

**'Exploring Colonial Trauma through creative writing: the experience of
Aboriginal Australians.'**

Wendy Edmondson
Dip. T. Grad. Diploma Mgt. MBA

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College of Arts, Business, Law and Social Sciences
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Wendy Anne Edmondson

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Abstract

This project examines colonial trauma and its ongoing impacts on the lives of colonised peoples. It aims to more fully understand the legacies of colonial suffering, particularly in settler societies where the descendants of the original settlers have established a permanent presence. My research not only exposes current and transgenerational trauma but also examines the ways in which such pain may be managed or resolved by drawing on Indigenous resilience, resistance and healing techniques, particularly as they manifest through the practices of writing. A review of colonialism, trauma and Aboriginal literature has revealed that Aboriginal writing is a potent tool for decolonising, centering indigenous voices, reclaiming identity and claiming a representational space in the literary field.

There has been limited work that has examined the impacts of transgenerational trauma in relation to colonised people, particularly in the Australian context, and so this project contributes new knowledge to this field. It explores the ways in which creative writing by colonised peoples be utilised to reveal the complexity of their lives and experiences, thus working as both a vehicle for storytelling and for healing.

This dissertation is in two parts. A thesis and a work of creative writing. My story *Gugurdung*, based loosely on biographical material from six generations of my family, creatively highlights the manifestation and impacts of transgenerational trauma over time and across generations. This work of creative writing demonstrates the power of indigenous truth-telling and emancipation of Indigenous counter-narratives, and as such it works to unite both creative and analytical elements of this thesis.

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Introduction

Peace was yours, Australian man
with tribal laws you made,
Till white Colonials stole your peace
with rape and murder raid;
—Oodgeroo Noonuccal, 'The Dispossessed'

Noonuccal's 'The Dispossessed' (1964) succinctly captures the history of Aboriginal Australia, including precolonial life (peace and law), followed by the profound violence and genocide of colonisation (rape, murder, poison and enslavement), which decimated the original population and resulted in the loss of the heart, soul, and identity for Aboriginal people.¹ The trauma of colonialism is passed down from generation to generation. Aboriginal people have been trying to piece together 'remnants' of their culture, whilst negotiating intergenerational and historical trauma and dealing with the pervasiveness of current trauma. In contemporary Australia, Noonuccal's 'the scattered few' are growing; not only are they increasing in population, but they are actively seeking to reclaim not only their culture but also to reclaim the truth. As Aboriginal people, long silenced and marginalised, seek to tell their truth as an alternative to the dominant narrative, they are also actively seeking to reclaim their truth through their own stories and ways of knowing.

¹The term Aboriginal is used to refer to the indigenous people of Australia and is reflective of the terminology used particularly in Western Australia which commonly doesn't include Torres Strait Islanders.

In the process of healing and cultural reclamation, creative writing has proven to be a potent force in giving voice to Aboriginal peoples' experiences and perspectives, challenging many Eurocentric narratives about Australia's postcolonial history which ignore the suffering of Aboriginal people. Through literature, Aboriginal authors are provided with a means to not only engage in truth-telling and highlight Aboriginal perspectives, but also to deconstruct and decolonise colonial discourses. This medium provides scope to privilege the voices of the colonised and reveal the inhumane repercussions of settler colonialism. It is also a powerful forum for exposing the complexity of trauma and how it continues to adversely shape Aboriginal lives across the generations.

The germination of this thesis was personal as it was based on my aspirations - as an Aboriginal woman - to develop a better understanding of culture, family, and identity through a journey of self-exploration utilising creative writing. However, with further reading and research it became apparent that setting the scene for the complex socio-political, historical and cultural situation in which we, as Aboriginal Australians, are situated was critical. The words of suffering in Aboriginal writing are not situated in the distant past, to be moved on from, or forgotten; for us, trauma is current and continuing. It is in this context, that the complexities of my family's individual and collective experiences of trauma are linked to our lives within a settler colonial nation – a context in which colonising forces maintain power and the colonisers remain forever. For many Aboriginal Australians our historical, cumulative and transgenerational trauma is precipitated by seemingly endless violence enacted within a colonial hegemony. Thus, to understand my own experience it was important to interrogate colonisation and trauma, the legacies of which powerfully and emotionally resonate in our lived experience and creative expression.

This dissertation comprises a thesis and a piece of creative writing. My story *Gugurdung*, based loosely on biographical material from six generations of my family, highlights the manifestation and impacts of transgenerational trauma over time and across generations. This work demonstrates the power of Indigenous truth-telling in creating Indigenous counter-narratives, and as such it works to unite both creative and analytical elements of this thesis.

Part 1: The Thesis, is made up of three chapters. The first two focus on building a historical and theoretical framework for my creative work, while the third explores trauma as presented through Aboriginal creative writing. In the thesis, colonisation and trauma are respectively explored to provide background for the current destructive and violent circumstances affecting Aboriginal people in Australia. In the aftermath of the two World Wars of the 20th century, key theories emerged that offered a catalyst for understanding the Australian Aboriginal experience; firstly, the rise of postcolonial theory, a result of the dismantling of European empires, and, secondly, the emergence of trauma theory, which examined the legacies of the Jewish Holocaust of the second World War.

Chapter 1 focuses on defining the context in which Aboriginal trauma is situated. Australia is most commonly referred to as a postcolonial nation. Use of the term 'postcolonial' implies that the period of colonisation has passed, the colonisers have left, and that the colonised have reclaimed their sovereignty. Given that these attributes do not apply to the Australian context, I turned to settler colonial theory because Australia met the logic of this hypothesis more accurately. Settler colonial states usually have small Aboriginal populations and when

colonisers invade, their intention is to settle on a permanent basis with an implicit agenda to eliminate the 'native', either through violence or bio-cultural absorption (Wolfe 2006). Framing Australian as a settler colonial nation, recognises that Aboriginal people have had limited success in claiming sovereignty, land rights, and self-determination in the face of ongoing government oppression. In addition, racism, discrimination, poverty, loss of country, culture, and other social determinants, has resulted in trauma being embedded in Aboriginal lives.

Chapter 2 presents an exploration of trauma theory. Analysis of the literature revealed trauma to be a contested and multifarious proposition, problematised by the diverse specificities in which it occurs. Original trauma theory focused on Eurocentric ideas, primarily Freudian psychoanalysis, one-off traumatic events, and the tragedy of the Holocaust. This narrow focus did not include the suffering of Aboriginal peoples (or other non-western groups) from around the world. Because trauma can manifest in many diverse and complicated ways, the concept of Indigenous trauma needs to be explored more specifically and extensively to deconstruct the Australian Aboriginal experience. In particular, Australia's settler colonial status means that trauma is not only located in the past, or transmitted through generations, but remains persistent with no conceivable end. Thus, trauma remains a constant in the day-to-day lives of most Aboriginal people and is reflected as such in the existence of both our ancestors and descendants. When Aboriginal people write about trauma it is most likely that they are reflecting on events that they, or their families, have personally experienced. As such, it is important to acknowledge widespread trauma, the need for healing, and potential for re-traumatisation that living in a settler colonial state may trigger in Aboriginal people living with colonial violence.

The third chapter in this thesis provides a bridge between theory and praxis. It situates my semi-autobiographical story within Indigenous creative writing more broadly, acknowledging that creative works by Aboriginal authors living in settler colonial contexts often represent the traumatic suffering of Aboriginal people. It suggests that creative writing may be a catalyst for the scars of trauma to resurface, but it can also be emancipatory and a powerful literary tool for decolonisation and resistance. Another strength of Aboriginal-led writing is that it tends to display an ambivalence to non-Western trauma paradigms, further suggesting that recognition of Indigenous trauma is specific to a settler colonial context. Thus, creative writing about trauma is, in many ways, ahead of trauma theory in its recognition of the way trauma manifests in the lived experience of Australian Aboriginal peoples.

In Part 2: my creative writing component, *Gugurdung*, explores themes contained in the thesis, with the aim of privileging Aboriginal perspectives of colonisation and trauma, particularly transgenerational trauma. The piece of writing focuses on a fictional account of six generations of my family over a period of over 100 years. It is a story of pain, unresolved grief, violence, resilience and healing against the spectre of the British invasion.

The incorporation of Aboriginal cultural and spiritual beliefs, and the use of specific literary techniques are used to demonstrate the strengths and resilience of Aboriginal people.

PART 1

Chapter One - Precolonial, Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Settler Colonialism: Understanding the Specificities of the Australian Aboriginal Experience and the Emancipatory Potential of Aboriginal Writing

Colonialism only loosens its hold when the knife is at its throat.

—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

In this chapter I examine the complex theoretical and historical context in which colonial trauma experienced by Aboriginal Australian peoples is situated and argue for the potential of Aboriginal writing to act as a form of resistance and mitigation of the trauma through presenting counter narratives to the dominant discourse. The structure of the chapter will comprise an examination, sequentially, of key phases in the timeline of the colonial project from pre-colonial, colonialism, colonialism in Australia, postcolonialism, settler colonialism, and settler colonialism in Australia. This approach has been adopted because of the need to undertake a broad exploration of the critical theories underpinning colonialism, followed by a deeper analysis of the Aboriginal Australian context, in order to situate a discussion about the effects of colonisation and the potential of Aboriginal writing as a literary tool to address trauma and colonial hegemony.

Colonisation has been a recurring feature of human history, notably the waves of European colonisation from the 15th century during the 'Age of Discovery', with much of what is now known as Asia, Africa, the Americas and Australasia being seized on behalf of European countries. Eurocentric philosophical, political and economic ideologies provided the rationale and justification for the domination of Aboriginal peoples around the world, and

the subsequent appropriation of their land and resources through violent interventions. European and Aboriginal ideologies and philosophies are marked in their differences, and the colonisers were able to take advantage of the spiritual, non-capitalistic, holistic, environmentally sustainable tenets which underpinned Aboriginal relationships to the land, which are in stark contrast to European ideals of superiority, capitalism and expansionism. The disparities in western and non-western belief systems are often explored in Aboriginal writing, and tropes around spiritual connection to country, non-materialism, community priorities and cultural beliefs provide sharp opposition to Western aims of environmental exploitation, greed, materialism and individualism.

Inevitably though, in response to political events of the first half of the 20th century, particularly World War I, and post-war shifts in colonial power as well as anti-colonial movements, many colonised states gained their freedom and independence in the period after World War II. This period has given rise to the theory of postcolonialism (Fanon 2008). In the context of the postcolonial discourse, there has been ongoing debate about where settler nations are situated. Patrick Wolfe (2006) and Lorenzo Veracini (2011) have led the argument that such countries are more clearly defined as settler colonial states, based on the proposition that settlers in these societies have come to stay on a permanent basis, in contrast to postcolonial countries, such as India, South Africa, Hong Kong, the Caribbean and other countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle-East, where the colonisers have returned 'home'. This chapter argues that Australia based on settler colonial theory.

Since the latter half of the 20th century, Aboriginal fiction and memoir utilising literary techniques of the dominant society have provided alternative narratives to the Eurocentric

deficit thinking applied to Indigenous peoples who are often viewed as the primitive 'other' in coloniser accounts and records since the 18th century. The postcolonial period saw the emergence of literature which has critiqued the legacies of colonisation and given voice to colonised people to articulate their perspectives in a nascent literary movement (Fanon 1967). Regardless of the continued debate about where settler societies are situated, Aboriginal authors emerged in the postcolonial era to write about their experiences of colonisation, and the resultant trauma caused by dehumanisation and oppression (Gilbert 1977). In the context of ongoing colonisation, it is proposed that the narratives of colonial trauma will potentially be written about by new generations of Aboriginal authors because it never ends. The potential of Aboriginal writing to provide an opportunity to challenge Eurocentric narratives has gained traction as more Aboriginal authors have joined the literary movement in the postcolonial period (Griffiths 2016). The depth of the trauma may only be understood if there is an understanding of the lives led by Aboriginal people prior to colonisation, the devastating effects of colonisation, and the Aboriginal experience of the postcolonial/settler colonial phase. Aboriginal fiction and memoir have enabled Aboriginal authors to explore both pre-colonial and colonial themes utilising Aboriginal voices and perspectives. A study of pre-colonial life provides the background against which the effects of colonisation may be analysed and critically examined.

Pre-colonial Australia

Pre-European Australian Aboriginal societies comprised approximately 500 language groups located in diverse ecological localities, with a national population estimated between 300,000 to 1,000,000 peoples (Blainey 2016). Each language group has its own territory and complex, intricate social, spiritual and kinship relationships are strictly maintained and

observed. Emphasis is placed on these relationships, as well as caring for country, rather than the acquisition of material possessions (Blainey 2016). Spiritual beliefs are largely centred on the creation stories of ancestral beings who traversed formless terrains creating all the natural elements, and it is these stories that have been passed down the generations, over many thousands of years, through each story's custodian. These stories provide Indigenous communities with both social and moral values and lessons for day-to-day living. Hunting, gathering and agricultural skills have been passed down, as have complex knowledge systems around astronomy, spirituality, bio-diversity, science, ecology and medicine. Indigenous cultures developed and maintained oral communication traditions, and music, symbols, art, dance, ceremony perform as ways of recording traditional knowledge (Poroch et al. 2009).

The degree to which cultural knowledge has been retained after colonisation is largely dependent on the actions of the colonisers and the material worth of local specificities; including location, land, climate, suitability for agricultural and pastoral use and resources. Significant cultural knowledge has been lost as a result of the disruptive effects of colonisation which unfolded in large swathes across the country at different times and in different locations over a 150-year period. Aboriginal authors, nevertheless, have drawn on the rich and diverse knowledge which has survived, and incorporated many traditional themes in their writing, sometimes in new and innovative techniques such as speculative fiction or magic realism.

The highly organised lifestyles of Indigenous peoples represented self-supporting economies practised by small groups, usually comprising several families, where each member had a

clearly defined role in supporting the group. Moving across the land, Indigenous peoples developed an intimate knowledge of the land and its resources and this served to ensure a soft footprint upon the earth and the preservation of the natural environment. Aboriginal author, Bruce Pascoe in his book *Dark Emu* (2016) argues that the diaries and journals of early explorers detail sophisticated pre-colonial agricultural practices in many locations, and that this information dispels the notion of aimless, nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyles, which he asserts is the lie used to justify the concept of 'terra nullius' or 'empty land', and the subsequent seizure of territory. In the last few decades Aboriginal knowledge about pre-colonial life has been published in non-fiction books detailing land use, technology, food sources, hunting, medicinal practice, including the work of the traditional healers, astronomy and creation stories. These publications often reflect current practices still undertaken by Aboriginal people despite colonisation, or those that have been maintained or reclaimed, such as language, through Aboriginal communities working with linguists. In particular, there has been a significant uptake of creation stories in children's books as they contain strong messages about Aboriginal values and morals for living. Magabala Books, an Aboriginal publishing house in Broome, is particularly well known for publishing children's books. Aboriginal storytelling has always played a critical role in the transmission of culture, and while this practice remains strong in many communities, literary works are now playing an important role in reclaiming and maintaining culture while also making this knowledge accessible to broader audiences. While Aboriginal memoir and fiction texts have focussed primarily on colonial life because memories of colonial interventions still resonate in the minds of the colonised, there are references to precolonial life in some literature, such as in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006) and Larissa Behrendt's *Home* (2004)

Colonialism

In Chapter 3 an exploration of Aboriginal memoir and fiction which draw on colonial themes will be undertaken. Many contemporary dilemmas, particularly trauma, confronting Indigenous peoples have their origins in colonialism as it is this project that has been a significant contributing factor in the devastation of Indigenous cultures and societies throughout the world. The theory of colonialism involves the domination of one people over another by a minority colonial hegemony. Jürgen Osterhammel names three attributes of colonialism as being:

(1) that one society completely deprives a second one of its potential for autonomous development; that an entire society is 'remote controlled' and reconfigured in accordance to the colonial rulers; (2) that the ruling and the ruled are permanently divided by a cultural gap; (3) the intellectual 'yoke' of an ideology whose purpose it is to legitimise colonial expansion. (1997, 32)

A primary fiction espoused by the Europeans for colonialism was the perceived political, religious, moral and technological superiority of the European world over non-European peoples, and the belief that the Western ways of life would substantially increase living standards for the colonised (Powell et al. 2015). When Europeans came into contact with Indigenous peoples in new territories, they invariably measured them against their own laws, land use practices, political systems, science, technology, religion and capacity to engage in warfare, and inevitably found them to be deficient in comparison to colonisers' 'standards' (Wolfe 2006). As such, they were deemed to be in need of the benefits of Western civilisation, although such thinking provided the rationale to seize, occupy and exploit inhabited lands and peoples on the basis of European superiority.

