culler 95). Whilst performativity does not necessarily include a change in the cosmos, it does include politically charged language, which contributes to the defence of literature, framing it as an active agent with transformative power. Throughout *The Swan Book*, Oblivia strives “to regain sovereignty over [her] own brain” (4) by fighting the melee of stories that have infiltrated, incapacitated and infected her mind, rendering her mad. The novel also highlights the importance of Indigenous storytelling or literature as an important means to “rediscover learning as spirituality and nurture” (Arias 620):

[Oblivia] remembered Aunty Bella Donna of the Champions once saying that no story was worth telling if no one could remember the lesson in it. [...] But ... even true stories have to be invented sometimes to be remembered. Ah! The truth was always forgotten. (233)

Significantly, this quote reminds us that by telling a story that has never been told, Indigenous writing can offer psychological transformation (“the lesson”) for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. For Indigenous people, transformation may be through an imaginary sovereignty, which when spoken (written) will in fact be actualised. For non-Indigenous readers this invites them to reconsider a different story or ‘truth’ about Australia’s colonial past, recognising how ‘mad’ it really is (Sefton-Rowston 658). Stories can thus make valuable contributions towards improving justice and human rights (Mead 3) and the historical, political and legal narrative which surrounds us. *The Swan Book* demands from the reader not simply empathy, or a possibility of embracing alternative Indigenous worldviews, but like Oblivia, it craves agency. *The Swan Book* evokes performativity.

Sovereignty and Madness

The psychological well-being of Indigenous peoples is inseparable from their relationship with land and their spirituality. Land ownership is for them, not about the act of legal possession, as it has been and still is for white colonialists, but about a sense of belonging to a place. Place, as discussed earlier, connects the present to the beginning of Dreamtime, and includes people, animals, elements and stories – all of which coexist and contribute to the universal circle of life (Turner qtd. in Sefton-Rowston 647). Australian Historian and Environmentalist Libby Robin supports this claim by stating that “traditional Aboriginal land management is as much about human well-being as ecological systems” (9). She cites the Healthy Country, Healthy People project in northern Australia which found that “caring for country” has benefits not only for the environment, but for “the physical, mental and cultural health of the Indigenous people involved”¹⁸. Considering the interrelatedness Aborigines experience with the land, it is not surprising that when this relationship is severed the consequences are devastating for their physical and mental health or well-being.

As a settler colony, the colonialist’s main preoccupation was land acquisition, typically accomplished by means of violence. Violence is non-consensual. It is “behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something” (OED). Violence can be caused by natural or human actions. However evidence suggests that violent acts done to humans by humans has the greatest negative and enduring impact (Figley qtd in Atkinson 57). There are three different types of violence: overt physical violence; covert structural violence; and psycho-social domination (Baker qtd in Atkinson 59). Within the Australian colonial experience, physical violence includes “dispossession of land, population decimation, murder, massacres, maltreatment [assault, rape, torture, starvation], fatal diseases, opium and alcohol addiction [and] slave labour exploitation” (Memmott qtd in Atkinson 59). Structural violence involves enforced dependency on the state, legislation, movement to reserves or missions and child removal. Psycho-social violence occurs through cultural and spiritual genocide.

All three forms of violence are found in assimilation policies. At the turn of the twentieth century, reserves were established in an attempt to improve and protect Aborigines. However, by clumping Aborigines from different clans or nations together and dislocating them from their own Country, they were deprived of their spiritual “heartplace”¹⁹. Gradually, the lives of the Aborigines on these reserves became controlled by means of legislation, bureaucracy and the police, impacting

¹⁸ The Lowitja Institute. www.lowitja.org.au/healthy-country-healthy-people-policy-implications-links-between-indigenous-human-health-and

¹⁹ Term used by Judy Atkinson in *Trauma Trails* to Aborigine’s relationship with the land (30).

their ability to support themselves (*AIHW* report 2)²⁰. It also rendered Aboriginal parents powerless. The State or the Protector (the formal title used for those charged with the responsibility of Aboriginal welfare and wellbeing) controlled family life, deciding who could marry whom, and whether you could raise your own child. By the 1930s, the combined impact of colonisation reduced the estimated 320 000 Australian Indigenous population to an estimated 80,000 (Smith 1980 qtd in *AIHW* report 2).

Indigenous child removal, a practice which continued for approximately seventy years proved to be an effective way of not only eliminating family relationships and ethnicity, but Indigenous culture and identity. As Judy Atkinson explains:

Cultural genocide not only works to destroy the cultures of oppressed peoples, it also eradicates the sense of self, of self-worth, and of wellbeing in individuals and groups so that they are unable to function from either their own cultural relatedness, or from the culture of the oppressors. They feel in a world between, devalued, and devaluing who they are. (71)

This quote speaks to Fanon's argument wherein our sense of self is socially constructed. The breakdown of that social and cultural structure, the lack of recognition by the oppressor results in an absence of self-worth and an internalisation of inadequacy. This culminates in a broken sense of place and an existential crises. As a form of psycho-social dominance, Indigenous child removal practices were a form of cultural genocide – striking the soul of a person or community (Moore qtd in Atkinson 72). Aboriginal poet Kevin Gilbert has written of the experience of Aboriginal people as a “rape of the soul so profound that the blight continues to the present day” (Gilbert qtd in Brady 243). When the connection and sustenance provided from the relationship between Country and kin is broken, this not only leaves a person's sense of self destitute, but dismantles a person's spiritual fabric, resulting in trauma.

Violence begets trauma. Trauma, defined by Atkinson, is “an event or process which overwhelms the individual, family or community, and the ability to cope in mind, body, soul, spirit” (xi). The “Bringing them Home” report of the National Inquiry between 1995 and 1997 into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their Families, traced the laws, practices and policies that resulted in what is commonly referred to as “The Stolen Generation”: Indigenous children who were separated by force from their families. This report explains that “the past is very much with us today, in the continuing devastation of the lives of Indigenous Australians”. The report also refers to multiple and profoundly disabling layers of abuse in the lives

²⁰ Taken from the 2015 report entitled “The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” carried out by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

of those affected – separation from primary carer; effects of institutionalisation; physical brutality and abuse; repeated sexual violations; psychological and emotional maltreatment; loss of cultural and spiritual knowledge and identity. The trauma incurred by violence creates “a cycle of damage” from which it is difficult to extricate oneself without help (Report qtd in Atkinson 70). This tragic life cycle is then compounded from one generation to the next.

It is possible to delineate the Australian government’s policy towards Indigenous peoples into four phases: “Subjugation (approximately at the end of 19th century), segregation and protection (up until the early 1950s), assimilation (1950s to early 1970s) and finally overtures towards some kind of limited self-determination” (David Mercer qtd in Dalal & Pal 91). However, in view of more recent Government actions, “the Intervention” in the Northern Territory in 2007, it would seem that Australia’s policies have regressed. Following the publication of the Little Children are Sacred Report in 2007²¹, concern was raised about widespread practices of child sexual abuse in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Perceived as a “state of emergency”, conservative president John Howard decided to intervene in seventy-three communities by use of a military and police taskforce, hence suspending local Aboriginal self-government (Renes 110). The Intervention legislation affected “all residents of the [...] prescribed communities without differentiation” (Altman qtd in Renes 110). Legislative amendments were made that affected welfare benefits, access to services and land rights (van Riswijk 244). These actions are reminiscent of the three initial phases used historically by the Government and representative of all three forms of violence described earlier. Again, this violence is justified and legitimised through law, embalmed in the discourse of “protection” and Indigenous people’s inability to take care of themselves.

The experience of colonisation and continued racism can thus be seen as contributing to “feelings of craziness” or ‘madness’ (Sefton-Rowston 645). From a clinical perspective, mental health problems can stem from socio-economic and environmental determinants, but they can also arise from “deeper social structures and processes that operate at the national and global levels” (Czyzewski 1). The 2008 report by the Canadian²² Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) identified that “the inequity [in daily living conditions] is systematic, produced by social norms, policies and practices that tolerate or actually promote unfair distribution of and access to power, wealth and other necessary social resources” (Czyzewski 1). This statement acknowledges that there are other elements at play, known as distal determinants (larger causes of causes), than simply unhealthy life choices (alcohol, drugs, petrol sniffing) and conditions (poverty,

²¹ HREOC. www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/social-justice-report-2007-chapter-3-northern-territory-emergency-response-intervention.

²² Canada (New Zealand and the USA), like Australia, is a settler colony and its Indigenous population has been subjected to many of the same colonial policies and practices as Australian Indigenous people.

unemployment). At the International Symposium on the Social Determinants of Indigenous Health in 2007, it was shown that Indigenous and Western conceptions of health are different. It also brought to light that as a collective, Indigenous peoples are affected by and share a common, confrontational issue: the subjugation of Indigenous peoples linked to the historical impact of colonisation (Intl Symp. 24 qtd in Czyzewski 1). Colonisation is therefore seen to have an ongoing impact on Indigenous peoples. Recognising colonialism as a distal determinant in the research of mental and physical health, supports the notion that colonialism is not a finished project and Fanon's theory that psychological problems are socially and economically determined.

The 'madness' or psychological impact of (post)-colonial Aboriginal trauma is evidenced through schizophrenia, dementia, depression and suicidal tendencies (Dalal & Pal 91) and symptoms of illness, dependency and dysfunction. Mental health illnesses and suicide are significantly higher among the Australian Indigenous population. Recent findings from *AIHW* reveal that in 2012–13, approximately one-third (30%) of Indigenous adults were assessed as having high or very high levels of psychological distress and almost half (48%) of Indigenous adults reported that either they or their relatives had been removed from their natural family. The suicide rate for Indigenous Australians was almost double the rate for non-Indigenous Australians, in 2008–2012. This rate was 5 times as high as the non-Indigenous rate, for 15–19 year olds (*AIHW* 80). Psychiatrists, Ernest Hunter and Helen Milroy, clarify that within traditional Indigenous societies the idea of suicide would have run counter to the Indigenous worldview. In an Indigenous society "life entails obligation – to care for country and kin, live out one's purpose and continue the greater story" (146). Rupturing this cycle of life, "the generational cycle of creativity and stability through violence" (Hunter & Milroy 146) seems contradictory. Indigenous suicide is a consequence of the feelings of absence of choice and free will.

From the late 1960s onwards there began a period of rapid social change for Indigenous Australians (Hunter & Milroy 144) promoted by deregulation, the revoking of racist and discriminatory legislation (the White Australia Policy, 1949-1973); in 1962 Indigenous peoples were given the right to vote; the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the National census, recognising that they were "people of their own country" (*AIHW* 2) in 1967; and the introduction of the policy of multiculturalism in the 1970s. Aborigines were therefore given greater liberties: access to money through welfare and unlimited access to alcohol. Yet they remained culturally excluded from the wider community. They were denied access to the resources (education, economic, political ...) necessary to actualise the ideals, resources and social advantages of mainstream Australia (Hunter & Milroy 144). The behavioural consequences of unrestricted access to alcohol and eventually other substances, passive welfare dependence and shattered family relationships, was evidenced by "risk-taking, violence and the undermining of capacity to address the responsibilities of family and

community life” (Hunter & Milroy 147). These symptoms of trauma show that Indigenous peoples were disconnected not only from their families and their local communities, but their sense of self.

Metaphorically, the experience of colonialisation and continued racism is akin to the production of subjects with “bodiless heads and headless bodies” (Ngugi wa Thiong’o qtd in Sefton-Rowston 645). Whilst Nugug wa Thong’o may have originally stated this in order to explain the incongruity of the language of the coloniser and the language of the colonised, it is also symbolic of the unnatural separation of body and mind that results from constraints placed on Indigenous people’s ability to govern their lives and the corruption of Indigenous identity. This body-mind connection is integral to NCC and embodied sovereignty. Disempowerment and disconnection from Country, family, culture, knowledge, language and spirituality, leads to inter- and intra-generational low Indigenous ethnic self-esteem, low concepts of self and distrust of white people. Hence, anger and aggression are reasonable responses to Aboriginal (post)-colonial trauma and should not be seen as mental illness. Instead they are reasonable human responses to the trauma of assimilation that remains unhealed (Atkinson 92).

Destabilisation of Western Sovereignty

Whereas the NCC connection Indigenous people have to place sustains their mental health, for non-Indigenous people their motivations and connection to place or belonging are starkly different. For them, a sense of place is connected to legal land acquisition and subsequent suppression of their anxiety. Australian colonialists developed their sense of belonging on the false premise of *terra nullius*. Colonial place-making practices of establishing boundaries and clearing the land serves as a metaphor for the removal of both physical and psychic impediments to progress. In turn, this secured the coloniser’s sovereignty, promoting a stable, ontological state (Potter 32). Impediments, which include but are not limited to, the dispossession of land from the original Indigenous inhabitants, denying their legitimate and sovereign claim to Country. By so doing, colonialists secured not only their sovereignty over the Australian landmass, but also their psychological well-being, quelling, or so they thought, anxieties of belonging.

However, Emily Potter postulates that non-Indigenous Australians have struggled, and continue to struggle with anxiety attributed to a sense of not belonging and the impossibility of maintaining the legitimacy of their sovereign claim over the Australian environment, both human and non-human (30-31). Non-Indigenous identity and political sovereignty is continually undermined due to the disturbing presence, perceived as threat, of existing Aboriginal sovereignty and the possibility of dual land ownership. For a colonial milieu that has survived on claims of Indigenous absence, *terra nullius*, this is disturbing.

Literature has also functioned to strengthen non-Indigenous identity and belonging. After Federation in 1901, Australian colonialist literature was employed to evoke unity and identity in a young nation. Historically, it is the narrative of the male Aussie battler, who must combat a harsh, unfamiliar and unforgiving land, in order to claim it as his own, under his control. In so doing, this battler “earns the right to be here” (Mead 32). This narrative, embodies the struggle for non-Indigenous sovereignty over the Australian landmass. Portrayals of “the bush”, the outlaw, the bushman, “having a fair go”, “mateship”, created a specific male-centred, ideological imagining of Australia for a specifically white audience. The elision of women, immigrants and Indigenous people in settler stories was common. Where present, Aboriginals were constructed as menacing, child-like or dehumanised. Using narrative to establish one’s place or home, is not unique to Indigenous Australian culture, but is fundamental to all acts of storytelling (Potter & Magner 29). These particular stories validated white Australian’s sense of belonging and sovereign claim to the land. Then as now, these tropes are based on the “phantasm” of *terra nullius*. A phantasm is the illusory entity or idea that is at the centre of every nation (Homi Bhabha qtd in Elder 30). Nearly two hundred and fifty years after the arrival of the first settlers, Australians have perpetuated a narrative that excludes and dispossesses Indigenous people.