Each new territory's experience of the colonial project was determined by local considerations all of which have contributed to the heterogeneity of colonisation. The colonial project has embodied an ongoing movement to "annihilate, define and, subordinate and exclude the 'native'" (Watson 2016, 30). Although indigenous peoples' experience of colonisation has varied, the logic by which it has been implemented has been similar.

The notion of a "civilising mission" was not conceived in the 19th century by the British. When the Americas were conquered by the Spanish in the 16th century a religious, political and ethical debate was ignited about the use of force to seize foreign lands. The ideology for fulfilling duties in accordance with prevailing human rights and the mission to Christianise, which underpinned European thought, evolved over time from the Spanish conquest, and was also used to justify colonial expansion (Boucher 2011). Notions of Indigenous inferiority converged with the principle of universal human rights and the inherent responsibility of humans to utilise agricultural practices to effectively exploit the land. This hypothesis was based on the premise that natural law applies to a hierarchy of civilisations and any violation of this law gives justification for war (2011).

According to this ideology, the higher-ranked Christian civilisations had an obligation to convert lower civilisations and assist them in fulfilling the universal duty of productively cultivating the earth which has been given to man by God (Boucher 2011). Any breach or variance, however, from natural law provided a rationale for engagement in war with those who failed to fulfil their obligations (2011). Rather than providing a safeguard or protection,

these criteria were used to invoke just cause. Eurocentric perceptions of unnatural practices and violations of the human rights by Indigenous peoples legitimised a 'humanitarian' intervention which sanctioned the acquisition of territories by Europeans. Such ideology was always going to favour the interests of the colonisers to the detriment of the colonised as this thinking was founded on Eurocentric theories and values. Much Aboriginal writing focuses on spiritual and cultural themes because, despite colonisation, these tropes are at the centre of much Aboriginal life and are either being maintained or reclaimed. Such concepts are also bound with strengthening identity and a sense of belonging which are absent in the lives of many Aboriginal people.

European colonisers postulated that the people who inhabited the lands in question were sub-human, uncivilised and primitive, and therefore lacking the capacity to use and cultivate the earth and, as such, it was waste-land (Banner 2005). Carole Pateman and Charles Mills (2007) argue the hypothesis of a 'settler contract', which is based on the right to husbandry, also involves laying claim to sovereignty in the event of Indigenous peoples' failure to cultivate the land. The colonised were not recognised as capable of exercising ownership rights (Linguist 2007). Colonisers rationalised their actions in seizing territory as morally commendable, rather than discreditable (Boucher 2011). The actions of colonisers demonstrate how abstract theories, such as the notion of universal human rights, provided the logic for western priorities, appropriation and free enterprise (Anghie 2006). Given that these notions remain deeply embedded in the Australian psyche, Aboriginal writing has provided alternative conceptualisations to these dominant belief systems. For example, in her science fiction book *Terra Nullius* (2017), Claire G. Coleman imagines a second wave of colonisation by aliens from another planet, drawing on the experience of the original

colonisation of Australia. In her review of *Terra Nullius*, Alison Whittaker states, “the self-same cruelties inflicted on Indigenous peoples – Stolen Generations; language death; frontier massacres; land theft; disruption of means of sustenance; total contempt by benevolent societies; slavery and internment” (2017). Coleman’s use of speculative fiction provides a new and fresh approach to examining the wounds of colonisation.

David Clayton argues that the theory of universal human rights is “symptomatic of an epistemological malaise at the heart of western modernity – a propensity to monopolise and dictate what counts as right, normal and true, and denigrate and quash other ways of knowing and living” (2009, 94).

A number of European Enlightenment thinkers of the late 17th century challenged the idea that Europeans had the duty to 'civilise' the rest of the world by arguing it contrasted with the philosophical principle that all persons are capable of self-governance and reason. They further argued that the notion of 'native difference' violated natural law and led to barbarism and exploitation (Weaver 2003). Sankar Muthu (2003) asserts that philosophers like Diderot opposed the view that Indigenous people benefited from European civilisation and that colonisers were the 'uncivilised' ones. Despite criticisms of colonialism it continued unabated until global shifts and the advent of two world wars led to European empires being disassembled.

Documentation of Indigenous lives during the colonial period was undertaken by explorers, anthropologists, historians, pastoralists, and by various authorities, like the Protectors of Aborigines, and as such, perceptions of colonised peoples would have been skewed through a European lens. Aboriginal peoples' views were seen as having little value given their

‘uncivilised’ status and perceived lack of culture. Europeans were unaware that oral traditions presented a strong, structured and inclusive approach to the transmission of culture. Many Aboriginal authors have demonstrated an ability to skilfully weave both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal oral and written storytelling techniques with authenticity and cultural integrity.

Colonisation of Australia

A great southern continent, now called Australia, was known to European explorers from early in the 17th century, and over the next 150 years was visited by Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and English explorers until in 1770 when, after charting the east coast of Australia on his ship, the Endeavour, James Cook claimed the country on behalf of the English monarch (Ogleby 2012). Early contact between Aboriginal peoples and the colonisers in 1788 soon escalated into conflict as early settlers expanded beyond penal colonies and settlements (2012). Indigenous peoples could not anticipate the nature, scale and persistence of the sustained violence, destruction and repression inflicted by invading Europeans, and as such they were ill-equipped and prepared to deal with hostile forces which demonstrated single-minded intent in their quests to conquer ‘inferior’ peoples.

Frontier wars and genocide lasted for well over a century as colonisers moved across the country, seizing and establishing new pastoral territories. Rachel Perkins and Marcia Langton (2008) argue that Eurocentric views of the world fail to recognise the spiritual relationship and close connection that Aboriginal peoples have with the natural landscape. Anthropologists and explorers observed Aboriginal people as being on the lowest rung of the hierarchy of civilisation, and better eradicated rather than enslaved, although ironically,

slavery, or unpaid labour, by Aboriginal people, built the pastoral industry. Perkins and Langton further assert that Indigenous peoples in Australia were viewed as essentially “animal like, cunning and treacherous, enemies of the nation” and as “primitive uncivilised natives” (2008, 11). This fiction was influenced by the theory of Social Darwinism, whereby different ‘races’ were situated along a continuum of evolution, with Indigenous peoples at the bottom, closer to apes, and childlike and savage (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993). The first phase of trauma was inflicted through physical violence and the killing of Aboriginal people as they were denied access to their traditional lands, which included cultural and natural resources.

Frontier violence soon became widespread, as Indigenous peoples were killed by massacres, introduced diseases, starvation and poisoning of food rations. The term ‘dispersal’ was a euphemism to describe the killing of Indigenous peoples. This period is also referred to as “the killing times” by many Indigenous people (Pascoe 2008, 7). The cultural violence ‘phase’ of colonisation was followed by the ‘Protection and Segregation’ era in response to the widely held view that Aboriginal people were a vanishing race and that they needed to be protected through removal to various institutions. By 1901, Konrad Jamrozik argues that “hundreds of thousands of Aboriginal people had disappeared” (2004, 66). Perkins and Langton (2008) state that a widely held belief at the turn of the century was that Indigenous peoples were ‘dying out’, having not coped with the demands of a ‘superior’ civilisation. In order to protect the remnants of a dying race Indigenous peoples were moved to church missions and government reserves (Pascoe 2008). In a plan that was described as ‘paternalistic benevolence’, Aboriginal peoples were portrayed as helpless and unable to care for themselves, thus requiring state intervention (Behrendt et al. 2009).

In the early 20th century, when it became apparent that Indigenous peoples were not dying out, various states implemented legislation that saw the forcible removal of Aboriginal children, who came to be known as the 'Stolen Generations', from their families and communities with the implicit aim of bio-cultural absorption into European society and the elimination of any difference between the colonised and coloniser. The goal of assimilation was to obliterate the native in the child (Behrendt et al. 2009; Jamrozik 2004) The Aborigines Acts in various Australian states removed parental rights with the consequence that there was no recourse to legal assistance in a quest for justice and the return of children. By teaching Aboriginal children European values, separating them from their culture, and 'breeding out the colour', with the passing of older Indigenous Australians, the assumption was that eventually the native would be eliminated. The systematic removal of Aboriginal children began at the turn of the century and although the legislation was repealed in the 1970s Indigenous Australian children are still being removed under various state laws at rates higher than ever before (Evershed 2018). These removals have had profound impacts on generations of Indigenous peoples. Works of memoir and fiction written by Aboriginal authors about the impact of these policies have become a recurring feature of Aboriginal writing. Some important examples include Larissa Behrendt's *Home* (2004), Alice Nannup's *When the Pelican Laughed* (1992), Ruby Langford Ginibi's *Don't Take Your Love to Town* (1988), and Kim Scott's *Benang* (1999) and Claire G. Coleman's *Terra Nullius* (2018).

A successful national referendum in 1967 led to the amendment of the constitution and resulted in Aboriginal people being counted in the census, but, despite this recognition,

state control of Aboriginal lives has continued unabated through paternalistic policies and practices to the present day (Behrendt, et al. 2009). Although policies supporting self-determination and involvement in cultural priorities by Indigenous peoples, were introduced from 1972 onwards, in reality the state continues to wield inordinate power and control in relation to programs and funding pertaining to Aboriginal peoples (Dudgeon et al. 2015). There has been legislative interference by government in the Native Title Act, whereby Aboriginal people have been denied access to their traditional lands. Additionally, the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) was implemented and enacted by the Federal government in 2007, in response to alleged child sexual abuse. The Intervention suspended the application of the Racial Discrimination Act, enacted harsh penalties on alcohol and pornography, and removed customary laws in certain areas of the Territory after reports of high rates of child sexual abuse. “The pretexts on which it was launched were all demonstrably fraudulent and the grounds on which it was justified are also all demonstrably false” (Brull 2017). The claims of abuse were not supported by further investigations.

The Federal government commissioned a review of the NTER in 2007 and the draft report reflected Aboriginal pain at the Intervention, and the deep emotional and psychological impacts of the Response. Rather than promoting self-determination and community control, such policies have served to undermine Indigenous autonomy and governance, creating a cycle of powerlessness and dependency in their stead (Evans 2011). Much of the historical trauma experienced during this time has been internalised or limited to individual and extended family groups. Western literature has given Aboriginal writers the opportunity for a broader coverage of trauma, for both the colonised and coloniser, to promote a better

understanding of the traumatic nature of the hurt experienced. More and more Aboriginal authors, for example Alexis Wright, Ellen van Neerven, Anita Heiss, Melissa Lucashenko and Tony Birch, have engaged in the use of Western literature to articulate stories of suffering, but also of resistance and hope.

Postcolonialism

It is argued that Australia is not a postcolonial country, that it is, rather, a settler colonial nation. This assertion will be further examined later in the chapter. Nevertheless, it is critical to understand the nature of postcolonialism because of the similarities between postcolonialism and settler colonialism as well as ongoing debate about where Australia is situated theoretically. The decolonising of European colonies in the 20th century led to a period where systems of power and various regimes were ostensibly dismantled. In the postcolonial period, the challenge has been to address the new and emerging priorities of these societies while legacies of colonial domination continue to be embedded in political and social structures and systems. Although colonialism has ended, ongoing research indicates enduring impacts of the colonial project continue to frame the social, economic, cultural, political, as well as racial hierarchies that have shaped the modern world.

Postcolonial theory provides an opportunity to critique how imperial knowledge systems are imposed, and then legitimised, to serve colonial priorities (Lunga 2008). The use of the prefix 'post' in postcolonialism presumes colonisation has ended through the liberation of former colonies (Moore-Gilbert 1997). Ella Shohat (1992) is fundamentally opposed to the use of the term postcolonialism because of the implication that colonisation is situated in the past, which fails to acknowledge that global hegemony endures in ways other than overt colonialism. James Duncan and Denis Cosgrove argue that there is a need for the

complexities of colonialism to be “unravelling through localised and historically specific accounts” (1995, 127). Any tendency to consign postcolonialism to a broad, reductive field of study fails to recognise the heterogeneity of colonial oppression, with all the subtlety and nuance that this diversity entails (Young 2016). Nonetheless, despite the divergence of colonial experience, the colonised share similar legacies of colonisation in a postcolonial world in which Indigenous peoples are aiming to achieve ultimate freedom from oppression. Postcolonialism, in its early iterations, continues to situate Indigenous knowledges and culture as the ‘other’ in the context of the normative ‘self’ of Western epistemology and rationality despite claims of decolonisation. Albert Memmi asserts:

And the day oppression ceases, the new man is supposed to emerge before our eyes immediately. Now, I do not like to say so, but I must, since decolonisation has demonstrated it: this is not the way it happens. The colonised live for a long time before we see that really new man. (1968, 88)

Postcolonial literature examines epistemic violence exercised as the result of the undervaluing, destruction and appropriation of knowledges of the colonised through the critiquing of imperial knowledge systems and how they are legitimised to serve imperial interests (Lunga 2008). Early postcolonial literature was used to confront and resist imperialism and Eurocentric ways of knowledge production, in an endeavour to position Indigenous voices and perspectives at the centre of the postcolonial discourse.

Following the disassembling of colonial states there was a proliferation of literature written by the colonised which examined the consequences of the loss of self-determination, power, culture and identity of subjugated peoples (Hamadi 2014; Lunga, 2008). The literature of the colonised from India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Canada,

African countries, Caribbean countries, Australia, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh is often defined as postcolonial literature (Heiss 2003). As colonised countries gained independence, a postcolonial literary movement evolved resulting in the publication of a myriad novels by the formally colonised. The notional end of empires created a fortuity for colonised peoples, whose voices had been occluded and rendered silent in dominant narratives, to confront their past, reclaim the present and articulate their futures. It was the colonisers' notions of superiority that led to the colonised viewing themselves as inferior and that challenging these long-held, somewhat assimilated, viewpoints formed part of postcolonial renewal. According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989) language provides a means by which interpretations of 'truth', 'order' and 'reality' are accepted. Emergent postcolonial voices were well positioned to constructively repudiate and claim the power and authority of the dominant language and culture through the postcolonial literary movement.