Sovereignty, in terms of western conceptions, can be redefined as a legal and political attempt to ensure a stable society, by the perpetuation of a national ideology upon which definitions of self are drawn. But in effect, this national narrative establishes boundaries and creates divisions by suggesting the existence of a potential threat (Potter 33). This threat can be perceived from outside the country, resulting in policies pertaining to immigration and border protection, but also from within the country. I remember in the 80s and the 90s being proud that Australia saw itself and believed itself to be a multicultural country; a nation that embraced difference and diversity (Elder 115). Corner delis²³ which were typically owned and run by Italian refugees after the Second World War, gradually came to be owned by Vietnamese refugees after the Vietnam War, in the mid-1970s. Today, almost half of Australia’s population is now living in migrant households (Arthur 3), representing over two hundred countries (DFAT 12). Yet despite this, resentment and hostility towards the ‘other’ exists. Although the Chinese, for instance, came to Australia in the 1850s to provide labour for the Gold mines, they came to be seen as potential threats to white Australian’s jobs and life-style. Perpetuating negative stories about Asia and Asians, they were spoken of in terms of an “Asian invasion” (Elder 124). In 1901, the year of Federation, the Immigration Restriction Act was passed, granting government authorities the right to refuse entry to those entrants deemed unfit. A century later, the then Prime Minister John Howard, put in place two

²³ Delicatessens

legislations, the Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) Act 2001 and the Border Protection Act 2001 (Elder 120), to combat the wave of refugees who were seeking asylum at the time, on humanitarian grounds. Currently, the invasion story is different, the target is now the Muslim community. Nationalist ideologies are today being inflamed by protest groups, such as Reclaim Australia, which cling to nostalgic narratives of a white Anglo-Australian nation.

However, it could be argued, as Potter does, that the most unsettling and challenging threats to western conceptions of sovereignty comes from within Australia (33). It is the presence of Aboriginals which destabilises the nation's political foundations and Anglo-Australian-ness. The Mabo decision, which challenged Australia's status as *terra nullius*, upended white hegemonic power, imbuing Indigenous people with a sense of cultural self-esteem and changing the psychological terrain for Indigenous people still struggling with the effects of displacement, both recent and past. Yet at the same time, it also disturbed notions of non-Indigenous identity and political authority. This discourse of insecure belonging, is exacerbated by the growing momentum and attention surrounding the inclusion of Australian Indigenous people in Australia's Constitution. It is further troubled by a diminishing sense of place in post-modernity, due to a Western capitalistic, egocentric culture that produces a way of living which is socially disconnected and oblivious to its environmental impact (Potter 34).

Climate change is another kind of colonial 'madness'. The invasion, occupation and exploitation of the Indigenous 'other' is inherently connected to the invasion, occupation, domination and exploitation of nature as 'other' (Robin 9). Having established that non-Indigenous Australians' struggle with anxiety over their sense of belonging due to the illegitimate claim of *terra nullius*, the discourse of climate change contributes greatly to further unsettling this claim. Climate change, adds insult to injury, as it perpetuates the destabilisation of non-Indigenous sovereignty. Perceived as a menace to social structures, people and places, climate change promotes "narratives of environmental tragedy and the failure to belong" (Potter 33). The otherness of the environment confronts the colonisers who have brought about this environmental destruction and subsequent environmental threat. Indicative of insecure belonging, climate change is a dispossessing force and an indication of the complete failure of non-Indigenous Australians to occupy the Australian space without risk of negatively affecting all environments, human and non-human (Potter 34). Governments respond to the discourse of climate change by implementing policies of repair attempting to re-attain environmental stability. As stipulated in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a "stable climate is an essential public good. Delivering a stable climate is a security, prosperity and moral imperative" (Potter 34). This desire to obtain environmental stability harkens back to colonial practices of securing settled land and attempts to obtain authority and control over the environment.

The discourse of climate change compounds further non-Indigenous anxiety about belonging, since it exposes non-Indigenous people's inability to inhabit the Australian environment without destroying its ecology. By framing climate change in terms of an 'emergency' or 'crises', Potter argues that this re-energizes and re-establishes colonialist forms of dominance and power, perpetuating a human-centric discourse with the aim of creating a secure, stable climatic future. This narrative of continual 'crises' or 'emergency' is according to Giorgio Agamben, a political tool which "leaves the door open for a reassertion of exclusive sovereign power" (Potter 35). Parallels can be made with the emergency of climate change to other periods of 'emergency' in Australia's history which allowed for the legitimisation and legalisation of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families; the White Australia Policy; and the recent Northern Territory Emergency Response, also known as 'the Intervention'. During these periods, particular Indigenous groups, perceived as a threat to the national or ontological order, were thus framed in the rhetoric of 'emergency' allowing for the curtailment of Indigenous claims and right. More recently, although not in an Indigenous context, we see the implementation of a State of Emergency in The United States by President Trump, in order to obtain the funds to build a dividing wall between North America and Mexico, to establish a literal barrier against a perceived threat.

Although today, the threat of dispossession is equally applicable to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, for non-Indigenous Australians however, the climate change emergency prays upon their anxiety about belonging. Ironically, the crises framing of climate change does not result in a re-examination of the ethics of the political decisions that led to this anxiety and poor ecological management (Potter 36). Instead, when considering our relation to place and to each other, Potter claims that we perpetuate a human-centric discourse with the aim of creating a secure, stable climatic future. Typically our response to perceived threats, whether they are Indigenous people, boat people, illegal immigrants or climate change, is to reassert white exclusive sovereignty through violence and control. Attempting to control climate change is futile, since climate change defies closure: it is a non-linear occurrence which does not have a single originating source or point, either in time or space (Potter 37). This suggests that the threat of climate change cannot be resolved or controlled by colonial logic. In order to inhabit place we must recognise that notions of closure and enclosures (the creation of property and country boundaries/borders) are an illusion. As Potter states "The climate change event—the emergency that triggers a reassertion of sovereign power—is ultimately uncontainable, there is always something that escapes the psychic, political or legal bounds of sovereignty" (38). In other words, climate change signifies the way in which place is always unstable and that belonging is never a given, but is continually negotiated. This negotiation demands a different type of knowledge or way of being. It encourages us to consider a human system that does not depend on capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism. The rhetoric of

emergency is a way of maintaining the status quo, a way of fixing or stabilising climate change, similar in fact, to the manner in which colonial stereotypes endeavoured to fix identity and meaning. The ‘emergency’ of climate change is an example of the hidden presence of colonialism in modern society. As was shown with the discussion of stereotypes in Chapter One, the ‘other’ is unable to be fully subjugated and controlled. There is always slippage. Ultimate sovereign power and authority over the psyche, the social, the political and the legal is a fantasy. Within *The Swan Book* the prospect of creating a secure and stable climatic, social or political future, locally or globally, does not seem feasible, unless we employ different ways of knowing to salvage it.

Conclusion

Acquisition of land and sovereignty over it, secures social, ontological and psychological stability. This is true for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples. Yet the concept of Country has a spiritual connection that is not limited by nor restricted to geographic boundaries, but describes the inextricable bonds between NCC, the land and Dreaming (storytelling). When Country is denied it leads to a form of ‘madness’, a warped existence for Indigenous peoples. On the other hand, denial of sovereignty over land intensifies non-Indigenous people’s anxiety about not belonging. However, given the distribution of power in Indigenous non Indigenous relations, non-Indigenous peoples can reassert their dominant power, through legal policies and violence, reclaiming, often under the guise of ‘emergency’, their sovereign claim. These are desperate attempts at holding on to an identity based on the historic falsehood, *terra nullius*. It is also an extension of an imperialist, anthropocentric position which seeks to maintain the status quo. Indigenous peoples are thus controlled and manipulated, body and mind. It is being in this constantly embattled state, caught between two disparate worlds/cultures, which perverts an Indigenous sense of self and well-being.

From a mental health perspective, the effects of colonialism are embodied reactions to historical and contemporary political, social, economic experiences of trauma. The circuitous nature of law is replicated in the circuitous storying of the uneven, disjointed relationships in the novel. *The Swan Book* questions the self-legitimising discourse upon which historical, legal parameters have defined and continue to define Aboriginal lives, robbing them of their sovereignty. The official power and right that the legal system imbues allowing for the unrestrained use of violence, implies that only the law is capable of punishing offenders and adjudicating truth (van Rijswijk 239). The novel challenges this ‘truth’ and reveals that what has and continues to transpire from this claim is a battering of harms that do have very real effects on Indigenous physical and psychological health. Herein lies madness. The concomitant response to these harms is personal, collective and

intergenerational trauma. Reclaiming sovereignty by decolonising the Indigenous mind, removing the “virus” as Wright metaphorically calls it, will improve Indigenous mental health.

Although Indigenous people are often told to “forget about Aboriginal rights, that our claims of sovereignty won’t feed people” (Wright Mabo lecture qtd in Mead 7), those that are saying this are missing the point. It is not about feeding the body, it is about feeding the soul. This has to come first—what Wright refers to as the “sovereignty of the mind”. Healing. The only way to soothe the historic, accretive wave of negative psychological effects from colonialism, racism and dispossession, is through the legal, positive affirmation of sovereignty and the recovery of traditional ownership of Indigenous lands. Irrespective of whether this is achieved through the creation of a separate Indigenous state or by means of shared sovereignty, it does mean the right to self-determination in all aspects of one’s life. However, *The Swan Book*, does not fall into the category of a healing narrative. Without healing, there can be no sovereignty, and thus madness remains. But it is only partial. The anxiety that the (post)-colonial condition produces, indicates that we all are partially mad.

CHAPTER 3: Visibility: Redefining Indigenous Subjectivity through the Literariness of Madness

... a different imagination and language can dissolve a world that has turned to stone.

(Inspired by Italo Calvino “Lightness”)

In this close reading of *The Swan Book* I explore the way story defines and delineates the Self and the ‘other’. The novel addresses the role of narrative as identity-forming and providing agency in social, spiritual, political and literary ways (Barras 1; Mead 3). Through its “Dreamtime narrative” (Devlin Glass qtd in Renes 106), questions are raised as to how the history of Aboriginals has been told and how stories have been used in the creation of a national narrative. Yet it also shows how stories can re-shape Aboriginal Australia (Mead 7). Similarly, the unknowability and undecidability of meaning in the novel, targets literature and language’s very nature (Barras 4). Indigenous storying can therefore be invoked to rewrite history—develop new personal, national, if not global stories. The performative nature of narrative /stories opens a horizon of self-identity and self-determination connected to Country which empowers psychological sovereignty.

Sovereignty and identity, two sides of the same coin, are embattled concepts in the novel. Through the narrative’s imbricative and reiterative structure which resists a linear progression, characters reveal the ‘madness’ inherent in the (post)-colonial Indigenous experience. These characters assume multiple, hybridised subject positions in order to survive. I explore the importance of Country to Indigenous sovereignty, revealing that there are multiple ways of being indigenous. However, it is Oblivia’s connection to Country and her struggle to honour her responsibility to Country and remain disengaged from the human world, which is shown to be particularly fundamental to her psychological well-being. Although she is depicted as a victim of her trauma – silent, lacking agency and invisible – it is through her embodied connection to Country that this is subverted. Although she does not necessarily regain sanity, she manages to break the cycle of madness.

The novel’s narrative structure juxtaposes Western and Indigenous ways of being and knowing, destabilising hegemonic Western knowledge and reading practices. By employing Homi Bhabha’s concepts of stereotypes and mimicry, Indigenous subjectivity, and ergo sovereignty, finds its language/expression and visibility. *The Swan Book* addresses the intellectual, political and structural battle against *terra nullius*.

Story and Identity

The Indigenous concept of ‘story’ has a far greater spiritual and life affirming reciprocity than its Western counterpart. Story is not just for entertainment or moral purposes, but is an important aspect of looking after Country. Storytelling is the “currency of indigenous sovereignty’ (Brewster 88). It is not only the means of interaction with people from different Aboriginal nations, but is also the vehicle for indigenous law which explains the social and metaphysical relationships between humans and nature, and humans and Ancestors. In an Indigenous worldview there are many truths, represented by similar but different versions of stories across Aboriginal nations. There is no absolute or authentic version. This notion is significantly different from Western perceptions which have strived to discover, through science, or enforce through religion, law and history, a single truth or story.

In *The Swan Book*, Bella Donna of the Champions refers to “the concinnity of dead stories” (17) that have been forgotten but will eventually be heard. She states simply that she is merely contributing one story about a swan to this multitude. Similarly, the novel, reminds us of this manifold, by skilfully arranging, overlapping and alluding to different manifestations of the concept of story (history, myth, fairy tale, dreaming, song). Importantly it highlights how our sense of self is created by narratives, whether they are the ones we tell ourselves or are told about us by others. These stories embrace both Western, Eastern and Indigenous traditions, reminding us of the increasingly hybridised and cosmopolitan nature of our world and its inhabitants. For instance, the chapter entitled “Brolga and Swan” recounts Warren Finch’s daydream which is reminiscent of a fable. Like any fable, it conveys a moral or a warning to be heeded. In this story Warren is allegorically represented by the Brolga and Oblivia by the Swan. The story begins with Warren communing with the Brolgas until he notices a flash of black and follows it. He is mesmerised, having never seen a swan before and it reminds him of his earlier dreams. He pursues the swan into the river, which results in the swan’s demise and Warren’s near drowning. Individual desire overrides all else, common sense, even nature’s warnings. It is his will, his obsession with the swan which leads to its death. From an Indigenous perspective, this fable can be considered a Dreamtime story. Irrespective of which definition one employs the story’s effect is the same. It predicts a tragic ending for any attempts at unification between Warren and Oblivia. Warren’s conviction/self-justification that he and Oblivia should be together overrides logic and any resistance provided by his three travelling companions, the Elders of the swamp or Oblivia herself. His will and desire conquers Oblivia’s, the swan in the fable/Dreamtime story, caught in a net and overcome by a raging river. Finch doesn’t understand, as Freud did, that dreams have meaning, even perhaps the

power to foresee the future (112). This story within the greater story of the novel foreshadows the events to come. However, as the novel shows, the future is not so easily preordained.

It is the reiterative nature of stories that is so beguiling. They can serve to pass on knowledge from one generation to another, reinforcing cultural beliefs and values, or they can distort what you think you know, what you believe and your reality. The power of the story is in its continual telling. Despite being a stranger, Bella Donna is welcomed into the swamp community where she dominates the physical (she literally lives in the middle of the lake, the centre of the community) in conjunction with the inhabitant's psychological space. Bella Donna constantly revisits, reminisces and retells her previous life/world experiences, including songs and stories from her European heritage, until the people of the swamp are fed up and feel threatened: "It is after all factual that terribly, terribly dry stories that flip, flop seven times in one hour straight are dangerous to the health of the mind" (35). This narration of her life, becomes, 'dry', dull and unengaging after the zillionth rendition. Her stories are like a fish out of water. Flip-flopping about, they do not belong or have any relation to the Aboriginal people of the swamp or their Country. Representative of the dominating power of colonialism, it is not simply the land which has been invaded, but the mind via migration or settler stories usurping Indigenous stories, and by association cultural beliefs, values and practices.

Stories can be like a virus. A virus which even has the power to reset time and history. Historically, non-Indigenous possession of land was allied with place naming practices and the creation of stories or myths that reinterpreted and relocated foreign settler stories to fit into the Australian landscape (Mauch 7). Through colonialism these stories eclipsed the existence and history of an Indigenous presence, establishing a "temporal and spatial year zero" where the wrongs of the past are forgotten (Rose qtd in Potter 36). In an Australian setting this meant that time began anew when the British arrived in 1788. Bella Donna, as the only primary white character in the novel, is in this regard a metonym for colonialism.

Yet, it is not always the case that stories are poisonous. They can also nourish us, psychologically and physically. Bella Donna, we are told, is "feeding squads of cygnets volumes of a tangled, twisted love story about the Gods only knew what, which they soaked up like pieces of wet bread" (71). This simile is reinforced when Oblivia is in a coma and Bella Donna is described as "Feeding her stories for nourishment, more than food" (89). In fact, after her rape Oblivia recreates her childhood out of the stories of other lost little girls that Bella Donna told her about. Oblivia creates a sense of self out of these stories she is told. Gradually Bella Donna, but primarily Oblivia, appropriates foreign narratives—the short story *Rip Van Winkle* by Washington Irving; *Leda and the Swan* from Greek mythology; Hans Christian Anderson's fairytale *The Wild Swans* (44); *The Swan Maiden*, a Germanic folktale (154); The opera *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi; the

stories of white swans from poetry, John Shaw Neilsons (53)—creating new ones to accommodate the black swans. There is both mimicry, cross cultural borrowing and alterity at play in the appropriation of these references primarily of other swan stories in *The Swan Book*. In this way, the novel constitutes hybridity, Bhabha's "third space", which is neither coloniser/colonised, the West/Other, Black nor White, but their interstices. In this way, stories can be inclusive, rather than exclusive. Inclusivity exemplifies one of the principle differences between the West and Indigenous societies. There is no colour difference, black or white, there is only swans. The swans serve as the intersection of Indigenous and Other stories (Barras 4). Quite simply the swan can function as a metaphor for a new way of seeing humanity, rid of its epidermal bias.

Sovereignty and Country

In *The Swan Book*, 'Country' is shown to be more than merely a physical, geographical location or natural object, it is a psychological state that provides succour and sustains sovereignty during calamitous times and events. Oblivia, the novel's principle character who has been gang-raped by a local group of boys, is found by an elderly, white, migrant woman, Bella Donna, hiding in an ancient tree where she has been for ten years. This single tree is sacred to the people of this area. Having amassed the stories of their Ancestors, safeguarding them, it embodies all the knowledge and memories of both a people and a place. The tree is assigned a protective power and function, harbouring Oblivia after her traumatic experience:

There was a story about a sacred tree where all the stories of the swamp were stored like doctrines of Law left by the spiritual ancestors ... This ancestor was our oldest living relative for looking after the memories, so it had to take her. (78)

The tree's anthropomorphic description, equated to a family member, reminds the reader of the Indigenous point of view which values and nurtures all relationships between all life: animate and inanimate. It is part of Country (the swamp area and community). The tree is not only alive, but having a life of its own. It has agency. Whilst Oblivia sought refuge in this ancient eucalyptus tree, it allowed her to stay. The relationship between them proves providential. In addition to finding sanctuary, Oblivia learns the language of the Ancestors, the sacred stories that say "We are who we are" (51). Thus begins her process of Indigenous education. This proves beneficial once the tree is destroyed, as Oblivia retaining this ancient wisdom connects it with the swan stories and so begins the burden of responsibility to nurture the swans.

Oblivia's relationship to the tree represents the emotional and psychological empowerment that Country gives to Indigenous people. Throughout the novel, when Oblivia is stressed or

frightened, we are told that she “goes bolting down the tree” (172). This is not meant literally but metaphorically. The tree still exists for her in her mind. They are still connected, mentally or spiritually and corporeally. It is not relegated to the past, deleted from her reality, simply because it no longer exists physically. In conjunction with Indigenous perspectives of time, it was, is, and always will be part of Country and ergo Oblivia. The tree cannot be severed from Country or her as it symbolises and provides a psychological safe-haven, where Oblivia can hide from her memories of her rape and her current circumstances (199). This embodied experience of Country is different from the rest of the swamp people, implying that Oblivia has a different kind of sovereignty,

Once Oblivia is discovered and removed from the tree, it is destroyed. For the swamp people the eradication of this cultural and spiritual totem, disconnects them from their history, eroding their autonomy, culture and identity. It prohibits them from participating in ceremonial practices which are important for instance, for healing (Atkinson 50). For the swamp people, the emotional and psychological chasm that is created when the land is desecrated and/or they are separated from it, leads to a form of madness, described in the following extract, as being ‘unhinged’ and ‘unmoored’:

They were too speechless to talk about a loss that was so great, it made them feel unhinged from their own bodies, unmoored, vulnerable, separated from eternity. They had been cut off. They called themselves damned people who felt like strangers walking around on their country. The reciprocal bond of responsibility that existed between themselves and the ancestors had always strengthened them. This was what held all times together. (78-79)

This passage highlights the embodied nature of sovereignty. Becoming “strangers” in their own country is like disconnecting the mind from the body. They cannot function, they are drifting. ‘Unmoored’, they are aimless vessels, no longer anchored to Country, to an Indigenous reality, no longer grounded by their relationship and the guidance provided by this Ancestor.

Furthermore, two significant aspects of Country are brought into focus by this quotation. Firstly, a reciprocal bond of responsibility and secondly, Aboriginal perspectives of time. The reciprocal bond of responsibility, which is arguably one of the primary concerns of this novel, emphasises the notion of stewardship placed on the custodians of Country. It is reciprocal, because both Country, or ‘Nature’ in its broader sense, is bound to the occupants of that Country and vice versa. Both parties affect each other, for better or for worse. Emphasis is placed on maintaining a balance, on behaving in a morally accountable manner towards the environment. Responsible stewardship means not wielding mankind’s power and will over nature, as evidenced by the white Army/Government’s unconscionable destruction of the tree or the climate wars which have devastated the novel’s world. In addition, this relationship of caring for Country is what contributes

to the past, present and future being simultaneously relevant and connected. The layers of connectedness between First Nation peoples and their Ancestors, nature, spirituality and time is evident in this passage. The swamp people's psychological strength lies in these relationships, which when broken or destroyed, leaves them in a vulnerable state.

The reactions of Obliva and the swamp people to the tree's destruction seem at odds. One, finds continual consolation by imagining the tree, the other, feels a permanent sense of loss and disorientation. Yet the novel allows for both contradictory interpretations, because ultimately, "country never leaves its people" (26). Although the lake/swamp area is the Aboriginal people's Country, they do not legally own the land, due to a loophole in the new Native Title law, stating that indigenous people had to show continued occupation. This was impossible for the lake/swamp people who had been frightened away from the area by colonial invaders (10). By choosing to remain on "their land", living among ancestral spirits, the lake/swamp people are forced to live in what has become an Army-run detention camp. They are, in effect, living the Interventionist lifestyle. In this way, the novel flags the 2007 actual Intervention and present-day laws in parts of the Northern Territory, whilst implying that the future does not appear to be any brighter for some Indigenous peoples. Deprived of agency and it seems any actual alternative, the Aboriginals living at the lake/swamp, manage to carve out a life in a toxic environment: the dumping ground of the Army's flotilla, which is also used as target practice for Defence Force training manoeuvres. With dry irony "What a blast was that?" (12), they adjust to the environment, rather than trying to alter it, accepting the concomitant birth defects. This is a 'crazy' world and the swamp people who are described as "suspicious of one another" (27) are affected by it. However, for the swamp people, it is inconceivable to be without Country. And for this reason alone, they maintain some semblance of psychological strength, despite losing their tree-Ancestor, in spite of the physical hardships and hazards they are subjected to and the realities of living in a prison.

The relationship between Indigenous people and Country is governed by Law. We are told that the tree retains the stories or Laws given by the Ancestors. Although not specified for the reader, the reader can reference this against their own understanding of Western law, determining that Indigenous Law regulates the behaviours of the members of Country. We are told the tree "*had* [my emphasis] to take her". Within the Western legal system, we understand the human imperative to follow laws in order to maintain a functioning society and to avoid punishment. Similarly, the tree *must* help Oblivia: it is bound by Aboriginal Law to do so. Here recognition is given to the power of Aboriginal Law. The capital letter 'L', reminds us of phrases like "the letter of the law" and its overriding, absolute sovereignty. Wright does not assume that the reader is familiar with Indigenous Law and concepts of agency of all life within Country. In contrast, she relies upon the reader's recognition and experience of the Western legal system which will illuminate their ability

to understand an Indigenous legal system, to see correlations between the two, in spite of its metaphysical overtones. From an Indigenous perspective, geographical features are like humans, sentient and capable of agency. They are equal subjects within Country. This contrasts markedly with a Western framework, which views geographical features and space as objects: inanimate, non-living and non-feeling. Western society is traditionally hierarchical, where animals and geographical features are considered inferior to humans. By foregrounding Country in this way, and appealing to the reader's existing understandings of Western Law, Wright allows for a redefinition of this term to allow for an Indigenous perspective. Country, then, is not just exemplified by the reciprocal relationships of its subjects, but equally importantly it demonstrates that Indigenous Law is indistinguishable from Western law. By levelling these two laws, the novel raises the question as to the validity of white Australia's legal territorial claim of *terra nullius* which nullifies Indigenous territorial claims.

Oblivia's sovereignty, and therefore subjectivity and agency, is linked to and embodied by the responsibility of care she eventually assumes for the swans. She is shown to be instrumental to their survival and in preserving life she upholds the ethos of Indigenous society which entails fulfilling your obligation "to care for country and kin, live out one's purpose and continue the greater story" (Hunter and Milroy 146). Within the narrative there are several elements or events which lead Oblivia to her "apotheosis as the swan woman" (Sheridan 200). Her knowledge of Country and the Ancient language is firstly provided by the eucalyptus tree. Through Bella Donna's stories about white swans, Oblivia learns how to speak to them. After Bella Donna's death, Oblivia takes over feeding and caring for the swans. Her enforced imprisonment by Finch and his destruction of her homeland/heartland, causes the swans to follow her to the city, where she treats their injuries. It is after Finch's assassination that Oblivia leaves the city, following her swans on the long, arduous and dangerous journey home.

There is further evidence in the novel which endorses Oblivia's native-centred awareness. For instance, her voice is described in natural terms, as the "language of windstorms or wind gusts" (21), "the rustling of the wiyarr spinifex grasses", "the flattened whine of distant bird song" or "a raging bush fire crackling and hissing from jujuu jungku bayungu" (20). We are also told that "She listens to the sky ... [and] for the heartbeat of her swans flying" (205). She sends them messages. In addition, the Genies recognise that Oblivia had "spirits looking after her" (167).

In the epilogue, after returning to the swamp, exhausted and frankly "jack sick of it" (331), Oblivia wants to give up, to rescind her obligation. However, the drought woman-Ancestor, reminds her "Don't drop the swan" (331). The old swan leader, Stranger, alone without his flock, equally feels the burden of his responsibility, which is "to fly high up in the atmosphere ... [and] ... make it rain" (332). Stranger, with his wings "damaged, frayed and singed" and unable to walk (331)

and Oblivia with her head filled with “stories of extinction” (333) are struggling with honouring their responsibilities. Recalling the discussion of Country in Chapter 3, we know that relationships in a NCC worldview are interrelated, connected and must be nurtured, and that the environment is equally shaped by human and non-human agency. The final pages of the novel indicate that if they do not continue to meet the burden of their responsibility, the consequences will be devastating, not just for the swan and Obliva, but for the rest of us: neither of them, were interested in saving the world (333).

Multiple representations of Sovereignty

Comparing and evaluating characters is one way of reading the text which coincides with western ways of thinking—searching for absolutes and/or categories of difference. There are critics who claim that Oblivia is “the embodiment both of the Law of the swamp and of the swamp country” (Barras 4). Whilst this seems a reasonable interpretation, it is an anthropocentric reading in which the swan is completely disregarded. Does not the swan also embody the Law and Country? If every living thing in an Indigenous worldview is of equal standing and has agency, then the swan’s contribution is equally pivotal to maintaining Country as Oblivia’s. They each carry a burden, which although different, are equally important to keeping the balance and promoting life. Oblivia and the swans’s story are inextricably entwined, to the extent that if there were no swans there would be no story or a significantly different one.