According to D.J. Taylor:

each individual novel's core lies a powerful deconstruction of long-standing myths: English superiority and "civilisation", benign colonialism, the scrupulous conduct of public life, even - and this is perhaps the most profound deconstruction of all - the idea that there is such a thing as shared history. To be told that the Empire your forefathers administered was a sham is one thing, but to be told that this Empire imposed a view of history on its subjects that was merely false raises this iniquity to a philosophical level. (2001)

The writings of key postcolonial thinkers such as Fanon and his contemporaries Cesaire and Memmi, created a critical scholarship written from the point of view of the colonised. The natives spoke back to Europe using a critical philosophical voice to do so. Writers such as Fanon were pivotal intellectual leaders who succeeded in forging an ongoing critical

dialogue with mainstream European intellectual culture. In the decades that followed, new voices such as Said, Ashis Nandy, Chatterjee and Homi K. Bhabha built on the foundational work of Fanon. Key works include Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008) and Said's *Orientalism* (1978), both of which espouse that the coloniser has determined what it is to be 'Black' within the paradigm of the West's presumed superior knowledge systems.

Fanon asserts that the resultant inferiority experienced by 'Blacks' is a direct outcome of the colonising process and imperialist institutions which have positioned 'Blacks' as inferior in a hierarchical relationship between coloniser and colonised. He states that colonial aggression, domination and exploitation lead to a relationship between coloniser and colonised that is always violent (2008, 42). Further, he proposes that racism should not only be condemned, but that the very systems that perpetuate it should be targeted and that the enslavement of people should cease, and that the West should rediscover its love for fellow humans.

Orientalism (1978) explores the theory of postcolonialism and its manifestations in Western literature, focusing on the primitive 'Other', in comparison to the civilised (and civilising) 'West'. In this book Fanon analyses the relationship between cultures, and chooses the novel to do so, not only because of its foundational role in the development and maintenance of imperial attitudes, but also because it provides a vehicle for colonised people to assert their own culture, identity and history through opposition, resistance and decolonisation (Hamadi 2014). Said identifies this paradigm as 'orientalism', a particular characteristic which manifests when the coloniser systematically constructs the colonised as inferior to the coloniser and therefore needing redemption. Despite a raft of theories he

defines colonial ideology as a structure that “promote[s] the difference between the familiar “Europe, the West, ‘us’ and the strange, the Orient, the East, them” (1978, 43). Phil Hubbard and Rob Kitchin argue that othering is “the process through which the other is often defined in relation to the self in negative ways” (2011, 496). The genre of the novel proposed in *Orientalism* provides a literary vehicle for colonised peoples to challenge the West’s knowledge systems - including notions of inferiority, and othering - in a process of decolonising what it means to be Black. It is argued that the ideology and postcolonial critique espoused by Fanon, Said and others is relevant to all territories which have been colonised because of the similarities in the colonial experience, and yet there are sites of contestation in the discourse. Firstly, whether manifestations of colonialism are firmly located in the past, and secondly, where settler colonial societies, such as Australia, are situated.

Aboriginal author, Anita Heiss (2003) asserts that the term ‘postcolonial’ is used by the established literary circles as a way of describing the genre in which Australian Aboriginal people write, but that the majority of Aboriginal authors, however, view the term as implying that colonialism has been consigned to the past, and that decolonisation has occurred – and that this is not the case. Most will not even contemplate this ideology in relation to their work, particularly given the poverty, discrimination, economic and social disempowerment of Aboriginal people.

Kathryn Trees (1993) asks for whom the ‘post’ in postcolonial is in fact ‘post’? She explains that for Aboriginal people it is not in the past because of the lack of social justice and denial of sovereignty experienced by Aboriginal people and that postcolonialism is a fiction used

by non-Indigenous theorists as a contrivance of language which obviates the need for political action. It is a 'white' ideology through which Western countries seek to be redefined in non-imperialist ways. Lydia Wevers (2006) has identified that Pacific, Australian and New Zealand Indigenous literatures are absent in recent books on postcolonial theory and criticism; those by Robert Young and Ania Loomba, among others. Graham Huggan (2002) observes that the postcolonial literary movement privileges only a few writers such as Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul, and three internationally renowned critics: Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak.

Huggan argues that when postcolonial analyses exclude settler colonial countries this results in an erasure of complex colonial differences and leads to the favouring of one kind of colonial experience over another. Nathaneal I O'Reilly (2011) asserts that narrow definitions of 'postcolonial' that exclude settler colonies serve to ignore significant bodies of literature and literary criticism. That said, the notion that there are many kinds of 'postcolonialism' has not, as yet, significantly pervaded ongoing critique because recognition of the diversity of postcolonial experiences has not been fully accepted or embraced by scholars in this field.

While there is ongoing debate about an agreed definition of postcolonial theory, most Aboriginal writers in Australia reject the notion of postcolonialism (Heiss 2003). The argument for settler colonialism more accurately represents the situation in countries where the colonisers still maintain systems of power and domination of Aboriginal people (Wolfe 2006). The themes in Aboriginal fiction and memoir attest to this ongoing oppression

and provide a literary vehicle for the colonised to speak back to the colonisers, in the coloniser's language.

Settler Colonialism

There is a strong argument that countries such as Australia and Canada, United States, Israel and New Zealand, are not postcolonial because the colonisers maintain power and as such the colonised have not achieved independence or freedom from colonisation, or had Indigenous sovereignty recognised. Wevers (2006) states there is a distinction between those nation states where Indigenous peoples are a governed minority and those where they are self-governing. According to Wolfe, these are states where "the colonisers have no intention of returning home" (2006, 393). As such, it is proposed Australia is a settler-state and that 'settler colonialism' is a more accurate concept for understanding and framing the voices of Aboriginal Australian writing. Despite the apparent inevitability of ongoing colonisation, Aboriginal authors have used the power of the literary discourse as a way of decolonising Eurocentric expositions on the 'truth' of Australian history.

During the emergence of postcolonial theory in the 1970s a number of scholars began questioning the use of this theory in relation to settler states. These societies did not meet the criteria for being 'postcolonial' as they are not situated in the colonial past, given that the state is still actively exercising power and control over Indigenous peoples' lives (Wolfe 2007; Veracini 2007; Barker 2010; Johnston and Lawson 2000). The debate about whether some countries are settler colonial or postcolonial garnered renewed attention in the 1990s, Barker (2010) and key settler colonial theorists have argued that continued discussion is critical to achieving clarity about the status of some countries, particularly those where

Indigenous populations are in the minority (Veracini 2007; Wolfe 2006; Nandy 1992; Chatterjee 1993; Bhahba 1994; Said 1978)

Settler colonialism aims to *extinguish* itself Veracini (2011) and seek its own end through the establishment of a permanent hegemonic state in the 'settled' country. The ultimate aim of the settlers is to eliminate, replace or absorb the original inhabitants, and in turn become positioned as 'Indigenous' to the land themselves (Wolfe 2007; Veracini 2011). This would ultimately require the Indigenous population to become fully 'assimilated', and eventually invisible, as separate, identifiable collectives within the broader Australian society.

Scholars such as Adam Barker make the point that settler colonialism serves to dehumanise Indigenous peoples through the rendering of the fiction of 'peaceful and brave pioneers' forging new frontiers in the name of Western civilisation (Barker 2012). Wolfe argues that settler colonialism "destroys to replace" (2006, 389) in that the colonisers do not recognise existing Indigenous societies which are 'eliminated' as new settler structures and systems are established through destructive practices. The end point of the settler colonial project is when the colonisers are no longer viewed as settlers and are positioned as "post-colonial" and "settled" (Wolfe 2006, 391) through physical structures and false narratives of settler belonging (Barker and Battell Lowman 2015). Deborah Bird Rose (2004) has pointed out that to get in the way of settler colonisation, all the native has to do is stay at home.

Paradoxically, while settler colonial literature has been marginalised globally in postcolonial literature, it is being used as an effective tool in counteracting dominant expositions, at least in the local context of settler colonial nations.

Settler Colonialism in Australia

In order to understand the implications of ongoing colonisation it is important to be aware of how colonialism has unfolded in both the past and present, through phases of colonial violence, in order to imagine the future of this phenomenon. Colonial governments continue to rule for Australia's mainstream population in the absence of recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty, which, significantly, has never been ceded. While Aboriginal people have not been eliminated, they comprise only approximately three-percent of the population. There is a notion that Australia, on a cultural level, is in an "undecided state" and that it "is a land, a society, a history neither colonial nor postcolonial" (Sheridan 1995, 67). Further, the pall of the settler colony cloaks "the past, the present and the future" and its "vanishing endpoint that is continually pursued is, in effect, the moment of colonial completion" (Macoun and Strakosch 2012, 42). 'Colonial completion' occurs when the country is no longer regarded as settler colonial because the 'settlers' have permanently replaced Aboriginal peoples.

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In order to understand the function of the trauma expressed through Aboriginal writing it is important to acknowledge Australia's continuing status as settler colonial and the subsequent absence of any significant decolonisation, or possibility of independence from the state, by Aboriginal peoples. Examining the lasting legacies of colonial violence and trauma should be only undertaken by Indigenous peoples, because only when Indigenous voices are privileged and positioned as core in the discourse will there be an opportunity to not only understand the complexities of trauma, but also develop ways in which Indigenous people can be healed and ultimately liberated from ongoing despair.

This chapter has explored colonial violence experienced by Aboriginal peoples against the historical back-drop of precolonial life, colonialism, postcolonialism and settler colonialism. An examination of precolonial Aboriginal nations' lifestyles, worldviews and value systems highlighted the conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ideologies and exposed the inevitability of the clash between two opposing belief systems in the event of invasion by the colonisers. Prevailing ideology about European superiority informed this period of colonisation and provided the rationale and 'inherent right' for the seizure of lands and eliminatory practices in relation to Aboriginal peoples.

The legacies of colonisation remain deeply imbedded in the minds and bodies of the colonised, following the dismantling of colonies in the 20th century. For many countries, the period following the end of the colonial era has been underpinned by postcolonial theory, and in this time the postcolonial literary movement emerged as a means to critique colonialism and for colonised peoples to write of their experiences as a way of transforming the Eurocentric deficit narrative about 'primitive' Aboriginal people and their cultures.

An examination of settler colonisation in the Australian context provides a sound understanding of the complex social, cultural and political issues that remain in play in Aboriginal societies. These considerations include the health and well-being of peoples who have been significantly affected by colonial destruction enacted since 1788, and the resultant manifestations of trauma, as both cumulative and transgenerational. The next chapter will focus on the trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples from an Aboriginal, rather than Eurocentric, viewpoint. The power and authority of Aboriginal fiction and memoir will be explored as it is gaining both national and international traction following

nearly two centuries of Aboriginal voices being silenced and ignored in the colonial discourse. Significantly, Aboriginal voices are now expressing trauma in ways that are demanding to be heard, but which also speak to enduring resilience, survival and hope.

Chapter Two - The Trauma of Colonisation and Potential for Resistance and Healing

Aboriginal peoples, as individuals and within their families and communities, have been profoundly hurt across generations by layered historic, social and cultural (complex) trauma. 'Closing the Gap' on Aboriginal 'disadvantage', must acknowledge that where there is hurting, there has to be a healing. In healing, people's Trauma Stories become the centrepiece for social healing action, where the storyteller is the teacher and the listener is the student or learner. We need to learn how to listen. We need to want to listen.

—Judy Atkinson An educaring approach to healing generational trauma in Aboriginal Australia.

Chapter One examined the theories of colonialism, postcolonialism and settler colonialism. In this Chapter, the issue of ongoing settler colonial structural violence and trauma will be examined given the colonised have no foreseeable opportunity to experience freedom from colonial hegemony. Verancini (2011) asserts that settler states are traumatised societies par excellence because Indigenous genocide and/or displacement interacts with other traumatic experiences such as poverty, homelessness, substance use and community violence. Even when trauma is ignored or overtly repressed, it continues in either an internalised form, such as depression, suicidal ideation, loneliness, unresolved grief and loss, loss of identity and self-esteem, or manifests externally as risk-taking behaviours, substance use, violence, hypervigilance and family and community breakdown.

The trauma of colonisation, particularly historical, transgenerational and cumulative trauma, as experienced in postcolonial and settler colonial nations is analysed in this chapter. The trauma narrative highlights the need for healing and empowerment strategies as a form of resistance, and as a means to break the cycle of trauma through healing interventions.

Engaging in healing programs may prove problematic for many Aboriginal people who are faced with poverty and homelessness and who are disempowered and depressed.

Nevertheless, national and local healing programs which draw on resilience, protective factors and community strengths are proving effective in many settings for both raising awareness of, and managing, trauma. Aboriginal writing is explored, specifically fiction and memoir in the context of trauma, as this literary form is well-positioned to bring trauma narratives in from the margins as an exposition of strengths in the face of dominant Eurocentric interpretations.

Trauma

Trauma may form part of the human experience but how such trauma is exhibited is dependent on the way each individual or cultural group responds to its diverse manifestations. Traumatic events cause differing degrees of psychological stress and physical injury through a broad spectrum of catastrophic events such as genocide, war, ethnic cleansing, terrorism and natural disasters at collective levels; and childhood abuse, sexual assault and family violence at individual and family levels.

Cathy Caruth categorises trauma as:

a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviours stemming from the event ... the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experienced it. (1996, 4–5)

Theories of trauma developed in response to the experiences of survivors of the Jewish Holocaust. Drawing on Holocaust literature, early theory development focussed on a single

event of the past, victim/perpetrator experiences, and an emphasis on the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud, with a preference for melancholia rather than resistance (Visser 2011). A key argument by Caruth (1996) is that trauma may provide common ground between disparate historical experiences, and that this, in turn, may lead to new forms of community and cross-cultural solidarity. Stef Craps and Gert Buelens (2008) assert that Caruth's assertions are primarily concerned with the trauma experienced in the west, to the exclusion of non-western 'others.' Craps et. al. (2015) provide an analysis of the impact of postcolonial theory on trauma studies, the state of the field and its future possibilities. They express concern with trying to universalise an individual, geographically local PTSD event and argue the resultant scope of literature is bound by Eurocentric historical and conceptual frameworks that privilege 'White' suffering (Craps 2013). Early trauma theory was not focused on the sustained and continuing trauma experienced through global colonialism.

Postcolonial theory inherently engages with traumatic suffering, but there is often an ambivalence displayed towards such pain in modern postcolonial literature, suggesting that recognition of such trauma in the literary field may be more challenging than it may first appear (Dalley 2015). There has been a call amongst postcolonial theorists for a new trauma model that offers more differentiated, nuanced conceptions, drawing on local Indigenous historical and cultural specificities. Dalley argues that:

Not all traumas are equal, and while the term provides a basis for comparison across national, religious, racial and linguistic boundaries, it cannot reduce the specificity of these experiences to a unitary model. Trauma theory will only be effective for postcolonial analysis if it is supplemented by a critical materialism that pays attention to the specificities of setting, and which is attuned to the power hierarchies that differentiate experiences and make what is progressive in one context regressive in another. (2015, 389)

Craps et al. (2015) have expanded contemporary trauma research by providing an analysis of the impact of postcolonial theory on trauma studies. It has been proposed that renewed formulations are needed to address the depoliticised and dehistoricised nature of early trauma theory and its failure to address legacies of genocide, war and violence (Bennett and Kennedy 2003). Michael Rothberg (2008) argues that original trauma theory is unsustainable in the context of postcolonial theory and that it requires reformulation, stating that if it continues to be tied to a narrow Western framework it distorts the histories it addresses, such as the Holocaust, and threatens to reproduce the “very Eurocentrism that lies behind those histories” (2008, 227). His work has since evolved into a project for decolonising trauma studies through transformed ways of interpreting trauma and the cultural and historical recognition of violence and suffering experienced through colonialism.