Other models of Indigenous sovereignty are presented in the novel. Doom, Mail and Hart are shown to have connections to their own Country, as well responsibilities in the modern Western world. In the chapter called “Owls in the Grass” we are shown the way these three men embody Country. Born and raised on salt-lake Country, the genies know how to walk in it. The narrative reveals their affinity with the land and with specific animals. For instance, Bones Doom can communicate with birds and replicate their bird-song perfectly and Snip Hart is a snake charmer (183). They are on Country, to collect data about owls and their breeding patterns because climate change has caused animals not endemic to the area to migrate to it, thereby changing the ecology (179). The genies are Doctors, in the Western academic meaning of that word, as well as Lawmen, respecting and abiding by Indigenous Laws of Country. As traditional owners, there are rituals they must honour. For example, when they first arrive they walk off to speak to the land to “let the Country know they had come home” (166) and explain who the strangers are in the car. Only the genies know how to read the landscape (185-186) and know the names of places within it and the stories that are part of this land’s Dreaming.

A few days after their arrival, they tell the stories which retrace the songlines specific to this place:

The genies kept calling the names of these places which were thousands of years old, and which joined the Law stories of naming, titles of belonging, maps of exclusiveness that ran like this, throughout the continent. (191)

The merging of voice and movement, of speaking the names and telling the stories that have been told since time immemorial, and treading on and through the land, is a ceremonial act in which the genies acknowledge and enliven the land, their Ancestors and all life within it. Nevertheless, the two phrases “titles of belonging” and “maps of exclusiveness” contain an implicit criticism. “Titles” references the legal right or claim to property which corresponds with the right to “belong” (as shown in Chapter three). “Exclusiveness” in the second phrase suggests something that is rare and/or expensive. Maps of course represent different areas of land. Even in this idyllic representation of Country the pain of the loss of other tracts of land is not forgotten. Here we are reminded that the real or true land title, the real people that belong are the true carers for the landmass of Australia are the Aboriginals. These expressions taunt the white reader, who not only lacks ownership of this particular Country but lacks the “exclusive” embodied consciousness that is unique to Indigenous peoples. Nothing can ever remain harmonious in this novel, the undercurrents of madness or cynicism or paranoia criss-cross through it.

The genies straddle the two worlds seamlessly it seems. Doom explains to Oblivia that when they are not working as Finch’s bodyguards, they spend time in their shop in the city. Doom clarifies that the shop is like country— a “place in the city to hold my heart” (194). This sentiment indicates that homeland and heartland are synonymous. This quote shows the significance that Country has and how it is a physical and mental experience or sensation.

In these explorations of Country that Oblivia and the reader witness, Western knowledge is juxtaposed with NCC knowledge. Scientific explanations given by the genies to explain what is happening in nature is then explained from an NCC perspective. As the following examples illustrate. When discussing why the owls had flown east, the genies explain that “The ecology of the Country had changed”. The narrator in the subsequent sentence wonders “Was this the Law doing something to the Country?” (179). Next, there is Snip who is “an expert on desert snakes” which Oblivia interprets as “He was invisible to it [...] he was inside the snake” (183). Thirdly, as Mail “build[s] his “thesis on the plague of rats”, we are informed that he was “singing his curiosity to the country and asking the ancestors for their reasoning” (184). Lastly, when the genies are arguing that the single, pure pitch of an owl might meant that it is “signalling its territory”, this is paralleled with “a voice from the spirit country” (186). Each scientific explanation the genies proffer is

countered with an explanation couched in Indigenous understandings of Country and associated terminology. This passage of the novel demonstrates that Western and Indigenous knowledges are not irreconcilable, but merely different perspectives or forms of expression. This comparison makes these knowledges visible.

Alternatively, Warren Finch's connection to Country is presented with derision. Finch is described as "a senior lawman with much authority on his own country" (169). Yet, portrayals of the way in which Finch relates to Country, Nature and people is problematic and frequently embellished with contradiction and sarcasm. As a child, Finch received a mix of traditional knowledge which "honoured traditional law and the art of sustainability for culture and land" and scientific knowledge (107). Finch, as his name proposes, has an affinity with birds, particularly Brolgas, who are the namesake for his Aboriginal nation. When Finch first arrives at the swamp to 'collect' Oblivia, the Brolgas remember him as a child and start to dance for him. But Finch, now an adult, does not have the time nor the interest in dancing with them. He is no longer capable of interpreting their dance (131). He was "far more excited about how the world danced for him" (122). Finch belittles the people of the swamp who are in fact his relatives. He evaluates their impoverished and desperate conditions without an ounce of compassion, merely disgust (116) and thoughts of "extinction" (118), exactly as if he was White (115).

In "Owls in the Grass" and the beginning of the following chapter, we are given the opportunity to compare the genies interaction on the land with Finch's. Admittedly this is not Finch's Country, he is like Oblivia a visitor, so he does not nor cannot interact in the same way with Country as the genies. However, apart from an extraordinary singular moment of tenderness towards a raven that has lost its mate (177) Finch is more interested in the human world, human language, than the natural world. He is on the mobile constantly and is impatient to return to his job of running the country and determining the new direction of the world: "he was leading the development of new laws for the world on the protection of the Earth and its peoples, after centuries of destruction on the planet" (127). He is more concerned with the future, than the stories of the past, "the names of places [...] which joined the Law stories of naming" (191) that are part of the Dreaming told by the Genies. He rejects his traditional teachings when he discredits the significance and power of naming: "what's in a name?" he asks when he learns that the swamp people have officially changed the title of their land to "Swan Lake" (119). He is an oxymoron: a messiah with a devilish addiction to power: "Power crawled like a pack of cut snacks through his body" (191-192). For him life was about challenges. Oblivia who he saw as broken, was one of those challenges that he needed to work out (158, 188). Yet he humiliates her by making fun of her name in front of the genies (182). Oblivia we are told, is "his last real link to a world he had severed, the attachment he had planned to keep it" (188). For Finch, Country is no longer his homeland/heartland, but the city

(207). Oblivia acknowledges that “there was no link between her and Warren Finch’s world” (220). Although Finch has retained certain elements from his traditional education, he no longer embodies Country.

The three genies, Warren Finch and Oblivia are all framed within the narrative as having traditional knowledge and responsibilities. These different representations of Indigenous sovereignty reveal the multiple ways of having a connection to Country, of being indigenous, which are both physical and psychological. The story’s denouement indicates Oblivia’s and the swan’s mutual survival. She has become the swans’ custodian and through their relationship they are nurtured in processes of reciprocity: through her, the story of the swans is sustained, and through them, Oblivia’s sovereignty and identity is strengthened. Together they are Country. The final pages of the “Epilogue” emphasise that Oblivia and the swan are significantly more than keepers of Country. They, as opposed to Warren Finch, are the ‘saviours’ of the world.

Furthermore, these representations respond to the question raised by Bella Donna and the Harbour Master after Oblivia has been kidnapped by Finch and has blown up the swamp: “Who gives him the right to decide on other people’s sovereignty?” (232). This critique is of course targeted towards the Australian government’s demand for evidence for Aboriginals to show continuous occupancy and cultural practice in order to legitimate their claims over land. This critique also addresses Australia’s illegitimate claim to sovereignty which denies Indigenous people the right to challenge that sovereignty in the Australian High Court. However it is through storytelling that the boundaries to Indigenous sovereignty can be crossed. An imagined sovereignty can become transcendent. If words are living, as implied in the novel (194) then they can become transformative.

Stereotypes, Language and Self

If “the easiest and most ‘natural’ form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible” (Langton) then Oblivia is made invisible in a myriad of ways. She is mute, mad, black and female. Ostracised by the people of the Swan Lake and being raised by a white woman, she is regarded as ‘other’. Described as an ‘exile (14) and ‘mad’ (14), she is stigmatised within the swamp community. As a form of social oppression, stigmatisation disqualifies and marginalises individuals. As a consequence, Oblivia neither participates in nor is accepted by the swamp community (Palal & Dal 10). She is the perfect scapegoat that everyone despises so they can feel better about themselves. They even blame her for all that has happened, conveniently forgetting that the Army came long before she did (50). By marginalising her, they can re-centre themselves

improving their status within their community. They can be considered less mad, less insignificant than her. Oblivia is thus more ‘othered’ than they are.

Even the Harbour Master who comes to visit Bella Donna, ostracises Oblivia using animalistic terms, referring to her as “The Human Rat” (36). He considers her silence pretentious and a sign of weakness - “too gutless to speak” (203). Forgotten by her parents and community after her rape and disappearance, Oblivia’s decision to not speak marginalises her even further. Since she cannot be heard, it is assumed that she has nothing worthwhile to say. Hence, speechlessness or perhaps more accurately the absence of human language equates to invisibility in the swamp community and the world at large in the novel.

In *The Swan Book*, racialisation is not shown through pigmentation but through language and stereotypes. Oblivia is the quiet, passive, ignorant female. Oblivia understands the Indigenous language of the swamp people and English. When she arrives on salt-lake Country with the genies she says “this country would never hear her voice, or the language she spoke” (174). This statement implies that Oblivia possesses another language and that she can communicate. This language could be referring to the language of the swans or the Ancient language or even another imaginary language. Either way, this language is the great unknown. It is hinted at—“Their thoughts wild with noise” (13); “a little periwinkle of an experiment” (103), “tinder-dry nimbus” (4)—but is not entirely visible or comprehensible to the reader. What is clear, is that she communicates. She can express emotions—anger, frustration, curiosity—through body language, guttural sounds and by manipulating her breathing. She therefore contradicts the implied stereotype. We know she talks to the spectral Harbour Master mentally, because he, like the virus, has invaded her mind. We also know that she sends messages to the swans. What we do not know, is that if this is the language of madness or some primordial pre-language it can only be ‘spoken’ through the literary text.

The narrative seems to comply with this general perception of Oblivia as powerless. She is after all, dragged out of a tree by Bella Donna and dragged off to an unknown southern city by Warren Finch. When Finch comes to claim her she does not physically resist. Although the swans sense danger and urge her to fly away with them, she is incapable of action. Finch considers Oblivia’s confusion and silence as weakness. He doesn’t fully acknowledge the act of defiance or opposition represented by her silence. For him “Silence costs nothing just as silence means nothing” (99). He sees her silence as a barrier or pretence of ambivalence. He feels victorious when he manages to illicit a reaction from her when he blows up her home, the swamp, thus penetrating her facade. On the whole, he considers himself superior to her. Finch valorises language, recognises its power: “It was true that who spoke the loudest received the most justice, consensus” (123). He lives in a world of language, where he is constantly on the phone or creating speeches and plans in his mind. A master of numerous world languages, languages feed his two addictions: control and power

(192). His language is English, which we are told “was spoken for political use only” (22) in the swamp. Oblivia refuses to mimic the coloniser. She sees language as controlling and dominating: “The girl thought that she should be silent if words were just a geographical device to be transplanted anywhere on earth” (23). Clearly Oblivia chooses silence as an act of protest against the language of the coloniser (notably legal terminology), that has the power to consume an entire country with two little words: *terra nullius*.

Whilst the characters within the novel consider Oblivia to be insignificant, the novel’s discourse centres on her. The “Prelude” informs us that this is her story. Yet, she does not continue to use the first-person pronoun to re-tell the story. By contrast, the main narrative uses the third-person form with varying degrees of omniscience. As we are invited to believe, this is first and foremost Oblivia’s version of the story, with all its subtending biases and anomalies, omissions and inclusions. Omissions for example in the near absence of what Oblivia thinks. Oblivia is an enigma because her narrative does not include introspection. We, the reader, are simply told what she chooses to do: “the girl decided the swan wasn’t an ordinary swan” (15); “She had decided not to speak” (19); “So she decided to learn how to talk to swans too” (69); “The girl refusing to have visitors walk into her dreams” (110); “Oblivia changes her mind about her nerves” (250). The selection of the verb ‘decide’ implies that she has considered her options, evaluating the situation coming to a resolution in her mind. But in the narrative, it has an aspect of random spontaneity since the reader is not informed about how she arrives at her decisions. Quite simply, Oblivia has made a choice. So it seems, in spite of appearances as the insignificant ‘other’— silent, passive, ambivalent. Oblivia does have agency. Thus, subverting the stereotype.

Oblivia, however, never takes action for her own sake. As evidenced when she is thinking about killing Finch in order to escape from him: “Her mind [...] is at war with action. Fights decisions. She forgets to act when memories quickly regain control of her brain, and instead of fighting, she escapes” (172) to the tree. Her only actions are in reaction to the swans’ needs. For instance, when she is trapped in Finch’s apartment, abandoned by her husband with only a few ghosts to keep her company, although she is frustrated she never leaves. When she eventually does leave the tower, her decision is precipitated by the swans. When the swans are unintentionally hurt by the fascinated and deprived street-kids, she leaves the apartment at night to rescue them. Similarly, once the swans have recovered and are filling up the apartment, she realises she has to release them, which means leaving the apartment again. Finally, upon realising that the swans are leaving the city without her, Oblivia spurs into action and escapes the carnivalesque mourning procession to follow them. It seems she is only capable of resistance and subversion or agency when it is directly related to the swans. It is through these actions, that she comes into being, that her sense of self is constituted.

However, Oblivia's identity is not entirely stable. It is the swans and her memories of them that help her cope, help her survive. At different points in the novel, Oblivia is overcome by Finch's presence and new experiences which confuse and fill-up her mind. It is as if her sense of self begins to disintegrate. For example, when trying to question Finch about the disappearance of the genies or even their existence, Finch reminds her that "Genies don't exist. The things you see here are what exist. Nothing else." (233). This is one of many examples of Finch's manipulative and controlling modus operandi which also references a western, scientific view, where knowledge can only be known by what we can see. Certainly, confusing comments such as these, do not help her already fragile mental state. During the chapter entitled "City Swan" she becomes fraught by the thought of being stuck, powerless, with no possibility of movement or escape, frightened that she is forgetting the swans. Suddenly she discovers Bella Donna's books full of information and stories about swans. These books, we are told, were "good company. Pages were flicked over, and lines recited, and reflected upon" (240). Oblivia's identity is reconfirmed by reading these stories. They teach her endurance and perseverance. Words do not only carry the power of negativity, they can also be empowering. On the chapter's final page, she is rewarded and the swans arrive. Without question, her identity or sense of self remains intact as long as the swans are with her.

Oblivia has learnt "We are who we are" (51) from the Ancestor-tree. She does not ask the question "Who am I?" or "Why am I what I am?" Yet her lack of self-reflection from a psychoanalytical point of view suggests that Oblivia has a different conception of Self or even that the Self is in a process of disintegration. Her madness, we are led to presume, is the result of the rape. Oblivia has no real memory prior to the rape, simply the echo of a voice saying "Em-u-awake" (158). Just like colonialism restarted time for white "Australians" erasing Aboriginal presence and history, the trauma of the rape has created a "temporal and spatial year zero" from which Oblivia's life, temporality, story, starts anew. A re-birth if you will. In this way, Oblivia functions as a metaphor for *terra nullius*. Since her past has been nullified, Oblivia does not long for the family unit, the embrace of her parents or her mother. Rather she seeks the comforting virtual trunk of the ancient eucalyptus. The people at the swamp are aware of this when they say that she "act[ed] as though she had by-passed human history, by being directly descended from their ancestral tree" (11). This quote indicates that she is to some extent, no longer human. Her sense of self is restored when she is unified with the tree. I consider this an alternative reading to Lacan's mirror stage. The originating diad is not her and her mother, but her and the tree. She is not trying to unify with the mother but the ancient tree. Furthermore, this would explain why she does not engage in human language, but is in possession of an unknown embodied form of communication which is considered as a collective 'We' as opposed to an individualistic 'I'. Ironically, she recognises that through human language she will lose her identity. She wishes to remain connected to the Real, in

Lacanian terms. She manages this to some extent, because she has not fully entered the Symbolic order, accounting for why Oblivia remains child-like. She has not gone through the Oedipal stage. If the Symbolic manufactures desire (sexual and other) through social and cultural interactions, then her lack of such interactions means that the maturation of the 'I' cannot be completed. Thus, we can see her lack of desire as a result of minimal social and cultural situations which serve to shape it. The tree is Oblivia's reflection, that is, Oblivia's idealised 'I' or perhaps 'We'.

Oblivia's does not appear schizophrenic, like Antoinette Cosway in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Oblivia is not torn between two human worlds, she knows where her Country is, she knows where she belongs. So, she is not culturally schizophrenic in that sense. She considers her world and Warren's to be separate (220) and has no apparent desire to learn how to fit into Warren's world in the city. However, there is one notable exception to the novel's overall tension between the human and the natural world. This is the episode when Oblivia sees an image of herself on television, as Finch's 'ideal wife'. This is a pertinent example of the enticing aspect of humanity (226) that Oblivia generally resists. This example provides a glimpse of Oblivia's identity struggle, her fragmentation.

Television is a story-telling medium that produces the illusion of a coherent and stable identity. These stories share the emotions, feelings and experiences of different personas. On a larger scale, representation on the television shows and indirectly teaches the viewer what it means to be Australian. On a personal scale, it presents us with an idealised version of ourselves. This is the case with Oblivia who sees reportages of herself as Finch's glamorous "trophy wife" on the television. From a psychoanalytical perspective, television, like films, function as the site of our unconscious, unveiling our desires.

The first image of Oblivia which appeared was whilst the monkey was watching a Marlene Dietrich movie and Oblivia appeared in a news flash beside her husband Warren Finch. "dressed up like Marlene Dietrich in sepia and parading like the actress" (253). Unquestionably, there is a surreal aspect in this depiction. Subsequently, Oblivia becomes curious about her appearances on television and cannot make sense of it. The next time she sees herself is on the 7 O'clock news. This image of herself seems to be the antithesis of how she sees herself – "Where were the downcast eyes...the lack of self-consciousness...the shame?" (255). She is contradictorily full of confidence. This is the perfect version of herself. Oblivia is intrigued by this image. On one level, she recognises that through the marriage ceremony she has been signified as his wife. On another level, she recognises that she has been completely abandoned and worse, replaced by an imposter. The Harbour Master raises the horrifying idea that "Warren Finch was forcing the girl to go mad from seeing herself being paraded around as the wife he wanted her to learn to be" (255). Here the Harbour Master addresses the notion that we create a sense of Self through role-play, adherence to

societal expectations and conventions. Going about our day-to-day lives we wear many different masques. At their wedding, Finch also reminds Oblivia that her role is that of “trophy wife” (227) and that he expects her to be “capable of doing the few simple things you are supposed to do” (227). Through the television, the all-powerful Warren Finch is narrating the story of the perfectly happy and successful ‘arranged indigenous marriage’. He is fulfilling the stereotype of marital bliss, and demonstrating this as the pinnacle of the female function in a patriarchal society. The television image of Oblivia presents a stereotype – the ideal wife. As mimicry it objectifies her. In some capacity, Oblivia is the dutiful wife waiting at home for Finch to return (238). So this television image feeds that desire within her.

Oblivia is intrigued by these images of her doppelganger. Even though she has a job to do (256), that is, releasing the swans from the apartment as it would soon be mating season, she does race back to the tower to catch further glimpses of herself on television. When she sees how intrigued and impressed the Harbour Master and the monkey are with this glamorous representation of her, she entertains the idea that this double-image could possibly be herself. This moment, reflects Lacan’s idea that our human desire is affected by either “desire for the other, desire to be desired by the other, and especially, desire for what the other desires” (Zizek 36). Ultimately, she takes a Foucauldian twist, recognising that there is only paranoia in the gaze – the image represented on the television – and she discards it. An alternative Lacanian reading is that she breaks the “vicious cycle of desire” (Zizek 39) and chooses freedom. Separating desire from need, she is incapable of assuming this ideal role because her need is to focus on the swans, who “were communicating with her about flight, long flight” (266). In this way, her connection to the swans, and her responsibility to care for the, saves her from herself. |

Yet, this stereotype of the ideal wife perhaps invites a more subversive interpretation. What is striking about this stereotype, is the choice of Marlene Dietrich to portray this ideal. Within film theory Dietrich has an iconic status. She is considered “the model of the fetishization of the woman, the representation of (male) lack [...], the woman rendered desirable yet inaccessible through her demeanor and especially through framing and costumes” (Mayne 1259). Breaking with stylistic gender conventions of her time, frequently dressed in suits, Dietrich returned the look, mocking the male gaze (Mayne 1259). Often considered sexually ambiguous or androgynous, Dietrich embodied plural desires. Both on screen and off she has been considered a central figure of resistance to patriarchal cinematic conventions and assertions of heteronormativity and female passivity. Can this really be the ideal wife of Finch’s dreams? Not likely. It is more likely that this stereotype represents Oblivia’s unconscious desire: to be able to return the gaze; to be sexually ambivalent; to effect a sense of alienation and anxiety in Finch; to assume ultimately a superior position of power. As metaphor, this stereotype seeks to invert the roles and privileges of men/women and

coloniser/colonised. In particular, it addresses the control and ownership of representation: images or language, or cultural artefacts, asking, who has the right to determine representations of Indigeneity? Implicitly the reader is invited to recognise the insidious power and credibility of these representations which destabilise a sense of Self. Representation can thus function as a process of identification or misidentification— does Obliva admire or desire what she sees on the screen or does she simply feel that she is lacking or does she simply consider it preposterous? Quite possibly all three are reasonable responses. But, as I have already explained this was not to be, because Obliva does not engage in mimicry. She is not really interested in gazing back at the coloniser. She is looking towards another horizon.

The Masque of Madness

The multitude of intertextual references creates a complex narrative. Yet, within the novel, I argue, there is a single story that although reiterated is less fragmented. Descriptions of different species of swans and intertextual references (historical, cultural, scientific) about swans, are interspersed throughout the novel like a leitmotif binding the novel together. The swans' story is imbricated with Oblivia's. From the time when Oblivia is taken by Finch to the city until her escape, the narrative follows to a greater extent a sequential narrative. Events are related chronologically, giving the reader a sense of progression. Thus, we are invited to reconstruct the narrative of their story – past, present and future.

The rape is central to Oblivia's traumatised, psychological state. She neither acknowledges nor identifies herself with the rape. Although she has heard the stories told by other members of the swamp community, including Bella Donna, about what happened, she cannot reconcile that story with her own story of herself, referring to the girl from the stories in the third person: "it just happened to some other little girl that everyone was talking about and maybe it was not her either, or herself neither, but all girls" (82). She tries to "decide whether she was sane or mad like the girl she had heard about from listening to people telling their stories" (82). Whilst Bella Donna tries to help Oblivia, she remains damaged:

Destiny itself had discovered the girl, and the old woman had explained: You child, are really peculiar. She once told Oblivia that she was joined with the undoable. It was the principle, she said, of the haphazard way sanity and madness were reaped from her having been gang-raped physically, emotionally, psychologically, statistically, randomly, historically, so fully in fact: Your time stands still. (82)

The half-rhyme, reape-rape, highlights the incongruent use of the word ‘reape’ in this citation. Oblivia is the site of negative abundance. She is an oxymoron. She is simultaneously sane and mad. Furthermore, by listing every possible way Oblivia has been abused, harm seems to take on a life of its own, where it “haphazardly” extracts sanity or madness in an indifferent, impersonal, random manner. Oblivia is thus objectified. By compounding one harm done to Oblivia with another, “reaping them”, the reader realises shockingly that they are indicative of the cumulative harms inflicted on Aboriginal people by colonisation and subsequent policies of assimilation. Oblivia is emblematic of indigenous intergenerational trauma, which in the novel is referred to as “the eternal reality of a legacy in brokenness” (86). The effect for her, and by association all Aborigines, equates to the cessation of time, which I interpret to mean, that all relationships and connections between all life have stopped too. Life is out of balance, and so is she. It is therefore no surprise that Oblivia is defined by others and even herself, as mad.

The one thing about Oblivia of which we can be certain, is that Oblivia’s responsibility towards the black swans motivates her to act. Aside from that, you can kiss certainty goodbye. Apart from Bella Donna, Oblivia’s interaction is with male characters who she typically greets with anger, irritation and/or distrust. The reader believes that this is the logical reaction to the trauma of her rape as a child. The passage below, one of the rare moments when we are given an insight into Oblivia’s character, seems to confirm this:

The girl could answer anyone herself about what it was like to be saved if she thought about pillaging a few words from somewhere in her mind to speak. She could have said that she did not know who she was. Or that she was so damaged that she could not speak. She was under a spell. But she felt nothing about pain or joy, night or day. She thought no life was worth saving if it was no longer her own. (50)

However, this explanation is not finite. The words ‘could’ and ‘or’ allow us to interpret this as a suggestion as to why she doesn’t speak, but it is not written in stone. Furthermore, this passage contradicts my earlier example, showing the correlation between Oblivia’s rape and her silence as her taking a political stance. Later in the novel, when we learn that Oblivia “renewed her vow never to speak again” (64), the narrator contradicts this explaining “who was she kidding? The truth of the matter was that Oblivia had long forgotten to speak, and did not know she could speak, and had no confidence to speak” (64). What are we to believe? The semantic density of language is also a source of confusion. For instance, this phrase taken from the above citation “no life was worth saving if it was no longer your own”, is open to many possible interpretations. Literally this could mean that one should only save one’s own life, or metaphorically it could mean that she had no

control over her life because of the virus or Bella Donna's influence, or that she forfeited her life due to the "burden" of caring for the swans. All interpretations are equally valid. But which one is most likely? The most appealing interpretation is the latter because it replaces the individualistic drive that informs Western narratives with another view or objective that is collective, which is more in keeping with NCC. Yet, as it is said several times throughout the story "Does it matter?" What does matter, is that this exemplifies the way meaning in the novel is not absolute; how language is a site of opposition, confusion, distortion, instability; and that multiple meanings can be equally pertinent and are in fact desirable.

The form of a "mental illness narrative" does not comply with conventional "finite sequences and temporality (plot)", nor "patterned behaviors provoking causality" or adherence to genre characteristics (Christie 49). Instead the experience of time reflects a particular kind of reality without a beginning, middle and end. This is evidenced by the way time is treated in the novel. Months pass in the novel in a sentence. Twenty years pass by in a chapter title. Story time and narrative time are fluid, where flashbacks and jumps forward are continuously juxtaposed in the narrative. As a result, the reader is not clear how much time has transpired – How long has Oblivia been trapped in "The People's Palace" – the building where she lives in the city? In this way it echoes a fairy-tale—"once upon a time"—"a hundred years"—here the specificity of the duration is not important, but rather a sense of duration. Curiously, significant events are flagged by quotidian or natural markers. For instance, the first black swan's arrival is at dinnertime (13), Warren Finch arrives at the swamp "on fish and chip night" (143). After she has released all the hurt swans, Oblivia takes stock of the sheer number of swans and wonders how much time has passed. Her calculation of time is based upon the swans' natural cycle: "She knew there had been many seasons of swan-egg cradling and cygnets reared which signalled above all else, that she had spent more time in the city than [sic] she ever expected" (270). This experience of reality as synchronous rather than linear, may well be a sign of Oblivia's madness or schizophrenia in which the "quest for meaning never ends" (Christie 50). Equally, it may arise from an oral storytelling tradition which includes spontaneous phatic remarks, digressions and repetitions. Or it may represent an Indigenous imbricative perspective of time, in which "the past, present and future are linked and equally important" (O'Brien).

Nostalgia is a way of relating to time by looking at events or periods in the past with wistfulness and longing. In the novel, nostalgia is presented as a white cultural phenomenon which is manifested through representation. The pervasive virus, for instance, which is mentioned at the start and the end of the novel, is one of these manifestations.

The virus was nostalgia for foreign things, they said, or what the French say, *nostalgie de la boue*; a sickness developed from channelling every scrap of energy towards an imaginary, ideal world with songs of solidarity, like *We Shall Overcome*. (3)

Nostalgie de la boue which literally means nostalgia or yearning for the mud or dirt, is used in English however, as an extended metaphor to mean "a desire for degradation and depravity" (OED). This expression casts colonialism in a sarcastic light, criticising the colonial enterprise which strived to recreate an idealised image of Mother England in Australia, despite obvious climatic and geographical differences. The "sickness" is the lengths they were willing to go to fulfil this romanticised version of their homeland, to maintain tradition (Fanon, *BSWM* 101), which included the near genocide of Indigenous peoples and their displacement from their land. In the chapter called the Christmas House (207-220), Oblivia encounters a series of small connected rooms containing replicated Christmas themes which depict "in miniature scale nostalgic wintertime memories of foreign countries" (217). Towards the end of the chapter she wonders why Australia, or the swamp, or herself, is not portrayed in any of these scenes. Aborigines are absent in these white European memories, in these representations of humanity. Through Oblivia's observation the narrator reminds us that history is incomplete. History is also a narrative, a story. Nostalgia, it seems, is the purveyance of the novel's white characters, Bella Donna and Warren's Red family (who are technically black, but inherently white). Since colonisation, white European history, stories, culture has been in a cycle of eternal self-perpetuating imitation designed to remember and reaffirm the delusional unified image of the Australian nation. Indigenous people are not depicted as nostalgic within the novel, because of the "connective tissue of heredity. A miracle that is not restricted to time. The brain is a marvellous organ" (177). These words spoken by Mail (one of the genies), reminds us that Indigenous people, "unlike man, [are] quite simply incapable of eliminating the past" (*BSWM* 100). Since Indigenous people are continually connected to all times, and all-times are continually present and accessible, there is no need for nostalgia.