In addition to Rothberg, other scholars, including Craps and Buelens (2008) and Roger Luckhurst (2008), have called for a reconfiguration of trauma theory to include the examination of ongoing colonial and racial violence experienced by non-western others within a more ethical, political and global paradigm (Bennett and Kennedy 2003). In developing a more comprehensive and inclusive theory, it is important to acknowledge that there is no hierarchy of suffering in respect to the Holocaust and colonialism, which are the specific traumas discussed in this chapter, as they co-exist as collectively-held traumas situated in specific historical, political and social settings.

Rothberg makes the point that original trauma theory entails “the completed past of a singular event - while colonial and postcolonial traumas persist into the present” (2008, 230). Ongoing cycles of grief, loss and violence through systemic oppression provide a limited opportunity to recover from any one adverse event, let alone address the cumulative nature of such trauma (Phillips 2008). This sustained exposure to insidious harm hinders the potential for communities to heal and recover (Atkinson 2002). The colonial actions of the past, exacerbated by current damaging interventions, exert negative social, emotional and mental distress on Indigenous individuals, families and communities with the resultant trauma creating a continuous cycle which remains unbroken and unresolved.

Colonial Trauma

In the past two decades the term ‘trauma’ has been applied to numerous colonised Indigenous groups throughout the world. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lemyra DeBruyn (1998) make the point that trauma can become normalised and immersed in the collective historical memories of a group and that they are subsequently passed down and inherited by future generations through the same processes by which cultures are generally learnt and transmitted. Significantly, while the transfer of cultural remembrances includes trauma’s adverse manifestations, the absence and loss of positive and affirming cultural knowledges and practices which may have been interrupted or destroyed by colonisation serve to compound this trauma.

The discourse about colonial trauma which has been endured by Aboriginal peoples gained traction in the late 20th century and early 21st century, primarily through the work of Maria Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) and Rothberg (2008) who have challenged current trauma

discourses because of the non-recognition of colonial atrocities, such as genocide through frontier wars, massacres, introduced diseases, removal of children as well as the dispossession of land, destruction of cultures, and oppressive assimilationist policies. Eliminary practices were implemented from the beginning of colonisation 230 years ago and continue in various iterations to the present day; these interventions originally included massacres and the 'killing times' of the 18th century which have then transitioned to assimilationist policies in the 19th and 20th centuries, and ongoing structural violence in the 21st century, leading to increased incarceration (and deaths in custody) suicide rates, family violence, substance-related deaths, and early mortality rates due to poor health. Colonial systems continue to wield inordinate social, economic and political power that negatively influence Aboriginal peoples' existence which then invariably contributes to the nature of the trauma experienced.

In the last few decades Aboriginal fiction and memoir writing has emerged as a form of opposition to dominant expositions of colonialism. Aboriginal authors such as Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Kevin Gilbert, and Jack Davis were some of the first Australian Aboriginal writers to critique problematic Eurocentric constructions of Aboriginal peoples. As Gilbert asserts when talking about the impact of early colonisation on Aboriginal people,

They were hit by the full blight of an alien way of thinking. They were hit by the intolerance and uncomprehending barbarism of a people intent only on progress in material terms, a people who never credited that there could be cathedrals of the spirit as well as stone (1977, 2–3).

Gilbert's words highlight the contrasting beliefs of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples which have been in conflict since the beginning of colonisation. Aboriginal peoples have

engaged with western literary modes and to develop unique systems of writing and knowledge in order to develop agency and control which are critical liberating strategies for the colonised (Grossman 2006). As Mick Dodson points out:

In making our self-representations public, we are aware that our different voices may be heard once again only in the language of the alien tongue. We are aware that we risk their appropriation and abuse, and the danger that a selection of our representations will be to once again fix Aboriginality in absolute and inflexible terms. ... However, without our own voices, Aboriginality will continue to be a creation for and about us. This is all the more reason to insist that we have control over both the form and content of representations of our Aboriginalities. All the more reason that the voices speak our languages [and] resist translation into the languages and categories of the dominant culture. (2003, 39)

Although Dodson proposes that Aboriginal people do not use the 'alien tongue' of Australian English, its use by Aboriginal writers has proven to be a powerful medium for representation, and for privileging Aboriginal voices using the colonisers' language. Aboriginal people have also seized the opportunity to define identity in diverse and flexible ways and take control of their own narrative. Aboriginal authors have also incorporated Aboriginal languages and themes into the storytelling process, thus creating unique literary techniques in expressing Aboriginal ways of seeing, being and doing, and again acting as a form of decolonisation.

Given the concerns about the Eurocentric nature of early trauma theory which excludes the suffering of non-Western 'others', scholars have sought to identify ways in which the trauma of the colonised may be recognised and examined through the lens of colonisation. In the next section the theory of historical trauma as conceived by Native American, Maria Brave Heart will be discussed. Key themes outlined in her theorising and research share

parallels with Aboriginal Australian colonial trauma, particularly transgenerational trauma, the study of which has been driven principally by Australian Aboriginal author, Judy Atkinson.

Indigenous Historical Trauma

Although historical trauma was initially conceived to research the narratives of children of Holocaust survivors (Kellermann 2001), in the past twenty years the concept has been applied to many colonised Indigenous groups throughout the world, as well as other cultural communities that have similar experiences of repression, mistreatment or mass trauma (Baker and Gippenreiter 1998). Drawing on Holocaust literature, an alternative trauma framework addressing historical trauma from an Aboriginal perspective was formulated by Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998), who furthered their trauma research by focusing on Holocaust victims, concluding that the outcomes substantiated the “theoretical constructs underpinning the concept of historical trauma” (Brave Heart 2003, 8). By utilising Aboriginal knowledges, histories and narratives, Brave Heart argues that Indigenous historical trauma consists of a trauma or wounding which is shared by a group of people, rather than individually experienced.

The trauma spans multiple generations such that contemporary members of the affected group may well experience trauma-related symptoms without having been physically present at traumatising events of the past. Historical trauma emerged as a concept to describe the long-term, ongoing impact of colonisation on Aboriginal peoples, and the continuing inequities in health and well-being, through focussing on social, cultural, and psychological interventions (Fast and Collin-Vézina 2010). Brave Heart describes historical

trauma as “cumulative, emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including the lifespan, which emanates from massive group trauma. A significant proportion of Native people are struggling with health disparities that stem from intergenerational trauma” (Duran et al. 1998, 24). Poor health status is also reflected in Australian Aboriginal populations who, Atkinson (2002) suggests, are experiencing similar trauma.

Trauma is a complex concept which not only escalates, but also cascades down and across generations, emanating in physical, emotional, cultural and psychological injury that is observable in the poor health and well-being of colonised peoples. Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) point out that government policies toward the Lakota people of the United States disrupted culture-based mourning processes, thus resulting in mass unresolved grief. It is argued that the violent colonisation of the Aboriginal peoples of the Americas interrupted cultural protective factors, community networks and parenting skills, thus leading to increased psycho-social risk, impaired parenting and health disparities in this population (Campbell and Evans 2011). While its origins are in the United States, as the theory of historical trauma evolved, its relevance to Indigenous peoples globally has become evident, particularly in relation to the process of decolonising Eurocentric trauma theory through the privileging of Indigenous knowledge systems.

Natalie Clark (2016) proposes the development of models for addressing violence that are aligned with Indigenous values, paradigms and epistemologies, and based in strengths, protection, resistance and survival approaches. She continues that there should be a move beyond decolonising Western models of trauma, and a new focus on the centring of “wise practices” from Indigenous knowledge systems (2016, 20). Only when Aboriginal peoples

are well-positioned to expand both community and scholarly understanding of trauma will Aboriginal world views inform the evolving trauma paradigm.

Historical trauma provides a way to contextualise poor Aboriginal health as a form of postcolonial trauma, de-stigmatise recovery which can be compromised by self-blame and legitimise Aboriginal cultural practices as therapeutic interventions (Duran et al. 1998).

Cross-generational impacts of this trauma, legacies of risk and vulnerability are passed from ancestors to descendants until 'healing' processes break the cycle (Fast and Collin-Vézina 2010). Recognition and further exploration of historical trauma is needed in the Australian context because of clear parallels with Brave Heart's historical trauma theory. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the specificities of Australian Aboriginal trauma there is a need to develop localised critiques. Atkinson (2006) leads Australia's work in formulating an emergent discourse and reformulation of Aboriginal trauma theory to reflect Australian circumstances, but other voices need to join in this work to promulgate a theory which encompasses this country's unique and diverse Aboriginal trauma expositions.

Transgenerational Trauma

Trauma experienced during childhood, or as an adult, may have a profound impact on the health and well-being of their subsequent children (Yehuda and Bierer 2007). The trauma transmitted, particularly from parent to child, is often termed intergenerational, multigenerational or transgenerational. Research studies, often drawing on data from Holocaust survivors and their families, have identified biological neuroendocrine changes as well as social, cultural, environmental and relationship issues, as contributors to trauma being transmitted down the generations (Bombay et al. 2009). Although the most significant

factors in the transfer of trauma between generations are usually family and community based, external factors such as historic events, government policies and practices, structural racism and violence also play a critical role. Brave Heart (2003) has outlined various symptoms or responses to historical trauma as the “Historical Trauma Response” (HTR) comprising:

Depression, self-destructive behaviour, suicidal ideation, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty recognising and expressing emotions. As well, it may include substance abuse, often as an attempt to avoid painful feelings through self-medication. Unresolved grief is an associated effect that accompanies HTR and was described as the impaired mourning that comes from generational trauma. Despite the broad acceptance that this conceptual framework has received by both health researchers and by Aboriginal communities, there has been little scrutiny of the concept, and its definition and constituent characteristics have not been well conceptualized or operationalized, although initial steps have been taken to do so. (2003, 8)

Transgenerational trauma is a complex and confronting phenomenon as it is multigenerational and multi-layered, and the depth of the trauma for individuals and collectives remains unknown. As such, what also remains hidden is how many layers of trauma are stripped away through healing interventions. These issues will remain undetermined in the absence of Aboriginal-driven research to gain a greater understanding of the multifaceted issues at play. What is known is that an inability to cope with trauma may result in a cycle of further stress. In the next section the relevance of trauma theory to the Aboriginal Australian societies and the need for more critical recognition, and exploratory research in academic and community discourses, will be explored.

Trauma for Aboriginal Australians

It wasn't until the early 21st century, through Brave Heart and DeBruyn's (1998) work on historical trauma in the United States and Atkinson's (2002) Australian trauma research, that the concept of transgenerational trauma gained some traction in Australia. Atkinson explains that government interventions into Aboriginal lives in Australia have been multiple, protracted and many-layered, acting as traumatising agents at different levels, compounding the agony of already traumatised individuals and groups. Ongoing perceptions of Aboriginal cultures as 'primitive', and negative stereotypes of Indigenous people as being 'lazy', 'drunks', 'violent' and 'unwilling to assimilate' and other problematic constructions, have been transmitted down settler generations and used to assign blame to the victim. The structural violence exercised by the colonisers has created a transgenerational response from the colonised, who have assimilated the negative perceptions, which has evolved and manifests differently over time, although the generational and cumulative nature of this trauma has received limited acknowledgement in Western discourses.

Many Australian Aboriginal people have internalised trauma and racism as self-hatred and regard themselves as worthless (Paradies 2006). Poor coping methods result in escalated or compounded stress leading to poor mental and physical health. The cycle of trauma and stress repeats across generations whereby adverse experiences of a preceding generation may be replicated in the next generation (Lyons-Ruth et al. 2005). Many Aboriginal people are unaware of how transgenerational trauma manifests, and thus, it becomes imperative to expand the discussion, particularly at Aboriginal community levels, to ensure that this phenomenon, and its implications, are fully understood. Healing programs, implemented by

Atkinson and others, are raising awareness, as is Aboriginal fiction and memoir, for example, one of the earliest such works was Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987) and a more recent important example is Ellen van Neerven's *Heat and Light* (2014). In her review of Meera Atkinson's *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma* (2017), Amanda Hickey cites Atkinson's observations, "so the efficacy of the poetics of transgenerational trauma 'speaks of, out of, and to, that which hovers between presence and absence, unnameable, and unknowable in the usual sense. Such literature is able to do this by way of a kind of channeling'" (Atkinson in Hickey 2017). Many Aboriginal people do not know or understand the nature of transgenerational trauma and as such it remains an invisible and destructive force in the lives of generation after generation. The nature of the trauma needs to be named and become known if it is to be addressed.

In order to gain a better understanding of its transgenerational nature it is useful to consider the trauma experienced by each successive generation in response to diverse colonial interventions. Merida Blanco (cited in Atkinson 2002) studied transgenerational trauma in Indigenous peoples in South America, specifically analysing its impacts on five generations. By mapping the violence perpetrated on Indigenous peoples he identified that as the first generation were conquered, the males were killed, imprisoned, enslaved or in some way deprived of the ability to provide for their families. In the second generation, many of the men used alcohol or drugs to cope with the loss of self-worth, with their cultural identity destroyed. By the third generation, domestic violence and other types of relationship violence begins to emerge and the connection to their predecessors, only two generations old, is weakened or lost. In the fourth generation, trauma re-enactment means that abuse transfers from domestic violence to child abuse, or both. In the fifth generation,

the cycle repeats itself, as trauma spawns violence and increasing societal desolation (Levine and Kline 2007, 438).

Atkinson's 2002 research reflects similar findings to that of Blanco, shown in a six-generational 'trauma-gram' which links the historical events of incremental frontier invasions into Aboriginal land resulting in conflict, epidemics, massacres and starvations. Government response to this first layer of trauma was to implement bureaucratic processes that re-traumatised those already severely distressed. In Queensland for example, the legislation that enabled the state to remove people to reservations, was a racist act called the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897. It focused on opium and the Chinese, but not on the use of alcohol which was to pay for Aboriginal labour; a common practice of the white landholders. The removal of children from their families was conducted under a period of intense government surveillance of Aboriginal lives and families. The third level acknowledges the intensity of present-day government attempts to rectify past wrongs, while making no allowance for the levels of traumatisation that already exist. Fourth, fifth and sixth generational levels show increases of intra-family violence, ill-health, poverty and distress as it multiplies in complexity and its effects are compounded. The trauma-gram traces one line of a family across generations, listing the known memory or experience (documented or narrated within the family) of sexual violence, a victim of physical violence, perpetrating violence, diagnosis with mental illness, suicide attempts and alcohol and/or drug misuse. It is suggested that the experiences of the generations in the trauma-gram would have been replicated at various times in differing locations as colonisation took hold in successive waves across the nation.