Whilst the entirety of the novel creates a whole, the arrangement of its parts is not always harmonious. The narrative structure intrinsically resists easy, comfortable reading. The characters in the novel are rendered by an overlapping, layered narrative. By this I mean, we gain insight into the characters, their past, their story, through fragmented and repetitive story-bites. The story progresses, but not in an obvious or predictable linear fashion. Although not necessarily succinct, each story-bite recounts previously given information, for example the rape of Oblivia, or the migration story of Bella Donna to Australia, from an alternate angle (historical, political for

instance), and/or in different detail, simultaneously presenting some hitherto unknown information. Frequently, one version of a story contradicts another. Meaning or knowing is never fixed.

For instance, early in the novel we are told “the history of the swamp people” (47). The paragraph begins with this introduction hailing it as factual. Wright is toying with the idea that it can be difficult to differentiate between fact and fiction, that is, which version of story or history we should believe. Given the existence and dispersal of fake news today, this should be easily understood. This resonates with us, presenting something familiar. However, the distinctions between fact and fiction are blurred, because we are told numerous anecdotes about the swamp people.

The “history” recounted partially reinforces how the swamp people have been described before in terms of sovereignty, whilst simultaneously contradicting it. On the one hand they have maintained sovereignty over their minds due to the fact that have remained connected to Country. Yet at the same time they are completely in the grip of the army/government which has “full traction over their ability to win back their souls and even to define what it meant to be human” (48). This indicates that they lack the type of sovereignty advocating self-determination and self-management. This contradiction, creates confusion, leading to tension and uncertainty in the reader. The swamp people maintain the illusion of sovereignty when no one intrudes upon them at the swamp. However they cannot maintain it indefinitely, because eventually someone, the army, a bureaucrat, Warren Finch, turns up, demanding something, even destroying the swamp. In spite of their loud protests, the swamp people are powerless to prevent it: “They had no say in anything important in their lives” (115). Furthermore, whilst they remain on their Country I’m not certain one can argue that they assume the “responsibility of care” that that implies, since they wait for the Harbour Master to remove the sand mountain that is blocking the flow of water to replenish the lake, which would help to decontaminate the area. What does this say about Aboriginality and their sense of agency or self-determination? This behaviour seems to be representative of the criticism levelled at Indigenous people by non-Indigenous Australians that “they do nothing to improve their situation”. Or is it indicative of a respect for the environment that is beyond White reader’s comprehension. An attitude towards nature and life, which suggests that Mother Nature will fix things eventually? The jury is out on this one, and the reader is left hanging. However, in the chapter entitled “the Dust Ends”, one is left wondering as to the significance of the sudden disappearance of the sand mountain (77) which serendipitously coincides with Bella Donna’s death and the departure of the Harbour Master. This episode speaks to the tensions highlighted in the novel between humanity and nature, between a Western anthropocentric perspective and an Indigenous one. In the final pages of the novel, we are told that the Ancestor ‘drought-woman’ was furious when the swans left the swamp to follow Oblivia, so she chased after them. The

consequences of her leaving the swamp to follow the swans to the South resulted in the entire country looking “as though it had been turned over with a pick and flattened with a shovel” (330). So the reader is provided with an explanation for such devastating weather whilst being shown simultaneously the agency that all life within Country possesses.

Oblivia’s interactions with other characters, allow us to compare and contrast their behaviours and comments with hers. Frequently, this reveals that it is the other characters that are more outrageous, insane and paranoid than her. The resulting irony, as roles are reversed, imply that she could well be the saner one. The main white character is Bella Donna. She is a dichotomy. As I have already demonstrated, Bella Donna represents the dominating power of colonialism. She represents white man’s desire to ‘fix’ or ‘save’ Aborigines by teaching them English and proper English-speaking ways: “to sit straight-backed at the dinner table and eat fish” (43). But, she also assumes a compassionate, maternal role, nurturing a sickly, damaged, crazy child, whilst acknowledging simultaneously and cynically that Oblivia is a hopeless case. In addition she subsumes the traditional role of an Indigenous woman. She is given the deferential Indigenous title “Aunty” because, in accordance with traditional practices, she passes on her knowledge via her stories about white swans to Oblivia. Although the Harbour Master is besotted by Bella Donna, he also views her as a racial fanatic: “spying for the Army against any sign of Aboriginal strength, while mothering Aboriginal weakness” (38). This profusion of contradictions is manifest in her name. ‘Belladonna’ is a poisonous plant, called deadly nightshade, whereas ‘Bella Donna’ means beautiful lady in Italian. Her polymorphic role in the novel— coloniser, spy, refugee, matriarch, mother, teacher, storyteller—shows that identity is not singular nor stable, and meaning even less so.

Finch, who we are told is a half-caste, has been moulded to assume the role of hero or saviour. His global name, the Night Lantern (135) makes him sound like a super hero. Described as “a gift from God” (122), he is also compared to the biblical figure “Moses ...intent on saving the world from the destructive paths carved from its own history” (123). Finch relishes his role: “It amused him to cast himself into the story found across the northern hemisphere of the hunter who captures a mythical swan maiden in a marsh” (154). Yet, he fails. Both within the chapter’s Dreamtime story and the novel’s greater story. Whilst we do not discover the repercussions of his assassination for the novel’s world, for Oblivia it provides the opportunity for her to save herself and the swans, subverting the fairy tale ending.

This is not always an affable world. There are some passages of a conventional realist mode, but it is not sufficient for the reader to hang-on to. Therefore, the non-Indigenous reader must be ready to relinquish their own interpretative certainty. Similarly to Finch and Oblivia who were welcomed strangers to the genie’s Country, we, the non-Indigenous reader, are placed in the

position of ‘stranger’ before an Indigenous signed text (Ravenscroft, “Strange Weather” 359). Whilst we are welcomed, we are not entitled to all knowledge, consequentially understanding is not assured. By establishing an Indigenous reality within the text as the norm, the non-Indigenous reader is hailed as the ‘other’, diminishing their sovereignty, not simply over the reading of this text but also with regard to “Western ideas about human, inhuman, life and nonlife, energy and matter” (Ravenscroft, “Strange Weather” 368): ideas about knowing and being.

Given these contradictions and recalling that Oblivia is defined by others and herself as mad, doesn’t that shape our perception, as reader, of events, characters and the validity of her narrative? Undermining her authoritative position as narrator? Given the reasonable assumption that the person who narrates a “mental illness narrative” is struggling with their identity, how can they manage to create a narrative at all, let alone a cohesive one? (Christie 49). From a different perspective, this can be seen as the ultimate form of mimicry. By refusing to use the language of the coloniser, refusing to interact with humans, you would think that Oblivia is not engaging in mimicry and hybridity. To some extent, this is true, Oblivia does not repeat the values, behaviours and language of the dominant colonial culture because if she did she would not be seen as different. However, as the stereotype of the silent, subservient indigene, she uses the camouflage of madness, to reflect the madness of colonialism upon the text and thereby the reader. In so doing, a veneer of madness overshadows the characters and the narrative, via “excess, transgression, instability, disruption and incoherence” (Holland 1). Oblivia is both metaphor and metonym (Flockemann 7). Her hybridity expresses itself in another language. Madness/Oblivia is the psychological embodiment of injustice from which the indigenous vision cannot be separated.

The trope of the ‘madwoman’ “offers a ‘mask’ from which to speak” (Nzengou-Tayo qtd in Flockemann 12). The result is a narrative which provides piecemeal information about characters, leaving the reader uncertain as to what s/he can know about the story, alerting us to the import of the prelude’s title, “Ignis Fatuus”. Meaning a foolish goal or hope or a will-o’-the-wisp, the title indicates something that is difficult or impossible to catch. In terms of Wright’s novel, it is the “excess and uncertainty” (Ravenscroft “Strange Weather” 368) of meaning which resists a mono-interpretation. *The Swan Book* can be merely seen as one ‘truth’ among man. The inhabitants of the novel’s world (animate and inanimate) are inescapable proof that not only their minds, but their world is contaminated. The novel suggests that this is a consequence of the pervasive virus that is mentioned at the start and the end of the novel. I believe this virus is not simply representative of colonial assimilative policies and practices and but also a result of global environmental policies and practices. I argue, however, that the novel, overrides both of these, proposing that language is the virus. As mentioned previously, Oblivia already views language critically, seeing it as a means of control. The multiple references in the novel to English as a means of “bridging the gap” or

becoming more “Australian” demonstrates Bhabha’s claim that colonialism is dependent on a logic of imitation or mimicry. The colonised, in this instance the narrator, is compelled to mimic the language (if not the habits, and customs) of the coloniser.

However, mimicry is never pure, evidenced by the oral nature of some of the English in the novel, oddities of language and the inclusion of unclarified, interspersed foreign (French, Italian, Spanish, Latin) and Indigenous words and phrases. These ‘other’ languages are italicised, thereby foregrounding their presence/existence for the reader. The inclusion of Indigenous language on one level has political significance, as it presents them as equal to other world languages. Yet, on another level, it signals them as separate from and foreign to English. Italicisation, however, is not only used to highlight foreign languages in the novel, but also to introduce another character’s voice, typically when speaking, including the storyteller’s voice at times, and to emphasise the importance of a particular passage. In this way, the use of italics disturbs the narrative (Ravenscroft “Eye”, 54), reminding the reader of his lack of knowledge and distorting the apparently simple use of language as mimicry. Since, the novel’s language resists the simple repetition of the master’s text, language in the novel is hybridised. As the novel suggests, hybridity amounts to another language.

Animal sounds and language (notably to do with swans) and musical allusions provide another counter-discourse to English. By counterpoising other languages to English, Wright is not only challenging English’s hegemonic stability, but valorising and equalising the non-human ‘language’ with the human. This is more in keeping with a NCC perspective. When nature is described, the language has a more lyrical quality to it. For instance, “The beetles blanketing the lake shook the night in a millisecond that shattered its surface, like precious old Venetian glass crashing on to a pavement” (8). There is a reverential tone towards nature in all its manifestations. The arrival of the first black swan (13) is depicted in a context of awe. It is through nature or the character’s interaction with nature that this sense of wonder is portrayed. Even the climate change devastation is displayed in wondrous, evocative language in contrast to the pithy, political rhetoric of humans. In fact at the end of the novel, a future is imagined where English no longer conquers the Australian landscape, and the few English words the Myna birds recall are “not true” (330).

In many ways the novel depicts the multifarious ways the Indigenous have mimicked the coloniser. In *the Swan Book*, hierarchies within Indigenous communities exist. There is an Indigenous elite – the Brolga Nation, created through colonial education, both formal (learning English, culture and knowledge in schools) and informal (watching politics on television). Historically, this elite was seen as aligning their “cultural and economic interests with those of the colonizing group rather than with those of their own society” (Smith 64). In the novel, this elite group is the Aboriginal Australian Government, who have learnt from their colonial past and have

become adept at imitating white ways of thinking and doing. They have embraced assimilation, they have learned that the end justifies the means. In this particular instance, I refer to the land treaty the Brolga Nation made with the Australian and World Governments. In order to guarantee their sovereign rights over their Country, they excluded their people living at the swamp/lake, allowing it to remain an Australian Government run camp and dumping ground for military refuse. They regard the swamp people as contaminated and inferior. The swamp people, have been doubly dumped: relegated to a dumpsite, they have been rejected by the White Government and their own mob. Whilst the novel indicates that their actions play on the conscience of the Brolga Nation, expressed as shame, it is not sufficient for them to rock the boat: to rescind what they have gained.

The character Warren Finch, the first Indigenous man to become President of the Australian Republic, claims to improve the lives of all Indigenous people. However, he is really only interested in his own success and aggrandisement, seeing himself as the antithesis of those other Indigenous people that live in the swamp, that are guarded day and night by the Army. “Being “good black people” means not having radical views about land ownership, but “being anti all these things to prove that they [Indigenous subjects] loved their children, and could get on, and if this is what it meant to be reconciled – Well! So be it (97)”. Finch is the “mimic man” par excellence. He has learned the language, the ways and the thoughts of the coloniser. In spite of his traditional education, he has conceded to acts of reconciliation, his mind has been colonised.

Oblivia’s interaction with Finch reflects aspects of the coloniser-colonised or master-slave interplay. He is male and powerful, she is female and appears passive—at least Finch interprets her silence as passivity and indifference. Finch forcibly removes her from her ‘home’ to his abode and keeps her locked up in a tower. He marries her without her acquiescence, although he does not physically or sexually abuse her. Yet she is trapped, imprisoned. It is the fairy tale gone wrong and there are no other princes in sight. Isolation is threatening and her only desire is to escape back to her country with her swans. However, Finch thwarts that possibility too. Framed ironically as a wedding present to Oblivia, she hears him on the mobile phone give the signal to blow up her former home, the swamp, ensuring she has nothing to run back to. This bizarrely cruel gift is evidence of the enormous power which he possesses and shows his contempt for the people and the swamp. The destruction of their home recalls the removal of Indigenous people from their homelands. Finch reassures Oblivia that the people were “safe”, being given either the option to move to the local town, where they could “learn to live just like everyone else” or “return to their homelands where their real [Aboriginal] laws and government exist” (231). Assimilate or authenticate, that seems to be their only options – which of course are the exact options that Indigenous people have been offered since the 1970s. Finch seems to endorse past colonial and more recent Australian government policies (the Intervention). Immediately after, however, he explains

that the Army won't be looking after anyone anymore, and criticises the idea of 'Intervention' (which has lasted a century) as stupid. So on the one hand, he rejects certain (post)-colonialist practices, whilst endorsing others. What is he proposing? Finch's ambiguity shows colonialisms subterfuge, where words and deeds are misaligned. Finch's mind has been colonialised. He is driven by patriarchal and colonial goals which intend to reinvigorate colonial oppression (Selfton-Rowston 649). His is "crazy" (Selfton-Rowston 652). Finch is a specific type of Indigenous subject. He is the textual incarnation of reconciliation, personifying the madness of colonialism where euphemisms such as freedom, equality, love and closing the gap are employed surreptitiously in order to maintain the status quo of oppression. This we witness the ultimate transformation through mimicry, which assumes a coherent re-presentation of Self, but which in effect does not provide any real subversion.

The world proffered in the novel, is one where national and global borders and boundaries have disappeared under rising seas or have been decimated by nuclear war. This future where non-Indigenous governments have fallen and chaos flourishes globally, reveals that Indigenous attempts at national sovereignty are equally inadequate and destructive (Mead 8). Wright appears to offer the Indigenous nation called the Brolga Nation, as the rising alternative, with Warren Finch as its visionary leader. But, it seems, salvation is not that simple and this Indigenous government too has its flaws; not the least of which is having reached this status by denouncing their relatives at the swamp and denying them sovereignty over their land. This "highly successful self-defined Aboriginal Nation Government" is referred to as the "anti-brigade":

presenting themselves as being well and truly yes people who were against arguing the toss about Aboriginal rights [...] anti culture, anti-sovereignty, anti-human rights, anti-black armband history for remembering the past, anti-united Nations, or Amnesty International, as much as being anti-pornography, anti-paedophiles, anti-grog, anti-dope, anti-littering, anti-having too many dogs and pussycats, anti-any kind of diseases or ill health, anti-welfare, anti-poverty, anti-anyone not living like a white person in their houses. (96-97)

This absurdist tirade acknowledges the very real tensions surrounding the rhetoric concerning sovereignty within the Indigenous community. Towards the novel's end, Finch is assassinated which puts a final nail in the coffin, so to speak, of the viability of this alternative. Thus according to Philip Mead, the novel rejects the social and legal factors that are typically associated with Western delineations of sovereignty, proposing instead a "futuristic, allegorical, symbolic mosaic of social and governmental possibilities" (9). In other words, the novel normalises an Indigenous worldview where sovereignty is defined by the NCC relationship Indigenous people have with

Country. Sovereignty in these terms means the ability to inhabit one's own reality (Brewster 88 qtd in Potter 255).

Within the colonial discourse the place of women is complicated. As a patriarchal enterprise, women in colonisation were typically on the fringe, oppressed by male, economic and social dominance. Colonised black women were even more marginalised being depicted by multiple stereotypes -immorality, sexually provocative and child-like. Oblivia is contradictorily portrayed in this regard. Still very much a child, Oblivia sees herself in a sexually ambivalent, even asexual manner. Yet, her rape, reminds her of the inherent dangers as a result of her physical gender. She is seen by others as both an object of sexual desire and infantile. Firstly, evidenced by the rape, and secondly by Warren Finch's imaginings of her. For instance, in his dreams, he sees a large, flying, naked woman that he refers to as "a black angel cloud" and who, we are told, "aroused a desire he had never known before" (109). Thirdly, there is the television representation of the ideal wife discussed earlier. These imaginings represent the fantasy aspect of the stereotype, its virtual or mythical quality and its incompleteness. Upon meeting Oblivia Finch realises that he would never touch her: "You can't have sex- make love with a kid" (188). Contrary to these objectivising images, Oblivia remains child-like throughout the novel. Her behaviours, such as her refusal to eat strange food (177) or her sudden outburst of aggression towards Finch (185), exemplify this. The anxiety this creates in Finch, is evidenced by his absence. Years pass and he never returns to the People's Palace, he never sees Oblivia again.

Madness and Climate Fiction

In Wright's novel, just as in the real world, the threat of dispossession due to climate change is equally applicable to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, yet for white people the climate change 'emergency' preys upon their anxiety leaving them homeless. In the beginning of the novel, pale-skinned Bella Donna, who hails from the Northern Hemisphere, is presented as being homeless, one of the "new gypsies of the world" that has lost her country due to climate change wars. The swamp people believed that they were luckier than Bella Donna since they had a home. The roles of those dispossessed of their land are seemingly reversed in this story. "Black people like themselves had somewhere, whereas everywhere else, probably millions of white people were drifting among the other countless stateless millions of sea gypsies looking for somewhere to live" (23). Bella Donna blames the destruction of her homeland on the climate; "some devil, not a person, but a freak of nature" (25). The narrator questions this by saying "Old woman what kind of freak was that?" (25). Here, the implication is that a human agent, presumably white, is the cause, not nature's untamable, impersonal force, as Bella Donna's comment implies. She hints at this when

recounting her trials at sea: “We wanted to relinquish our lands, their memories and stories ... we wanted to be exonerated from history” (30). She knows she is equally culpable and wants to be absolved for her part in the environment’s /world’s decline. “Modern man” we are told, “had become the new face of God, and simply sacrificed the whole Earth”(12). This scathing attack on white man’s hubris and superiority in dealing with the in-human ‘other’, leaves no doubt as to where the blame lies. Climate change in the novel exposes non-Indigenous people’s inability to provide custodianship for the World’s environment.

The rhetoric of ‘emergency’ around climate change, is more than a political tool for non-Indigenous people in the novel. As evidenced by the following quote:

The swamp locals were not experiencing any terrific friendship with this new God. It was hell to pay to be living the warfare of modernity like dogs fighting over the lineage of progress against their own quiet whorls of time. Well! That just about summed up the lake people, sitting for all times in one place. (12)

This extract clearly juxtaposes non-Indigenous and Indigenous’ sense of time: concentric, as indicated by the “quiet whorl”, contra linear, as indicated by “the lineage of progress”. This is also in evidence in Wright’s non-linear narrative style. Extending this metaphor to the question of belonging, it is this oppositional view which is emblematic of the “challenges of being-together-in-place” (Howitt 49). Correlating to Indigenous notions of Country, perceiving place, the environment as unstable, means that one is always in perpetual negotiation with it. Contrastingly, recognition of place, the environment, as stable, manifests itself in mechanisms of power and control. Accordingly, non-Indigenous response to the crises of climate change in *The Swan Book*, is with nuclear force and violence, having equally devastating results for humans and non-humans. Bella Donna explains:

Everybody looking twice at his neighbour’s property. One land-grabbing country fighting another land-grabbing country, and on it went with any people excess to requirement killed, or they left on their own accord by throwing themselves into the ocean”. (26)

The first sentence here is reminiscent of a Biblical commandment which is evidently in breach. This interventionist tactic was called “Peace” by the governments. Like “closing the gap”, the word “peace” is an oxymoron. These terms belie the colonialist intentions, the reassertion of exclusive sovereign power in order to stabilise the environment. Rarely in the history of Australia, have Indigenous and non-Indigenous people been able to find a fundamental common way to co-exist and co-inhabit the Australian continent (Howitt 49). It is this lack of common ground, irreconcilable

perspectives and practices of place, which Wright exposes as the dilemma concerning our global facility to coexist with each other and the planet. Not surprisingly, the result is “a volatile shifting world that was irreconcilably changed” (*SB* 26), promoting the demise of non-Indigenous sovereignty and preparing for the rise of an alternative.

In the novel, after the climate wars, the international community looks to Indigenous cultures as the way out of this chaotic world. As with Potter’s argument the implication is that Indigenous interaction with the land has always been benign. Criticism regarding this premise exists, notably the role of Aboriginal landscape burning in shaping the Australian biota. However, more recently, recognition is attributed to Australian Aboriginal people as developing careful management of their country (Mauch 5). The novel, however, questions this premise: the prospect of creating a secure, stable climatic, social or political future does not appear within its three hundred and thirty four pages. Within the novel, the Aboriginal Nation Government is upheld as the “showpiece of what a future human world was all about. ... This modern Brolga Nation was just the kind of place that International Justice could promote to bring an end to the wars of homelessness across the world” (106). However, this nation’s status, we are told, has come at a shameful cost. By acquiescing to white man’s policies of “closing the gap”, manipulating the system to achieve their aims, they ended up having “the swamp people’s part of their traditional estate, the Army’s property and dumping ground, deleted from the treaty” (105), so that they could claim traditional land ownership. In order to connect Brolga values with the future of the world (107), the elders of the Brolga Nation invested all their hope in their prodigal son, Warren Finch.

The substitution of a white politician with a black one, does not change anything for the Aboriginals on the ground. Half believing the myth that is Warren Finch—that an Indigenous politician would best represent them and their interests—“they liked the idea that Australia needed a blackfella to hide behind” (124). But Finch is no less a political animal than his predecessors, white or black, driven by his own pursuit of glory and self-serving ego. Simply having a symbolic Indigenous person in government doesn't necessarily ‘fix’ anything, particularly if they are perpetuating the same system, ignoring the realities of past failures. As Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth*, “postcolonial [...] nations court disaster if they simply replace their white colonial bourgeois leaders with a black [...] post-colonial bourgeoisie, while leaving the basic class structure of the societies in place.” (*NATC* 1438). Fanon’s warning is not heeded by Warren Finch and the Aboriginal Government in Wright’s novel. Changing the epidermal colour of the politician, without changing the class or social and economic oppressive structures amounts, as the novel shows, to tokenism not activism.

The possibility of a different kind of political community, with a different epistemological and ontological view, is not likely to be established by Finch or anyone else in the novel. The

climate change event—the emergency that triggers a reassertion of sovereign power—resulting in war in the novel, the rise and fall of governments, is followed by millions of white people being homeless. They experience a similar state of disconnect, that the Aborigines feel when they are dispossessed of Country. Even though a solution is found in Indigenous notions of Country, it is not realised due to the serendipitous assassination of the new President Warren Finch, which leaves the reader wondering whether it was really possible in the first place. Instability becomes thus, the new status quo.

Climate change and the Indigenous person/experience are both “other” in post-colonial terms. If climate change hails the end of the idea of nature as a non-human passive entity available for exploitation by humans (Potter “Teaching” 252) then this has repercussions for Western literary forms which are tied to Western epistemological frames of reference: humanism and capitalism. Thus as Potter states: “If Western modernity has reached its limits, then its literary effects must have too” (“Teaching” 252; White 144). This quote implies that present conventions of modern novelistic forms are not capable of representing climate change, supporting in turn a new type of literature. We witness this in Wright’s novel, which has been found to be difficult to define, existing outside, and extending beyond present novelistic genres. By mimicking Western novelistic conventions and appropriating the colonial narrative, the novel extends beyond them by incorporating other experimental modes of narration. Thereby becoming “neither the one nor the other”, but claiming its own power and authority. In effect, *The Swan Book* is an example of literary hybridity or an example of the limits of existing Western literary tropes (Ghosh qtd in Robin 6). Incongruous narrative and character delineations, subvert physical and psychological hegemonic practices, represented by the realistic novel. Housed under the umbrella of postcolonial literature, the novel can therefore be, and often is classified as magic realism. I agree with other critiques who claim that the novel does not easily fit into this genre, but transverses several categories, among them climate fiction and historical metafiction. It can thus be argued that the complexity and enormity of climate change justifies the need for the non-traditional narrative forms the novel employs. Alternatively, this could equally imply that modern novelistic forms are not capable of representing Indigenous madness or the madness that is, the Australian Indigenous experience.

Conclusion

Oblivia’s narrative represents the synecdoche of harms committed against First Nation peoples, as a result of colonisation and assimilation. Personalising, even personifying history in this way destabilises notions of absolute truths, and the single story of history. Oblivia’s narrative is the only one that has a conventional linear progression, particularly after she is abducted by Finch, half-

way through the novel. Despite the swans' stories beginning with Bella Donna at the start of the novel, it is Oblivia's personal quest for sovereignty and identity which is linked to and embodied by the "responsibility of care" she assumes for them. Through her, the story of the swans is sustained. Through the swans, Oblivia attains agency. Their reciprocal relationship tells a story which effectuates their mutual survival. The story is a speech act, which evokes and invokes Country. Through story she is able to define and/or re-define her Self. Hence, the relevance of my self-inspired Calvino quote, which reminds us of the power of language, its performative and transcendental qualities, which through story can "dissolve a world" that seems impossibly fixed and immutable.

Madness, sovereignty and identity are central aspects of the text. The narrator invites us to believe that she wants sovereignty over her own brain. However, whether this is achieved by the story itself or the process of writing/telling it, or both, remains unclear. Furthermore, we are informed that the main character is 'mad'. Sovereignty over a mad brain, ownership, authority over the self and one's thoughts seems like a reasonable request. Reclamation of sovereignty and emancipation from racist and sexist psychological imprisonment are accomplished by Alexis Wright's construction of a female character that withdraws and disengages from the nation state, rejecting the status quo (Sefton-Rowston 646). Oblivia doesn't just disengage from the state, but the human world. In this imaginary world, Oblivia is positioned in opposition to post-colonial forces. The new world order proposed, may at first seem dreamlike or crazy, but Wright's message is clear, the way forward, towards decolonisation, reconciliation, forgiveness or sovereignty, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, is possible if motivated by native-centred consciousness and understandings of place (Country). This means recognising alternative forms of knowledges and acknowledging the possibility that not everything can be known. In order to regain sovereignty over their own brains, Indigenous thinkers and writers must be "like a head that cannot be severed from its body" (Sefton-Rowston 658), writing of Country from which they can never be truly parted. From this perspective, the novel functions as metafiction where writing, the author's sovereign act, creates an Indigenous literary space that provides solace for the Indigenous reader, and vistas of possible sovereignties.

In another story, this epic struggle to return to one's homeland could be seen as heroic. But, Oblivia is the antithesis of the heroine, or the feminine, morally robust, redemptive figure of traditional novels. Her journey lacks the personal, individualistic impetus of a Western narrative. She does not return home healed from her trauma (Sheridan 199). She has not regained her sanity, which from a Western perspective is what is meant by healing. It is not triumphant in that sense. But it is from an Indigenous perspective, since she has managed against all odds to navigate her way home, and has fulfilled her obligation to Country by keeping at least one swan alive.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, I have shown how Alexis Wright's novel, *The Swan Book*, endorses a "native-centred consciousness" which demonstrates and proposes sovereignty as an embodied experience, which includes a reciprocal relationship to 'Country', as a means of attaining psychic survival. I argue that Alexis Wright chooses to demonstrate this through representations of 'madness' which originate from colonial policies and practices.