Australian Aboriginal doctor and academic, Helen Milroy (2005) also provides a comprehensive narrative of how trauma passes down from one generation to the next, manifesting in negative effects on relationship development, including parents and family; poor physical and mental health and break-down of community resilience and cultural practices. In addition, there is ongoing exposure to critical levels of stress, grief, loss and bereavement, and the experiencing of vicarious trauma when children witness the continuing trauma of a family member. Milroy notes that “even where children are protected from the traumatic stories of their ancestors, the effects of past traumas still impact on children in the form of ill health, family dysfunction, community violence, psychological morbidity and early mortality” (2005, xxi). Aboriginal children experience secondary trauma as they witness and absorb the distress and hurt of family and community, even though they have not experienced such trauma first-hand (Atkinson 2012). The implicit legacy of trauma experienced by Aboriginal peoples has led to Aboriginal leaders and communities identifying ways in which protective factors, Aboriginal knowledge systems and resilience may be used to promote coping skills and healing through community initiatives.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission argues that the removal of children from their families has resulted in the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next (McGlade 2012). The ‘Stolen Generations’, as they are known (Atkinson 2002), emerged from institutions having experienced child abuse, racism and limited education, which has generally contributed to mental health issues, ubiquitous poverty, homelessness, substance use, constant police surveillance and a greater likelihood of imprisonment.

Generations of successive separation of children resulting in loss of family, community and

culture also ensured that the complex traumas experienced were not known or recognised (Atkinson 2002). When faced with the burden of complex and interrelated circumstances, many Aboriginal children, particularly as they grow into adulthood, are faced with often insurmountable barriers in attempting to exercise agency and control over their lives. These factors are often exacerbated when children have left institutions without the protective factors provided in community contexts. Despite the cataclysmic nature of this trauma, it remains under-theorised and under-researched and has yet to gain significant traction in the Aboriginal research landscape.

As part of The Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series, Cynthia C. Wesley-Esquimaux and Magdalena Smolewski cite previous research conducted by the foundation in 1999:

When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next. What we learn to see as “normal”, when we are children, we pass on to our own children. Children who learn that physical and sexual abuse is “normal”, and who have never dealt with the feelings that come from this, may inflict physical abuse and sexual abuse on their own children. The unhealthy behaviours that people use to protect themselves can be passed on to children, without them even knowing they are doing so. (2004, 2)

As Hickey observes about Atkinson’s text: “at the heart of transgenerational trauma narratives are shame, fear, anxiety and grief (including sadness and melancholy) and often these emotions are entwined with others such as anger which, for example, usually binds to shame” (2017, 2). In *Too Afraid to Cry* (2018), Aboriginal poet Ali Cobby Eckermann’s memoir, she explores the trauma of three-generations of her family; her grand-mother, mother and herself, each of whom were either forced or deceived into giving their child up for adoption. In her publication of poetry, *Inside My Mother*, she “explores the distance

between the generations created by such experiences, felt as an interminable void in its darkest aspects, marked by sadness, withdrawal, yearning and mistrust, but in other ways a magical place, beyond imagination” (2015, p). Transgenerational trauma evokes deeply-rooted emotional responses in those Aboriginal authors who have experienced it and have written about it. Memoir provides a powerful platform for the exploration of intimate and personal insights into the impact of such trauma on individuals, families and communities.

Cumulative Trauma

Duran’s concept of the ‘soul wound’ draws on American Indian beliefs about the notion that spiritual, mental and physical energies should be in harmony for every individual, and that if such a balance is disrupted by traumatic events then there is a ‘wounding on the soul’ (Daniels and D’Andrea 2007). Such is the complexity and endemic nature of trauma, that, drawing on Duran’s ‘soul wound’, any analysis of historical and transgenerational trauma, which is profoundly injurious and ‘wounding’, also needs to examine its cumulative nature. Greg Phillips argues that for Aboriginal peoples’, trauma is “‘situational, cumulative and intergenerational defined as unresolved trauma that is experienced between generations” (2012, 23) which has transitioned into cumulative and transgenerational trauma “‘resulting from unaddressed grief and loss” (2012, 23). Generation after generation of transmitted trauma, compounded by layers and layers of new trauma, serves to manifest in cumulative trauma that results in unrelenting pain, unless mitigated by healing strategies and/or inherent resilience. As Indigenous children grow into adults the trauma may become cumulative as they themselves experience racism and oppression and are subject to abuse and family breakdown that their parents and grandparents also experienced. Beverley Raphael, Pat Delaney, and Daniel Bonner confirm that this ongoing trauma resulting from

colonisation causes “psychological injury” (2007, 338). According to Atkinson (2002), Australian Aboriginal peoples continue to be fractured without the protection and safety of culture and land to enable them to feel a sense of belonging in their own communal spaces. The cumulative impact of colonial history is demonstrated in the deterioration of spiritual, and social and emotional well-being. The escalating impact of abuse and other adverse childhood experiences highlight the importance of continued investigation in identifying causal factors in family and community settings to obtain an accurate portrayal of what contributes to the continuation of this intergenerational cycle. The need for further research, and development of strategies to facilitate healing, remains an imperative in a society where both structural and interpersonal racism persist in the Australian socio-political discourse.

Recognising and Healing Trauma for Aboriginal Australians

Historically, Indigenous peoples’ worldwide have managed trauma using their own protective skills, knowledge systems and cultural practices. They have utilised their own ways of knowing, being and doing to cope with and manage trauma in established and distinctive contexts. The colonial project has adversely affected the ability of Indigenous peoples to use coping mechanisms and practices due to the effects of invasion and subjugation. With the advent of permanent colonial tenure, Aboriginal practices and wisdom in dealing with trauma have been largely disrupted or marginalised, causing further injury that has been cumulative and transmitted down the generations (Ranzijn, McConnochie, and Nolan 2009). Despite the interruption to pre-colonial practices, many communities, families and individuals have restored or created new protective factors and coping mechanisms to ameliorate distress, compromised well-being, marginalisation and alienation (Wilson 2007, 3). The vexing question for Aboriginal communities has been how to heal the pain of the past by identifying and addressing trauma. Many of the ‘problems’ in

Aboriginal settings have not been recognised as wounds arising from colonisation until recently.

As Judy Atkinson states:

Although the legacy of unresolved trauma contributes to many problems and presents many challenges, the strength and resilience of Indigenous Australians and Indigenous culture—particularly in face of extreme adversity—must be acknowledged. Protective attributes—including strong kinship systems and connection to spiritual traditions, ancestry, Country and community—have enabled many Indigenous Australians to transcend painful personal and communal histories. (2013, 6)

Acknowledging trauma is the first step towards healing, and Atkinson (2002) argues that Aboriginal people need to redefine their own narratives by claiming and owning stories about violence and trauma, changing the dialogue, and identifying, with hope and optimism, the potential of healing. Many Aboriginal people, however, do not have the time to either acknowledge or address the impact of trauma on their daily lives. Shane Merritt states:

Sometimes we've lost our own innate abilities to heal, to acknowledge, because things have been interrupted like parenting, but also because we're so busy dealing with the morbidity and the mortality. We're so busy having to deal with the latest funeral we have to go to or the latest bout of physical ill health that we're having, or our child's having or our grandparents are having that, sometimes there's no energy left there to heal and to go through what needs to be done. (2009, 2)

The competing family, community and cultural priorities in the day-to-day lives of Aboriginal people, and the impact of the social determinants of health like poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and internalised, interpersonal and structural racism, present barriers for Aboriginal people to acknowledge trauma and engage in healing. The deficit lens through which Aboriginal people are viewed has led to an internalised lack of self-worth and limited positive cultural identity leading to guilt and self-blame (Attwood 2011). Marlene Burchill states:

We must take into account decades of massive upheaval caused to Indigenous people; we continue to struggle today. Many of us lack trust, belief and faith in other people. Whatever confidence we may have in others is fragile and easily disturbed or destroyed. So how does community

development progress when we have not recovered from the wounds of the past? Before we move forward to achieve positive change there is a need to help heal the individual, the family and the community to ease the pain and trauma resulting from colonial domination and power abuse. (2005, 6)

Sherwood (2009) asserts that despite the impact of colonial trauma, Aboriginal people have demonstrated enormous resilience. In a settler colonial context, Aboriginal people continue to be challenged by the wounds of the past and repression of the present, but Aboriginal-driven policies of self-determination and community development programs and services are providing a foundation for vulnerable communities to drive change in communities to break the cycle of intergenerational violence and trauma.

A change in priorities by the Australian government from assimilation to self-determination has seen Aboriginal peoples involved in the development of restorative and emancipatory cultural and social programs. Since the policy of self-determination was launched in 1972, the last four decades has seen a wide range of Aboriginal 'community-controlled' programs being implemented to address issues of social determinants of health, self-determination, empowerment, identity, reclamation of culture, reconnection of families and, more broadly, healing. National healing programs have emerged in response to trauma, such as the Family Wellbeing Empowerment Program which consists of five training stages related to loss and grief and family violence, and Mura-Mali, which delivers workshops to train counsellors to work with Aboriginal people who were removed from their families and are subsequently experiencing grief and trauma. Additionally, We-Ali, another national program, developed by Judy Atkinson, is informed by the narratives of Indigenous people using traditional healing work integrated with a western trauma informed and trauma specific approaches to individual, family and community recovery. Additionally, the services of traditional Aboriginal healers are used across various states and territories, the most well-known of which are Ngangkari healers from South Australia and the Northern Territory.

There are also many small-scale local healing programs, including women's and men's groups, youth outreach programs, mothers and babies services, yarning circles, programs

for Elders, return to Country, language revitalisation and land management programs which are widely regarded as making a positive contribution in addressing the effects of trauma. These programs have enabled Aboriginal people to develop some coping skills to manage the legacy of a settler colonial state through healing strategies. Trauma-informed services also assist with dealing with the effects of trauma as perceived through a 'trauma lens' and predicated by an understanding of trauma and the influence it has on the lives of Aboriginal people (Harris 2004).

Apart from specific healing programs, Aboriginal people have also developed community-based programs such as arts, education, narration, language, health, social and emotional well-being and community development in order to promote empowerment, self-esteem, culture and positive identity. A recent Canadian-Aboriginal trauma study presents persuasive evidence that creative arts, culture and healing are connected, and that community-based healing programs compellingly include creative arts (Archibald and Dewer 2010). Bruce D. Perry (2008) asserts that healing rituals from geographically diverse, culturally heterogeneous groups display similar characteristics in strategies that have been developed to facilitate healing from trauma. He claims:

The core elements include an overarching belief system – a rationale, a reason for the pain, injury, loss; a retelling or re-enactment of the trauma in words, dance, or song; a set of somato-sensory experiences – touch, the patterned repetitive movement of dance and song – all provided in intensely relational experience with family and clan participating in the ritual. (2008, xi)

Healing programs are drawing on the potential of spirituality, culture and creativity to provide Aboriginal people with the knowledge and skills to manage colonial hurt and grief.. These initiatives have had variable success in countering trauma and ongoing colonial interventions, but the harnessing of collective knowledge and wisdom has influenced the

development of more targeted and strategic programs by Aboriginal people. National and local programs have been developed over the last two decades in recognition of the need for healing, or at the very least, management of trauma. Community resilience programs, specifically targeting youth, are being conducted in communities to promote coping skills and protective factors to provide at least some resistance for future generations and future trauma.

Unfortunately, the uptake of these community-based programs is often hindered by the very trauma upon which they are focussed. Risky behaviours, such as substance use, violence, family breakdown, poor health, as well as depression, disempowerment and poor self-esteem compound to present barriers for groups and individuals to fully engage with healing processes. Nevertheless, these programs provide a vital opportunity for the cyclic and generational nature of trauma to be progressively resolved.

Decolonising Trauma through Storytelling

Storytelling and oral traditions have always been pivotal in Aboriginal cultures as they are central to the continuance of diverse Aboriginal belief systems, world views, protocols, family structures and rules for living which have been passed down the generations, over tens of thousands of years (Archibald 2008; Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010). Colonisation has severely disrupted these long-standing oral traditions, with stories being lost or fragmented, particularly as people were forced off the country to which these narratives, particularly creation stories, are connected. Cultural knowledge, such as language, was also forced underground and taught covertly, as Aboriginal people were forced onto missions and reserves and forbidden to engage in traditional practices. Many practices and stories have

been retained, however, particularly in remote or country regions where Aboriginal people have been able to remain on their traditional lands. The majority of Aboriginal peoples' cultures, however, have been compromised in some way. Many traditional Aboriginal stories have been largely replaced by stories of colonial oppression, disruption to families and communities, loss of culture and the removal of children from their communities, with such trauma narratives passed down the generations; and while the details of the original trauma stories may be difficult to recall after two or three generations, the trauma still persists. According to Marlene Brant Castellano and Linda Archibald:

Images and memories of traumatic events are passed on to following generations through cultural (storytelling, community discourse, myth), social (types of parenting), psychological (memory processes), and biological (e.g. hereditary predisposition to PTSD) modes of transmission. Over time, and with each generation, these images and memories of suffering become selectively distorted and not fully remembered but are still present, even if people may not be fully aware of the influence these stressors have on their own perceptions and ways of adapting. Recurrent recollections of trauma experienced by individual members of a society will, sooner or later, enter into a social narrative of the group and become transmitted to subsequent generations. Individual memories are recounted and enter into cultural collections of symbols and meanings, into rituals and ceremonies, and into the group's shared cultural memory and behavioural patterns (2007, 73).

That said, there has also been a shroud of silence as the remembering of traumatic experiences has often been a painful process in which Aboriginal people have not wanted to engage (Attwood 2011). In the post-war era of assimilation, new and old Australians were urged to abandon both their communities and their communal memories, to forget the past and enter into an unknown future, and there were few White Australians who wished to hear Aboriginal histories. Such stories were considered counter to the grand narrative of modernity and progress which had no place for a dying race or a primitive culture (Attwood

2003). Thus, Aboriginal stories and voices were deemed irrelevant or of little value to the 'story' of building Australia's Eurocentric nationhood.

In the late 1900s Aboriginal stories began to be told within the Western genre of literature; stories about social, political and cultural issues, including trauma, offering alternative versions on the history of Australia, told from Aboriginal perspectives. The marginalised voices of the colonised that evince the traumatic effects of colonial impact are now being integrated into dominant history, for example Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987) has been used in mainstream school curricula. Appropriation of the dominant language and genres has been useful for Aboriginal writers in developing agency and control in the face of Eurocentric narratives designed to suit the needs and interests of the colonisers. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers now share the same literary space which has opened up opportunities for the colonised to present their own truths and privilege their own voices.

The emergence of Aboriginal writing broadly coincided with W.E. H. Stanner's 1968 Boyer Lectures. He points out that Australia's sense of its past and its collective memory had been built on a state of forgetting, which couldn't "be explained by absent-mindedness" and that there would need to be major shifts in critical thinking to critique and revise Eurocentric historical discourses to ensure Aboriginal perspectives are included (1968). Veracini (2011) asserts that the settler-colonial version of Australian history is promoted as *historia nullius* or 'no history' and is the result of curated colonial perspectives. This has proved challenging in the ongoing climate of denial, rationalisation and minimisation, but Aboriginal writers have increasingly exercised power in making independent and alternative contributions to national storytelling.

While postcolonial literature has created the means by which Aboriginal writers have been able to access the literary discourse, Heiss, along with Indigenous writers like Jacki Huggans and Sandra Phillips, suggests that it is inappropriate to apply postcolonial theory to the contemporary position of Indigenous writers in Australia because colonial interventions by government, the media and society continue to exercise power and control over the daily lives of Aboriginal peoples:

In terms of defining Aboriginal writing as post-colonial literature, it appears that there are two distinct views. Firstly, that of the literary establishment who use the term as a way of describing a genre in which Aboriginal people write; and secondly, that of most Aboriginal writers who see the term implying that colonialism is a matter of the past and that decolonisation has taken place, which of course is not the case. In this way, most writers do not even consider the term in relation to their writing at all, which makes this discussion difficult (2003, 43–6).

Additionally, Healy-Ingram (2011) asserts that Aboriginal writing, generally, is considered political because it provides a measure of resistance to dominant ideologies and narratives as a way of shifting the paradigm, because it speaks back to racist ideas and exposes 'race' as a marker of power. As a cultural and ideological construct adapted by Aboriginal authors, writing shifts the previously 'silenced' into the centre offering insights into diverse Aboriginal value systems, world views and social relationships and allowing considered and measured access to Indigenous knowledges and relations between stories and law, ancestral beings and country (Healy-Ingram 2011). Whether creative or memoir, Aboriginal writing is at a critical point in which a shift in transforming national narratives, identity and history is being undertaken

Aboriginal writing is not usually included in the lexicon of trauma healing, and while its potential for doing so remains largely unexplored, writing about trauma has gained traction in the last few decades as a way of situating Aboriginal trauma within the broader literary movement, and for privileging frames of reference and mindsets. Aboriginal literature has claimed a space in the national imagination and since the 1960s non-Aboriginal people have been reading Aboriginal stories.

Aboriginal readers may also relate to the often powerful and intimate expositions of colonial and contemporary trauma, perhaps seeing their families lives in the words and in the emotions expressed. In the next chapter Aboriginal literary history will be further examined in the context of trauma narratives and as potential means to decolonise the ubiquitous Eurocentric narratives which went unchallenged until Aboriginal authors found a place in the literary discourse. In the next chapter, a range of Aboriginal trauma discourses will be examined in order to explore how trauma is expressed by Aboriginal writers and to identify key themes which are emerging from Aboriginal narratives

Chapter Three - Literary Analysis of Aboriginal Trauma Literature

I felt literature, the work of fiction, was the best way of presenting a truth—not the real truth, but more of a truth than non-fiction, which is not really the truth either. Non-fiction is often about the writer telling what is safe to tell

- Alexis Wright, *The Politics of Writing*, *Southerly*, 62.2, 2002, 11

Introduction

Thus far, this thesis has examined key themes around trauma as a historical and transgenerational outcome of colonialism, postcolonialism and settler colonialism. In settler colonial societies, such as Australia, it is argued that the trauma of colonisation is an enduring feature of Aboriginal peoples' lives (Iverson 2015). In continuing to suffer colonial trauma it is asserted that the perspectives of the colonised, have for the most part, been ignored in dominant Western literary discourses, which have historically favoured the interests of the coloniser (Leane 2013). Despite this, Aboriginal storytelling, utilising Western narrative modes, has emerged as a powerful alternative means by which Aboriginal people were able to situate themselves purposefully in the national discourse by creating a space where they might represent our stories on our own terms. Significantly, narratives representing Aboriginal ways of knowing have provided a means by which Aboriginal people can reclaim their cultural identity and lay bare hidden trauma.

This chapter examines how Aboriginal writers, as colonised peoples, have used storytelling to not only resist colonial narratives, but also become empowered through Aboriginal 'truth-telling' about trauma. Aboriginal writers have been challenging the dominant

paradigm through which they have been suppressed and previously denied access.

Storytelling facilitates the rendering of Aboriginal viewpoints and, as such it challenges or offers an alternative view and creates a bridge between trauma theory and lived experience.

I examine four key themes in selected Aboriginal literature that privilege Aboriginal perspectives. These are: Aboriginal Writing: Decolonising Colonial Trauma; Trauma and the Stolen Generations; Trauma and Aboriginal women, and finally, Trauma and Identity.

Literary works from a range of award-winning Aboriginal writers will be analysed to explore how these themes are represented. Writers with whose texts I engage include Sally Morgan, Kim Scott, Alexis Wright and young, emerging Aboriginal author, Ellen van Neerven. Van Neerven's work is analysed in some detail because it demonstrates that trauma continues to be a prominent theme in writing by younger Aboriginal authors. I also consider how Aboriginal spirituality and the literary technique of magic realism are woven into a realist narrative, arguing that these elements may add richness and depth to the storytelling by highlighting unique Aboriginal expositions in a range of texts.

My research, thus far, has identified recurring motifs in relation to colonial violence and trauma and the ongoing repercussions for Aboriginal peoples and these themes are expressed in diverse contexts in Aboriginal storytelling. Importantly, decolonising and challenging Western literary tropes around these issues challenges the predominant deficit discourse about the shortcomings and failings attributed to Aboriginal peoples. The four key themes explored here emerged as key tropes in this research, and further examination of these themes in this chapter reveals the ways in which they are represented in Aboriginal

memoir and fiction. Much Aboriginal creative writing does not explicitly identify the continuum of causal links between colonialism, settler colonialism, colonial violence, trauma and transgenerational trauma. In my creative writing for this dissertation I explore this continuum to highlight the importance of being fully aware as to how each theme influences the others, and how critical it is to not view each in isolation, particularly if the overarching colonial story is to be conveyed as deeply rooted, complex and unresolved phenomena in the Australian psyche.

Indigenous Writing: Decolonising Colonial Trauma

A more detailed critical understanding of Aboriginal writing may be gained by examining the early development and transformative evolution in Aboriginal storytelling. Alice Healy-Ingram proposes that “Indigenous writing, whether creative or critical, provides an important critical point at which a shift in understanding national narratives, identity and history can be examined” (2011, 83). Ernie Blackmore noted that ““contemporary Aboriginal fiction puts the predicaments of Aboriginal people right into the foreground, making them actual and urgent’” (Blackmore in Thomas 2008, 141). According to Heiss (2003), “rewriting history” could be considered a germane term for much of the writing by Aboriginal authors in recent years who are addressing “conveniently left out facts” around invasion, colonisation and genocide. One of the most potent and recurring subjects about which Aboriginal authors write is trauma; it is difficult to pick up a book written by an Aboriginal writer without reading about some manifestation of trauma.

The first generation of Aboriginal writers included, as mentioned previously, Aboriginal poet, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, poet and playwright, Kevin Gilbert, and writer and playwright,

Jack Davis, all of whom began to penetrate the silence from and about Aboriginal people and claim the right to represent Aboriginal viewpoints within the Western literary genre. These authors were at the forefront in writing about the rising anger at traumatic effects of colonisation, loss of culture, institutional racism, erosion of a collective sense of Aboriginal identity and the dispossession of country. The title poem of Noonuccal's book of poetry, *We are Going* (1964) has been described as a cry from a dispossessed people, and a call to rally those who are becoming more politically active. Shirley Walker notes that:

Aboriginal women writers such as Oodgeroo Noonuccal, while maintaining their separate identity and the authenticity of their cultural voice, are now taking their rightful place in the Australian literary tradition. (1992, 3)

In drawing attention to the brutality and ravages of colonisation, Gilbert in *Living Black*, states that Aboriginal Australia "went through a rape of the soul so profound that the blight continues in the minds of most blacks today" (1997, 2–3). He made this statement at a time when Aboriginal people were given very little attention in political and societal spheres, having only been recognised as citizens in 1967. Dennis Carroll (1997) observes that Davis brought the plight of his people and their histories to life as part of a growing cross-cultural dialogue. His work reflects a lifelong commitment to Aboriginal activism, exploring issues such as identity and loss experienced in Aboriginal cultures and the clash of Aboriginal and White law. Noonuccal, Gilbert and Davis were the first Aboriginal writers to openly describe the consequences of the brutal invasion, paving the way for future generations of Aboriginal activists and authors to do so, and weaponising their writing to fight for Aboriginal rights.

According to Anna Clark (2018), "Indigenous histories are often relegated to 'memoir', 'story', 'family history', 'narratives of place' or 'political protest', rather than endorsed as

part of a disciplinary discourse. Natalie Clark (2012) further asserts that Aboriginal writing has often been adjudged as not making a significant contribution in shaping Australia's historical discourse, with the exception of oral, pre-colonisation and cultural histories. Nevertheless, the numbers of Aboriginal writers who write on Aboriginal themes has contributed to a groundswell of interest in shifting and transforming the national debate about the 'true' history of this country, often through increasingly diverse narrative modes. For instance, Melinda Kembrey (2018) observes that Aboriginal author, Claire G. Coleman, in describing her novel *Terra Nullius* (2018), says that historical and speculative fiction is used to:

“unsettle the foundation narrative of the nation leading in the end to greater understanding” and [citing Jeanine Leane] that emerging Aboriginal fictional writing “critiques the vicious fiction of the colonial archive”. (Coleman and Leane in Kembrey 2018)

Fiction has thus evolved as an alternative, but compelling, vehicle for telling Aboriginal stories without posing the inherent challenges of writing memoir or auto/biographical works which often draw on the painful and sensitive lived experiences of Aboriginal families and communities. As Wright remarks:

It's very hurtful for our family sometimes to talk about that history. And I think it gets passed down to the next generation through the following generations of not wanting to bring up hurtful things, hurtful things that happen to us even now. (2002 11)

In *Plains of Promise*, a story of the Stolen Generations, Wright fictionalised the story at her community's request in order to protect individual identities, although she argues that 'fiction' contains many 'truths'. While not faithfully representing real life, the novel provides an opportunity for the attestation of “the living hell of the lives of many Aboriginal people”

(Wright 2002, 13). Lived trauma is often seen as inexpressible and beyond narration. Yet the aftermath of trauma is the trauma itself, and life-writing's navigation through trauma is the record of living through trauma, and its repeated intrusions into the mind of the writer (Visser 2015). Many Aboriginal authors have thus chosen fiction to avoid the potential re-traumatisation that is inherent in writing about personal and collective experiences of trauma. Gloria Prentice asserts that "novels are performing trauma as distinct from examining testimonial texts with hidden trauma embedded within their non-explicit narratives" (2015, 11). Aboriginal novels are often able to convey a sense of immediate lived experience without exposing contested versions of the 'truth', explicit details of trauma and long-held secrets and sensitivities in Aboriginal family stories. Nevertheless, even fictional accounts are often loosely testimonial and draw upon real life experiences, and Aboriginal authors may experience emotional triggers which are challenging to manage. And yet, such is the desire to represent Aboriginal life experiences with both authenticity and as acts of decolonisation, that many Aboriginal writers have demonstrated their preparedness to expose themselves to the inherent challenges and emotional barriers in order to achieve this. One of the common themes of trauma about which Aboriginal authors write are the "Stolen Generations". Most Aboriginal people have either experienced removal from family or are descended from, or related to, those who have been removed, or know about it as a shared community experience. The stories of the Stolen Generations are woven into the very fabric of Aboriginal life, often invisible but nevertheless, potent and destructive influences.

Trauma and Colonisation – the Stolen Generations

Aboriginal storytelling explores not only the trauma of colonial violence but, significantly, the trauma of the removal of 'half-caste' children from their families under Government policies. The resultant trauma has been passed down the generations to individuals, families and communities - with devastating effect. Transgenerational trauma is defined as the transmission of memories passed in cyclic phases from adults to children, causing "collective emotional and psychological injury ... over the life span and across generations" (Muid 2004, 36). The *Bringing Them Home* (1997) inquiry which examined the brutal and forced removal of 'half-caste' children, known as the 'Stolen Generations', from their families provided a seminal report which revealed the extent of the trauma, and the inherent grief and loss experienced by many thousands of Aboriginal families. Larissa Behrendt (2012) argues that every Aboriginal family in Australia has in some way been affected by the policy of forced removal of Aboriginal children. The *Bringing Them Home* Report states that:

the histories we trace are complex and pervasive. Most significantly the actions of the past resonate in the present and will continue to do so in the future. The laws, policies and practices of removal has resulted in the alienation of Indigenous societies today and permanently scarred their lives. The harm continues in later generations, affecting their children and grandchildren. (1997, 23)

Aboriginal stories published before and since the report provide testimony to the same trauma exacerbated by colonial violence which is central to the report. For example, Scott's *Benang*, published in 1999 only two years after the *Bringing Them Home* Report was released, resonates with the report's findings through the examination of removal and alienation from family and community. The novel is situated in the 1990s and extends back over four generations, exploring the lived daily experiences of Aboriginal people under the

extreme policies to which they were subject. The sexual abuse of the protagonist, and the inherent trauma experienced, are explored in flashbacks which expose the unassimilated nature of the abuse through the lens of oppression.

Prentice (2015) writes that Aboriginal author, Alexis Wright has stated that the information exposed in the *Bringing Them Home Report* was already known to Aboriginal peoples: “it is trauma that repeatedly resounds in the community until it erupts at a given time” (2015, 74). Further, she states that she had “inherited all the words left unsaid in a family to save the peace” and that these were “words that have buried a thousand crimes and a thousand hurts” (Wright 2007, 217–18). Her writing represents the brutality of the lives of the voiceless and traumatised. Observations such as these connect deeply with the reality of transgenerational trauma and writing about such painful issues may provide cathartic validation of past wounds. Aboriginal women, as nurturers and caregivers to children, have been vulnerable to colonial violence, particularly sexual exploitation. Their stories have resonated strongly as stories about Aboriginal women’s trauma have been liberated by Aboriginal women writers in an endeavour to expose the brutalisation and cycles of violence.

Trauma and Aboriginal Women

Colonisation has had a significant impact on both Aboriginal women and men, but Aboriginal women have taken the brunt of colonisation as they have been the targets of specific colonial violence. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Māori academic from New Zealand, asserts that colonial rhetoric on Indigenous women’s sexuality led to the negative stereotyping and resultant brutalisation of Indigenous women (1999, 39). In colonial Australia, Aboriginal

women were labelled “black velvet”, a sexual analogy that promoted their exoticism and availability to the white male population (Evans 1982, 15; McGrath 1987, 8). Lisa Belleair (1998), in the *Journal of Australian Studies*, commends the literary genre of the novel, and its value in highlighting the continuing cycles of violence maintained against Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women’s life-writing, in particular, documents their agency to counter the hegemonic discourse by asserting their right to speak for themselves and their shared past; and it is argued further that tropes about sexuality and victimhood are being countered by Aboriginal women’s demonstration of control of their own power and future (Moreton-Robinson 2004, xxv; Smith 1999, 37). Aboriginal women authors are engaging in rich and powerful writing as a means to counteract the historic dehumanisation of their mothers, grandmothers and female ancestors, and of their own lives, by bringing their often-violated lives into the light as an act of decolonisation and ‘truth-telling’.