In Chapter One, I discussed how racism and madness ironically stem from notions of humanism which emerged from the "Age of Reason" or the Enlightenment. Michel Foucault provides details of how 'madness' became a catchall description for any citizen deemed morally lacking. Incarceration of said offenders, became the standard practice. During colonialism, this practice was subsequently coupled with the categorisation and hierarchisation of humanity. Consequently all undesirables, including the madman and the indigene, were placed outside the hegemonic colonial discourse and deprived of their own voice and subjectivity. Frantz Fanon's work reveals how skin colour came to provide additional impetus to the creation and maintenance of difference. His notion of 'colour blindness' reminds us that although racial distinctions inform all cultures and nations, not just colonial ones, ultimately it is a certain way of looking: a perspective that is universally white. Fanon clearly states that racism is a social phenomenon which produces psychological trauma and alienation. Specifically he was interested in how the black man's inferiority complex was created and how the black man through mimicry, sought recognition from the oppressor. Through psychological studies Fanon shows that the trauma of madmen and black men are not dissimilar. The outcome for both is alienation and fragmentation. Given that there are parallels between the othering of the mentally deranged and the othering of Indigenous peoples, I then elaborate on how racism and violence informed the discourses of science and law throughout colonialism.

Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of stereotypes and mimicry expand on Fanon's ideas and in-keeping with his approach Bhabha also employs psychoanalysis theory to his analysis of colonial discourse. In particular, Bhabha draws on Jacques Lacan's the mirror stage and investigations of the complex interaction between language and identity. Bhabha's analysis of colonial discourse is founded on ambivalence or anxiety, in which both the coloniser and the colonised are structured according to conflicting versions of otherness that destabilise the psyche. For the colonised, mimicry does not result in a more coherent identity. In the coloniser, this becomes evident through his paranoia. In more recent times in Australia, as a result of this anxiety and compounded by a sense of inescapable shame about the past, the identity of Australians is shown to be in crises, since

it is precariously founded on a false sense of place and belonging due to the appropriation of the Australian landmass from the Aboriginals.

Chapter Two explored the question of sovereignty and the distinctions between Western and Indigenous worldviews where I argued that Indigenous sovereignty is experienced through the body and mind and is dependent upon connection to Country. Indigenous Sovereignty is shown to be polymorphic both within and without the Indigenous community. It can be considered globally from an international perspective; nationally as an issue contested between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; and individually as part of everyday life. In an Australian context, even though First Nation peoples have never ceded their sovereignty over the Australian continent, their sovereignty was superseded by *terra nullius*, the international law that declared the Australian landmass uninhabited. Since the arrival of the British in 1788, the polemic surrounding sovereignty has been intimately associated with land-rights.

In spite of the multivalent nature of sovereignty, what is crucial to notions of sovereignty is emplacement. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people consider having a sense of place of paramount importance, whether it is in relation to the Australian physical, literary or psychological landscape. However, each is driven by conflicting motivations: Indigenous people are motivated by their spiritual connection to and stewardship of Country, whereas non-Indigenous people are motivated by anxiety.

In order to support my claim that Country is central to Indigenous notions of sovereignty and therefore their psychological well-being, I explain this term in relation to other primary Indigenous concepts: Dreamtime and Law. All three concepts are imbricated and interwoven and are fundamental to an Indigenous world-view in which all life, animate and inanimate is sentient, capable of agency and equally significant. These three concepts are intimately bound to the concept of story. Stories are vital to the dissemination of knowledges and to maintaining and reaffirming ties to Country. Country is not simply a geographical location on a map, but a series of nurturing relations between people and all-life, connected to time immemorial. While the historical past of colonialism is in the past for White Australians, this is not the case for Indigenous peoples for whom time is never finished but rather continuous, imbricated and cyclical. The ethnographic information about Indigenous epistemology and ontology presented in this section, served to illustrate that the Indigenous worldview is comparable to a Western worldview and knowledges. It is simply a different way of looking.

I also looked in some detail at Indigenous ceremonial practices to define further this concept of embodiment. This revealed that through rituals for instance, the senses and experiences of the Indigenous body is remade into a different body. The boundary between body and Country dissipates in the performative event, which combines music, dance, story and painted patterns. As

each Country is unique, so are the cultural practices for each Country. This implies that the experience of the Indigenous body is different from Country to Country. Indigenous embodied subjectivity is demarcated by stories and cultural practices. These stories with the performative practices of ceremony makes a body different, in its very substance.

Since I argue that madness is endemic to the legacy of colonialism affecting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. I showed that the trauma caused by colonialist practices and policies in Australia, past and present, is currently manifested by struggling Indigenous mental health. I elaborated on how different types of violence are perpetuated through assimilation policies – forced child removal, displacement, eradication of Indigenous language and culture – resulting in self-perpetuating cycle of degradation, low self-esteem, economical inequity and violence from generation to generation. As a result, Indigenous people struggle with a sense of identity. Additionally, Indigeneity is troubled by Western conceptions of essentialism and authenticity which strive to ossify Indigenous culture and experience. The politics of identity is not straight forward given that today people are increasingly racially mixed. Classifying people by race is a restrictive predominantly white practice. Currently, Indigeneity is defined by three criteria: someone who can claim descendency from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander; someone who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; and is accepted by their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community. More recently, efforts by and within Indigenous communities are being made to reintroduce traditional knowledges and practices to help with healing intergenerational trauma.

For non-Indigenous peoples, the mad legacy of colonialism is manifested by nationalistic rhetoric, debates over land-rights and questions regarding the validity of white Australia's territorial claims based on *terra nullius*. Existing anxiety over a false sense of belonging is subsequently intensified by Australian's incapacity to nurture the environment. Whilst national narratives of identity attempt to stabilise identity, they simultaneously reassert Western sovereignty. Efforts to maintain sovereignty has resulted in identifying threats to Australian borders and the national psyche. These threats are seen to arise from inside the country, Indigenous peoples, and outside the country, migrants and refugees. However, climate change destabilises Western sovereignty by aggravating non-Indigenous notions of not belonging. Irrespective of the type of threat, the West's response to perceived threats is to reassert white exclusive sovereignty through violence and control. This is achieved by invoking a narrative of 'crises' or 'emergency'. The rhetoric of emergency, re-establishes colonial authority and power, implying that climate change can be fixed and that it should be stable. As a result, it repositions the humanist standpoint: human as superior and separate to nature, the non-human,

Chapter Three explores the way in which the novel addresses the psychological battle over place and sovereignty. *The Swan Book* creates an imaginary Indigenous storyscape, an

‘intercultural’ or ‘hybrid’ space within which references to other stories from around the World are imbedded. Stories about white swans are appropriated to accommodate Australia’s black swans. This storyscape subverts and distorts the actualities of the Australian Indigenous experience, past, present and future. The non-linear narrative and disjointed character development evokes the oral nature of Indigenous Dreamtime stories. Through Oblivia, the novel highlights the importance and the power of the Story in terms of identity-formation and therefore its relevance to sovereignty. The novel illustrates that the right to narrate one’s own story/history and inscribe one’s own future without the impediment of Western literary conventions or History, is a sovereign act.

The novel explores two other important Indigenous concepts, Country and Law. The novel, certainly supports the notion that Country has agency and provides sustenance and support. This is demonstrated clearly through Oblivia, who spent a decade physically and mentally conjoined with the tree-Ancestor learning its ancient wisdom. Her mind-body connection to the tree is so profound that when she feels threatened she can access it, even though it has been destroyed. In the novel, the relationship between Oblivia and the tree-Ancestor exemplifies the importance of reciprocal relationships within Country. These relationships which provide emotional and psychological empowerment, are not only between humans, but humans and non-humans/nature. Within the Indigenous worldview relationships are governed by Indigenous Law. Western and Indigenous law systems are juxtaposed throughout the novel, in order to validate the existence of Indigenous Law, thereby questioning the validity of *terra nullius*. Oblivia incorporates Indigenous Laws and knowledge with the swan stories, in order to assume responsibility of care for the swans. Both the swans and Oblivia are responsible for looking after Country. Other characters are shown to have different ways of interacting with and caring for Country. Whilst some are ridiculed, such as Warren Finch, the three genies embody sovereignty and maintain it through the rituals they enact when they arrive and walk through Country and the shop they have in the city. The genies represent the possibility of straddling two different worlds without becoming ‘mad’.

Racialisation is displayed in the novel by the use of multiple stereotypes. Oblivia is ostracised by her Indigenous community and described in animalistic terms. Her lack of language, her silence, renders her invisible and insignificant. Structurally however, the narrative contradicts this assumption because the novel centres on her and the swans presenting their story relatively chronologically. Oblivia contradicts the passive female stereotype. She does have agency, however, her agency is contingent upon and in response to the needs of the swans. Equally it is through the swans that her sense of self is constituted.

However, Oblivia’s sense of self is not stable. Generally her connection to Country reinforces and sustains her identity. This identity, consubstantiated by the tree-Ancestor, I argued is a collective one, ‘we’. Referencing Lacan’s mirror phase, I showed that Oblivia has not fully

transitioned to the Symbolic Order, exhibited by her child-like traits and her rejection of language and other means of interaction with humans. One principle event in the novel which challenges her sense of self, is the projections of herself on television as the ideal wife. This representation of an idealised version of herself is based on the film icon Marlene Dietrich. Dietrich, whose dress and appearance was considered androgynous and who represented multiple desires, is a figure of patriarchal resistance. In this way, this ideal image is subversive. Although, intrigued by this image, Oblivia rejects it.

Defined as mad, Oblivia is a subject reduced to silence after being raped as a child. Madness is shown to be a trope that structures the narrative and delineates characters. The novel's circular and imbricative structure is a counter-discursive response to a linear, progressive narrative typical of conventional novels. It highlights the disparity between Indigenous and Western understandings of time and space. Similarly, characters are presented in a disjointed, almost contradictory manner, alerting the reader to their tainted/damaged/ unbalanced state. They are all contaminated by the virus of assimilation which through language has destabilised their minds. The semantic density of the textual hybrid space, encourages multiple meanings, resisting the notion of a single story. In this way, madness is itself a form of mimicry, destabilising the text and the reader. Furthermore, this 'Dreamtime narrative' simulates a colonial world, offering a recognisable and unrecognisable (his)story. Through madness, Oblivia operates as the metaphor and metonym for the pervasive affliction of the colonial legacy on Indigenous people in Australia. Instead of disintegration, Oblivia survives, reclaiming a sense of self.

Through the literariness of madness, Oblivia is presented as mad and not mad. Oblivia shows that she is not in the least mad since she is capable of conjoining all the intertextual references into her own epic tale and simultaneously showing us that this is one story among many. Here is a story of epic proportions that can challenge colonialism's authoritative narrative. The novel proposes that the real madness occurs in those that accept one story and make it History or the Truth. We are reminded of the dangers of reiteration, where a single story can become hypnotisingly credible. Oblivia chooses to liberate herself from the dominant narrative, by disengaging with humans and their language and is thereby able to regain sovereignty over her brain.

In opposition to binary constructions, coloniser/colonised, the West/Other, that presupposes unified, monologic, homogenous national cultures and identities, Bhabha proposes something which is neither the One nor the other, a third space or intersubjective space wherein interpretation, negotiation and transformation are at play. The principle character, Oblivia, creates multiple, hybrid identities by way of stories. There is both mimicry, cross cultural borrowing and alterity at play in the retelling and reworking of these stories. Although written in the language of the coloniser, the

novel is peppered with words and phrases from the Wannji language and several European languages, including onomatopoeic language to depict animal sounds and musical references. In this way, the interstices of the novel's languages becomes a new hybrid language. The oppositional parameters proposed by stereotypes are further complicated given that the majority of characters in the novel are of intra- and inter-racial heritage, they are neither one nor the other. Furthermore, by putting white rhetoric in the mouths of black people and animal figures, tension is established about notions of absolute truths, superiority-inferiority, undermining the authoritative discourse of colonialism. This dichotomous relationship, imbued with anxiety, was discussed in relation to the character of Warren Finch in the novel.

The Swan Book is used as a counterpoint to contemporary capitalist secular modernity, evidenced by the devastating effects of climate change that the novel portrays. The novel suggests that it is white people who are responsible for these global climate wars and who are ironically, dispossessed of their land as a result of them. Since climate is unstable, one is in continual negotiation with it. For Indigenous people who are still connected to Country, this does not pose a problem as negotiation is inherent to the reciprocal relationships that are part of the responsibility of caring for Country. Climate change is a result of the subjugation of nature to the will of (white) man. In these terms, nature is equated to the indigene, another 'other'.

Today, the psychological well-being of non-Indigenous people is threatened on several fronts. Firstly the continued presence of Indigenous peoples and the fact that they have never ceded their Sovereignty over the Australian continent. Secondly, Australia has the third highest proportion of migrant households in the Western world, troubling the possibility of establishing identity and belonging based on exclusion. Thirdly, the threat of climate change. These three elements, in conjunction with Indigenous experiences of dispossession and connection to Country, elaborate the difficulties of sharing the Australian landscape. Throughout the novel, nature and Indigenous knowledges are juxtaposed with Western human knowledges, subverting our beliefs of what we think we know. One such knowledge is the structure of the conventional novel. By destabilising the authenticity of the colonial narrative, the novel allows for the rise of a new discourse to challenge humanism and capitalism.

The act of reading *The Swan Book* is indicative of Fanon's phenomenological approach. Through empathy, the reader is invited to participate in and try to understand Oblivia's experiences, in spite of the opaque and convoluted renderings of its complexity. In Fanon's two works *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), he is engaging with ideas of the unitary nature of the human subject. He is striving for a new humanism. The idea of a different humanistic perspective appeals to me in a world which is becoming more and more polarised by nationalistic and racist agendas. I propose that this is a way of reading Wright's novel. For the white

reader, she is not encouraging us to embrace an Indigenous ontology and epistemology, but a new definition of what it means to be human.

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