Reflecting on Noonuccal’s work, Walker observed that the unique feature of Aboriginal women’s writing in Australia is “its energy, its resilience, and its determination to tell the truth ... [providing] the voice of the ‘other’, a voice from the periphery sometimes harmonising with, but more often challenging the insistent, optimistic, centralist version of Australian life” (1992, 18). Ruby Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* (1988) and Morgan’s *My Place* (1987) reveal resilience and resistance in the face of deep social injustices and trauma experienced by Aboriginal women. Langford Ginibi’s journey to her birthplace is one of discovery and recovery in which she confronts the effects of her people’s collective trauma rooted in colonial dispossession and its continued impositions on Aboriginal rights and freedoms. *My Place*, Morgan’s autobiography, details the lives of three generations of Morgan’s family as she uncovers her Aboriginal identity, returns to country

to discover where she belongs and tells her mother's, grandmother's and uncle's stories using their own voices. This text has been central in raising awareness in mainstream literary circles about Aboriginal peoples' experiences of colonial violence. In *Auntie Rita* (2012) and *Sister Girl* (1998), Jackie Huggins writes about a shared spiritual journey with her mother back to their traditional home and contemporary issues of incarceration, government intervention, community activism and politics. There has been a proliferation of Aboriginal women authors contributing to a growing body of work that gives voice to the various manifestations of trauma through political, social and cultural tropes. These stories have escalated, forged across generations, providing an urgent imperative, not only to address a history of perceived Aboriginal deficit, but also as part of a truth-claiming and healing process for Aboriginal women and their families.

The theme of rape recurs in both memoir and creative Aboriginal women's writing.

Behrendt, in her novel *Home* (2004) tells the story of a young Aboriginal woman who embarks on a journey of discovery of self, family and home, particularly about the story of her grandmother who was kidnapped and repeatedly raped by a station owner, becoming pregnant and subsequently having all her children removed. In *The Swan Book* (2013) by Wright, the main protagonist, Oblivion Ethylene, is gang-raped by petrol-sniffing youths and is so traumatised that she hasn't spoken since, trapped in her own mind and struggling to regain control of her thoughts. And in *Plains of Promise* (1997), Wright explores the prevalence of rape across generations within a brutal mission setting. At every turn, stories tell of Aboriginal women's vulnerability to violence and exploitation. The violence continues unabated and Aboriginal women are subject to the same forces in contemporary societies, from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men, and the representations of this violence

continues through the work of younger Aboriginal writers. Van Neerven's writing is an example from a new generation of Aboriginal writers who are continuing to write about trauma containing endemic themes of identity, racism, violence experienced by women and transgenerational trauma. Her work highlights the assertion that narratives about colonial violence continue unresolved and unchanged since Noonuccal and Gilbert wrote about it in the 1960s. The plots in Aboriginal storytelling may vary, but van Neerven's work demonstrates that the deep, underlying themes of colonial trauma continue to permeate the writing of Aboriginal authors, suggesting that there has been limited resolution or healing.

'Heat' is a suite of interconnected stories within van Neerven's text, *Heat and Light* (2014). Here, it is the female protagonists' stories that resonate prominently in that their circumstances are reflective of those experienced by Aboriginal women since colonisation: violence, dislocation, disruption to traditional birthing and nurturing practices, dehumanisation, rape, removal of children, sexualisation and exploitation. The lack of control by Aboriginal women over their bodies has been historically pervasive, and van Neerven echoes this theme by writing about the rapes of two of her protagonists, told in very different settings. Through a historical recount by a non-Aboriginal observer, the reader gains insight into the character of Pearl (the subject of the first story), and non-Aboriginal views about Aboriginal women as the 'other'. The woman's comments demonstrate jealousy, resentment, racism and describe the sexualisation and exploitation of Aboriginal women: "There is a kind of woman that draws men like cards, that has beauty, and has knowledge as well in those siren eyes" (2014, 6); "The truckies were the kind of men who talk about hating native women" (2014, 8). Nevertheless, the truckies thought she

was beautiful. The reader learns that Pearl was raped by three men, who paid for this violation with their lives as the result of powerful Aboriginal spiritual influences at play.

As with Pearl, young Mia's rape in a subsequent story represents another example of the sexualisation, violence and racism directed towards Aboriginal women, but also the resultant internalised lack of self-worth, guilt and shame about violence which has been perpetuated by others. At the hospital, white women tell Mia her "rape doesn't take priority to a heart attack. You're going to have to sit down" (van Neerven 2014, 35). After Mia's young friend Colin smashes the television remote in response to these words, the women whisper, "they're all crazy, twisted. Out of control" (2014, 35). Mia's trauma is complex, as not only has she experienced rape and racism, she is being raised by a non-Aboriginal family and is far removed from her biological family and country. Thus, we see that Aboriginal trauma involves multiple layers of historical, social and racist trauma, all of which are interconnected and cumulative attributions of the ongoing effects of colonisation. Whether real or in fiction, traumatic incidents such as rape should be understood not as singular, isolated events but within the broader, collective framework of continuing colonial violence. As with Mia's experience, where the trauma of rape is compounded by her lack of belonging and identity in her current circumstances, many Aboriginal people are confused or uncertain, rejecting or accepting of their identity depending on their circumstances.

Trauma - Identity and Belonging in *Heat*

Identity is a complex issue given the diverse experiences of Aboriginal people; colonisation, removal of children, eugenics policies, and ongoing white preoccupation with skin colour and blood quantum (Gooda 2011; Bond, Brough, and Cox 2014). Scott, views fiction as a

means to establishing a discourse to forge a more credible definition of Australian identity. Danièle Klapproth asserts that for Aboriginal people, “[b]y relating their stories, they were relating themselves to the land, and the land to themselves” (2004, 16), while Dodson claims “country is centrally about identity” (2008, v). David McKnight states that the “loss of land is tantamount to loss of one’s self... it bestows a degree of independence that cannot otherwise be obtained” (McKnight in Kingsley, Townsend, Henderson-Wilson & Bolam 2013, 682). Aboriginal people still grapple with colonial imposition through state interventions on matters of identity, belonging, bodies, place and country. In this context, narrative writing has provided a means by which Aboriginal writers, and by extension, Aboriginal families and communities, can reclaim a forgotten and suppressed sense of self, discount false identities and lay claim to reconstructed identities that reflect Aboriginal world views, values and beliefs. In *Benang* the protagonist’s quest is one of recovering from trauma through regaining his Aboriginal identity, but it is also one of assuaging the acrimony directed towards those who took his Aboriginal identity from him. The novel explores the theme of loss in the Aboriginal community through an individual’s endeavours to restore his sense of self. A strong cultural identity contributes to increased self-esteem and sense of belonging; it acts as a significant protective mechanism and coping strategy in a society where risks for Aboriginal people permeate every level.

In ‘Heat’, several protagonists face challenges as they navigate their way through the colonial landscape in a quest to discover their own unique identities. Firstly, a young Aboriginal woman, Amy Kresinger, discovers the identity of her biological grandmother (Pearl) which profoundly challenges her own sense of identity and belonging. Alice Healy-Ingram argues that “Amy and Pearl reflect each other across generations. They are

introduced to readers simultaneously, as young women feeling disconnected, possessed by reckless energy” (2011, 28). The family secret is revealed to Amy by a complete stranger, disrupting long-held beliefs that Marie was her grandmother, and that her father Charlie, Marie’s son, is in fact Pearl’s child. Amy starts to identify with Pearl’s life, seeing her own life reflected more closely than in the more conventional life of Marie, to whom she has always aspired. There is an unravelling of the narrative which Amy has constructed about both her family and her place in the family, but she concludes that Pearl deserves to be part of the story as she is strong. Secondly, Marie’s husband, Griffin had been adopted by a non-Aboriginal family as a child and sent to a private school. When he meets Marie’s family, he is told “they are not your sort” (van Neerven 2014, 43). Griffin was not able to develop his identity as he was removed from his Aboriginal family and community. Despite a life of privilege, Griffin is drawn to other Aboriginal people and eventually marries Marie, finding a sense of belonging with her and her family. A third protagonist, Mia has been raised by a non-Aboriginal family as well, and her sense of identity is enhanced through her friendship with Colin and his family. When she is raped and leaves for the city, that connection is lost. Griffin and Mia’s stories resonate with those of the Stolen Generations: children who were removed from family, sent to institutions and, subsequently, forced into domestic service and station work, mostly never to see their families again. The sense of identity for these children would have been severely impacted by their dislocation from family, community and culture. In Catriona Menzies-Pike’s interview with her, van Neerven herself reflects on issues relating to her own identity:

as a young Aboriginal woman, I knew my identity was tied in with family and history, but this didn’t match up to the mainstream experiences that I was having through education. The mainstream stories of who an Australian

is can be quite damaging if you are not part of that privilege (van Neerven in Menzies Pike 2015).

Van Neerven did not view herself as being part of the Australian privilege about which she learnt. On a deeper level she understood identity was more to do with personal, rather than societal, relationships.

Identity, in Aboriginal contexts, is both deeply intimate and personal, but also part of a broader collective ideal. It is a concept that may be underpinned by loss, lack of self-worth and displacement, but also a strong desire to connect with family, community and country; key protective factors which give meaning to self, belonging and one's place in the world.

The gaps or unknowns in Aboriginal families' histories can contribute to the loss of identity and belonging. In 'Heat', Amy says, "My thoughts are running wild as I drive to my place. If I didn't know my grandmother, then how could I know myself?" (van Neerven 2014, 5). Amy sees her identity as bound up with knowing her ancestors. The revelation of the identity of her biological grandmother has challenged Amy's sense of her own future. Amy talks of the 'curse' of having multiple female lovers. Her sense of identity and place within a family has been unsettled by the revelation of this new truth but Amy begins to admire Pearl's strength and the fighting spirit exhibited through her struggles.

Her cousin Colin's sense of identity is shaped by his life experiences and after Colin moves to the city, he still yearns for a former self not informed by anger. He internalises the notion that Aboriginal men are always angry, and he knows that he must go back home before the "dust had covered my tracks" (2014, 36). He has already stopped ticking the boxes that

identify him as an Aboriginal person and has seemingly turned his back on his identity, family and country, a result of being vicariously traumatised by the violence perpetuated against Mia, and the effect of this trauma, and his own internalised perceptions, on his own sense of worth and belonging. Amy is critical, saying he doesn't identify as she reflects on the issue of identity and the fluidity with which some of the mob were able to deny their Aboriginality, but also claim this identity in order to gain some benefits. She has made assumptions about Colin's motivations based on the choices he has made without fully understanding what he has experienced. Amy and Colin have had different and complex experiences in relation to the evolution of their own personal identities, the circumstances of which are largely unknown to other members of the family and community.

Nevertheless, their identities are forged against a shared backdrop of colonial trauma about which neither appear to be aware. Many Aboriginal people do not possess an understanding of the broader colonial framework and its insidious influence on their emotional, spiritual and cultural well-being.

Trauma – Identity and Reconnection in Aboriginal Fiction and Memoir

For many Aboriginal people, identity is a matter of redressing loss, disconnection or creating new understandings of identity because of circumstances that are often beyond the control of individuals and families. Aboriginal storytelling reveals a strong impulse on the part of Aboriginal people to reconnect, discover and validate their identities in a desire to cultivate or re-cultivate a sense of belonging and self-esteem. In *When the Pelican Laughed* (1992), Nannup tells her real-life story of being removed from her family in the north of Western Australia at the age of twelve and taken south for domestic service. She returns to see her

biological family 64 years after leaving, with a strong desire to reconnect. The message of her story is simple: it is never too late to rekindle a sense of belonging. In Morgan's *My Place*, a significant section of the book involves investigating family history in a process of discovering and establishing identity. Likewise, after Morgan listens to her uncle Arthur's life-story, she writes, "however, in an odd way, we also experienced a sense of loss. We were suddenly much more aware of how little we knew about Nan and about the history and experiences of our own family. We were now desperate to learn more, but there appeared to be few obvious leads left" (1987, 214). *My Place* is essentially the story of Morgan and her family's quest to discover *their place* in a journey of uncovering their origins and creating an identity from new understandings. Langford Ginibi is clear about her cultural identity and Aboriginal heritage but in *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, the narrative shows how this is challenged throughout her life as the early normalcy of displacement is known to young Ruby. Later, she feels this disconnect as a mother raising her many children alone in the bush without support: "I felt like I was living tribal but with no tribe around me, no close-knit family" (Winch 1988, 2). Huggins describes her and her mother's life-writing project, *Auntie Rita* (2012) in which they return to the mother's birth country about which Jackie feels a sense of belonging and the presence of the ancestors. The attachment to the land is passed down to successive generations, spiritually, in the manner that has been carried on for thousands of years. While every Aboriginal story is unique, there are common themes woven through these narratives to which Aboriginal people and communities can relate on a deeply intimate level, as if at the core of a collective being.

Exploring Trauma through Spirituality and Magic Realism

Magical realism is represented by two opposing perspectives, one incorporates a rational view of reality, and the other, the supernatural as commonplace reality situated in a normal world with ordinary people and society. The concept 'magical realism' (Magischer Realismus) was first coined in Germany in 1925 by art critic Franz Roh's efforts to signal a return to a realistic style of painting after the period of Expressionism (Thamarana, 2015). Roh's term was subsequently used by literary critics in response to the overlapping influences, although still ill-defined, between magical realism in painting and literature. The literary movement relating to magic realism began in the 1940s with Latin-American writers such as Miguel Angel Asturias and Alejo Carpentier, with their representation of reality with extraordinary and magical elements to show that their 'marvellous real' *criollo* (creole) culture as vibrant and complex (Thamarana, 2015).

There are no parallels with the *criollo* culture of Latin America in Australia, and there is no obvious spiritual connection to the land by white settlers so the translation of magic realism concepts to the Australian context is challenging. Interestingly, however, a style of magical realism has appeared in Aboriginal literature which is called 'maban realism', developed by Mudrooroo (also known as Colin Johnson)". According to Dorothy Guest in her PhD dissertation *Magical Realism and Writing Place: A Novel and Exegesis* (2006):

Maban reality is the Aboriginal spiritual world that was subjugated, but did not disappear, at white settlement, it existed—and still exists—parallel with natural scientific reality: It is Aboriginal writing that incorporates specifically Aboriginal mythology or stories, or that translates into a written text with the narrative shapes of Aboriginal oral storytelling—it is writing that crosses between the lived world as it is now and the Aboriginal spiritual world (2006, 113)

Aboriginal literature, in which narratives about Aboriginal experiences are expressed, emerged through the language and literary genres of the settler colonisers. Maban realism

has provided a contemporary alternative technique through which Aboriginal literature is able to be disassociated from European literary modes (Guest, 2005). Maban realism facilitates the capturing of the co-existence of Aboriginal physical and spiritual realms in one narrative that integrates two realities: firstly, that of day-to-day living and, secondly, the spiritual systems that underpin Aboriginal identity.

Aboriginal writing often challenges the subjectivity of Western literature addressing Aboriginal themes because it engages in rich and complex cultural and spiritual themes at the interface of colonisation and trauma. In referring to *Carpentaria* and *The Swan Book*, Wright incorporates the Aboriginal spiritual worldview and replicates Aboriginal storytelling, because it “ties us with the land and the environment through stories and Aboriginal law” (Wright in Azam 2014, 2). Writing these novels gave Wright a powerful feeling of connectedness: “it was like writing a story to the ancestors, to the spirits of the country” (Wright in Azam 2014, 3). Wright was engaged in witnessing and testimony to examine how the spiritual and cultural stories of Aboriginal people are situated in contemporary society, and how the traumatised, colonised mind struggles with ‘unacceptable history’ (Wright 2007).

Aboriginal authors such as Wright, van Neerven and Scott utilise magic realism to enhance reality by adding a rich layer to Aboriginal storytelling techniques. Van Neerven’s use of magic realism in the narrative about Pearl and her interactions with the wind asks the reader to suspend belief as ‘unreal’ events unfold in a realistic setting. It is in this context that van Neerven uses the literary writing technique of magic realism to seamlessly explore the space between reality and fantasy, Eurocentric perceptions and Aboriginal spiritual

beliefs. Pearl's story both reflects punishment for transgression against the wind man, a powerful Aboriginal cultural entity, and conversely, suggests a metaphor for the violence of colonisation and trauma inflicted by non-Aboriginal people. Pearl has lost control of her life and she is at the mercy of powerful forces around her and remains an unknown, impenetrable protagonist with her eventual fate left to the imagination of the reader. The story concludes with remembrances of Pearl and the curse of the wind man, as both Charlie and Amy, on stormy nights, "dreamt intensely, violently – they often drown" (2014, 64). Charlie realises it has always been this way. Pearl's son and grand-daughter, Amy, will continue to experience the legacy of Pearl's transgression – the curse, or trauma, is transgenerational and has been passed onto them. Van Neerven's story concludes with this powerful analogy, which also reflects the key themes explored in this chapter. She demonstrates that trauma may be expressed in many ways, and in this case van Neerven has utilised creative and innovative literary techniques to convey the pain experienced by Pearl, and the transmission of these wounds to successive generations of her family.

This analysis of selected Aboriginal literary texts over the past fifty years has revealed persistent, familiar and shared themes around colonial trauma, even when not overtly identified as such per se by Aboriginal authors. In the history of Aboriginal writing, from Noonuccal to van Neerven, trauma writing remains constant – it is clearly unfinished business in the psyche of Aboriginal peoples not least of which because the trauma continues today. Aboriginal writers have been occupied with claiming a place, and positioning themselves, in the western narrative, significantly in order to redress the problematic western constructions of Aboriginal history which have largely ignored and minimised colonial violence. Key themes relating to decolonising colonial trauma, the Stolen

Generations, violence against Aboriginal women, and identity and belonging are underpinned by a legacy of deep-seated and enduring hurt and pain. Significantly, Aboriginal people are seeking ways to mitigate the trauma through healing and the development of coping skills and protective factors, and strength, survival and revitalisation are themes also contained in Aboriginal writing, giving hope for the future.

PART 2

Preface

In the creative component of this thesis I present a loosely biographical story about five generations of my family. I have chosen to write a creative piece out of respect for the sensitivities in basing my story in life-writing because of the nature of the violence and trauma experienced by my family, and as a subsequent mark of respect to my extended family and community. My research, so far, has facilitated deeper insights into colonialism, particularly settler colonialism, which is not a widely used or understood term, but which is eminently relevant to Australian historical, socio-political and cultural contexts. My examination of trauma, particularly transgenerational trauma, has uncovered parallels in my own family's experiences, and provided me with transformative cognisance of previously unknown or poorly understood experiences in my family and community's history. It has helped me understand who I am and my cultural identity, both in the context of my relationships with my family, and as an Aboriginal person who continues to experience trauma and oppression through colonial systems. Ultimately, I am seeking to decolonise my thinking, develop an alternative personal narrative, and reassert my identity through understanding the forces that have shaped me by engaging in transformative unlearning in a quest to develop ways to effectively manage ongoing violence and trauma.

Gugurdung

They leave Perth in the soft grey light of dawn, gunning the rental car north through the Swan Valley and out of the city. As suburbia falls away, soft greens of farmland and eucalyptus trees emerge in the growing light and pinks and golds frame the fairy floss clouds. A promise of the day to come. A flock of galahs take flight in a raucous flurry to begin their foraging for the day. The farmland and the small towns soon give way to thicker bushland of tall eucalyptus and wattle trees blooming in glorious golds. Annie glances at her sleeping son and her brow furrows slightly.

I hope things are going to be OK. He's grieving so much, but I want things to go well for everyone. I want Mum's memory to be honoured.

She had hoped that her own children wouldn't succumb to alcohol, like so many of her family had. Her Grandfather, who had been removed as a child under the Aborigines Act, had been a heavy drinker, which led to his premature death. Annie was sure that it was his experiences on the Mission; the separation from family, loss of culture and time fighting in the War had contributed to the long sadness of his life; a soul wound that would not heal.

Annie lectures in Aboriginal health at a university in South Australia, and she teaches about the trauma of colonisation that is passed down the generations. She thinks that this cycle is happening with her family. The signs are all there, but how to break the wounding? She shakes her head despairingly. As they pass through Bullsbrook an hour later, Dan wakes and asks Connor to pass him a beer from the esky.

Gadya Djina

“It’s a bit early, Dan,” says Annie. “Don’t you want to save some for when we get there?”

Dan grunts. “I can get some more up the track if I have to.” He pulls off the cap and takes a long swig. He quickly downs a second and third beer before he appears to relax.

“Try not to get too drunk. Remember you’re meeting Auntie and Uncle later.”

“So what? They’re nothin’ to me. I’m here for Nanna, my real mother.”

Annie notices he is losing his inhibitions as the alcohol kicks in, and emboldened, she laments that he decides to pick the scab that never seems to heal.

“Nanna was the one who saved me from being adopted”, he continues. “You didn’t want me, did ya? You just wanna get rid of your guilt when I was born. I was just a piece of rubbish to you. You hate me because of who my father was.”

Annie closes her eyes momentarily. This conversation is one that has been repeated over and over, and no matter what she says, Dan is never going to believe her.

“Whaja talkin’ about, Dad?”, Connor asks from the back seat.

“Nothin’! Go back to listenin’ to your iPod, and stop stickin’ your nose in.”

In the rear-view mirror Annie watches Connor’s crestfallen face as he put his earbuds back in. He has already heard many angry family conversations in his young life. Dan turns to look out of the window and a tense silence descends as everyone turns to their own thoughts. Annie knows that if she responds a huge argument will break out. It is better to try to keep the peace.

Dan starts to reflect on his life as he often does when he is drinking. He is often drawn to the past. He is the victim in all of this and only Nanna seemed to have cared. His thoughts turn to Flinders Bay where he had lived with Nanna for many of his childhood

years. His favourite place had been the back beach where he spent endless happy times there with his mates, especially Bigsie. His mind drifts as he recalls those memories.

“C’mon, Bigsie, run faster”, Dan shouted as he sprinted, barefoot, down the road to the next clump of trees.

The two boys soon gasped for breath as they took refuge under the shade.

“Wish we ‘ad thongs, unna”, said Bigsie, in a half-gasp, half laugh, as they both prepared to take the next dash over the burning hot bitumen in bare feet.

They ran from shade to shade as they made their way home from the back beach. They’d been swimming in Hospital Creek and playing with soldier crabs by digging into their holes under the mangrove trees. The two boys had been best mates since Dan shifted to Flinders Bay the year before. They spent all their free time together, exploring the mangroves, going bush with the Uncles, making up play fights, or racing each other like they did today.

By the time they reached Nanna Gracie’s porch they felt like the soles of their feet were on fire, so they tumbled down, gratefully, under the pink bougainvillea-covered pergola.

Dan thought about how different his life had been since he moved from Adelaide.

There was no shouting or crying here. He didn’t have to watch his step-dad, Neville, punch his Mum in the face, over and over, until she was spitting bits of teeth out. He remembered his mum had felt doubly betrayed when Neville left to be with her life-long friend, Monica. She’d been distraught and inconsolable. She had not only lost her husband but her best friend as well. Dan squeezed his eyes shut to block out those memories, but tears formed, and he quickly brushed them away, not wanting Bigsie to see. After Neville left for good the angry words were replaced by silence and sadness that seeped into Dan’s

pores. Mum got through those days like a zombie with a blank face, showing no emotion. Sometimes she didn't get out of bed at all, laying there with the blinds drawn and dosed up on sleeping pills or with a hangover from the night before. After the first time she tried to commit suicide and ended up in hospital for a couple of days, Nanna Gracie and Mum decided it would be best if Dan went to Flinders Bay until things settled for his mum.

Although Nanna and Grandad would never tell him anything, he occasionally overheard them talk to each other from his favourite spot on the cool tiles outside, near the open window under the pergola. From those occasions he learned about his mum being in hospital again, and again, and then being taken to see a special doctor. Dan felt a heaviness on his shoulders and anxiety in the pit of his stomach that wouldn't go away.

Then Nanna's voice cut through and brought him back to the pergola, where Bigsie was still scraping the dried mud from the back beach off his legs.

"Ay, you two. Common inside outta the heat now. Tea's ready. You stayin', Bigsie?"

The boys jumped up and went inside, suddenly feeling hungry, mouths watering at the thought of roast lamb and crispy potatoes, and tall glasses of home-made lemonade. Nanna Gracie used to be a shearer's cook and was well-known for her good cooking.

As Dan settled into a routine at his new school, some of the tension ebbed away, although it never fully left him. He spoke to his Mum every couple of days and could hear the strain in her voice even though she tried to sound happy and reassuring. Dan felt powerless to help her and sometimes he wondered whether he was to blame for some of the things that had happened, like Neville leaving. He didn't know for sure, but it worried him a lot.

Every couple of weekends he would go marlu shooting with Bigsie and his father, Malcolm and Uncle Reg. They drove east of Flinders Bay to the hills. The Bay was located at

the top of a large inland gulf that was surrounded by pink and white crusted salt flats and land dotted with ubiquitous grey salt bushes. The country was interspersed with dry creeks that ran down from the nearby ranges. The creeks were lined by tall ghost gums symbolic of strong Aboriginal warriors standing in a row. When the rains occasionally came and the creeks flooded, all the kids from the town would walk out to the nearest creek to search for plump, spongy tadpoles to take home in their Mums' jam jars.

Uncle Malcolm and Uncle Reg were Bungalu men and this was the Country to which they belonged and were responsible. They were always happy to share yarns about how their people used to live and the stories of their creation ancestors even though he wasn't one of their mob. When Dan arrived at the Bay they could sense the boy's sadness, so they took him under their wing and taught him how to hunt, to track small animals, find water soaks and to read the country like a map so he could always find his way home.

Dan had only been in Flinders Bay a few months when on one of these trips, late one afternoon, the Uncles stopped to set up camp in a sandy creek bed beneath a couple of ancient, craggy outcrops. At sunset, large flocks of pink and grey galahs, singing their strident chorus, flew overhead to the nearby gumtrees to roost for the night. Later, as they sat around the campfire, Reg tapped Dan on the shoulder and pointed south. "Look there, Danny, at the Milky Way, see that dark cloud? That's the head of Emu, one of our creators, and the neck, body and legs are in those lines across the Milky Way. A long time ago Emu could fly, and 'e flew all the way up there, and now 'e looks down on us to make sure we okay."

Dan stretched his neck to look up at the stars to see the Emu and while he couldn't make it out at first, he was soon able to see the shape as his eyes adjusted. The Emu shape suddenly seemed to explode in a burst of starlight, a whirling flurry with bright flashes

shooting off in different directions. A long body with wings, its legs trailing behind like a comet filled with starburst, slowly descended. The enormous wings flapped. It was Emu. Dan and Bigsie, and the Uncles, all looked up in amazement, mouths wide open, in awe.

Emu got closer and closer and when it finally reached the ground near them it began dancing, casting a bright light against the rocks, and every member of the group felt a pulsating, buzzing energy through their bodies. Bigsie started clapping two small boomerangs together, and the two men rose to sing and dance the story of Emu, a protector and guardian who flew up high to be able to see the land. This was to make sure the people were looking after the Country and following the rules for living. The fire threw the mens' shadows against the outcrops as they twisted and turned in the soft sand.

When the men finished the song, Emu stood still. A breathlessness and a silence settled on the land; a deep peacefulness enveloped the surroundings. After some time in contemplation, Emu flapped its wings, faster and faster, stirring up dust, and with a huge thrust lifted off the ground, flying slowly back to the stars leaving trails of stardust in its wake. The small group watched respectfully, still in awe, as Emu returned to its place in the constellations.

Dan and Bigsie were so excited their amazement tumbled out of them.

"Settle down boys", said Uncle Malcolm as he lit his pipe, and leaned back against the smooth bark of a fallen log. "Before 'Whitefulla' come 'ere, all the people 'ealthy, the Country is good. We know our laws and culture, we teach the children, and look after old people. The tucker is plenty, and everyone is 'appy. But now, things no good, everyone so sad. We got kicked off land, taken to mission, our culture and language stop. Everythin' nearly lost. But we survive. Our Elders keep teachin' language and culture in secret. But now Emu visit more times because a lot of things are bad and 'e wants to give us 'ope and

strength. Too much drinkin' and fightin', and kids all mix up. Young fellas takin' drugs because they're not feelin' good about themselves, suicides and old people drinkin' too much grog. Everyone killin' themselves. No 'ope, no future."

Uncle Malcolm's face looked creased and strained in the flickering flames. He threw another log on the fire, sending sparks in the air. Dan tried to take in everything that happened. The beautiful starry Emu and the sad story. He was only nine years old but had already seen some of the things Uncle talked about. And yet he didn't fully understand where the anger and hurt came from.

With Neville gone, Annie got a job in Perth as she needed time away, and Dan stayed in Flinders Bay because his mother didn't want to take him to another state and enrol him in a strange new school. He played football and basketball and hung out with his mates whenever he liked because Nanna Gracie let him come and go as he pleased. Grandad Franz, however, was stricter with him when he did the wrong thing, and occasionally Dan ended up in the bathroom being whipped around the legs with a belt, like Annie's brothers had been when they were young. One time, Uncle Wayne told him that sometimes Grandad Franz got so angry he had punched the kids, including Annie, in the face and that Grandad really seemed to pick on Annie a lot because she wasn't his real daughter. He and Nanna drank a lot of beer and sherry and it was when Grandad was drunk that he got really angry and irritable with everyone.

Nanna told Dan that Grandad was a German immigrant who came to Australia after the Second World War. He found it hard to adapt to the Australian lifestyle and when he married an Aboriginal woman his workmates further distanced themselves from him. Dan knew he hated the heat and flies, and often referred to Australia as a "godforsaken desert island". Dan had met a few of their German friends but the couple led a fairly quiet life. Dan

knew intuitively that Flinders Bay was a racist place, with many Aboriginal people living at the old mission on the edge of town in tin huts that had no power or running water. Mangy and hungry dogs would run amok around the huts, stealing bush tucker that was cooking in the coals and, as a result, the old people often went hungry. They would take refuge in cheap flagons of sherry or port to numb the miserable reality of their lives.

Dan kept close to Nanna because she made him feel safe, but he spoke on the phone with his Mum every week. He missed her and visited her a couple of times in Perth, but over time the Bay became his home. He felt he belonged there, despite occasionally being called hurtful names by the white kids, like boong and abo, which made him feel bad about himself. He had a large circle of Aboriginal friends who always had his back. He thought he was handling his life well, but there were always doubts and worries that sometimes gripped his mind like a vice. It was some big things, as well as a lot of little things: the worry about his Mum, his grandparents' heavy drinking, the increasing arguments and physical punishments from Grandad, as well as the fights with other kids, and seeing the struggle and poverty experienced by Aboriginal people. These all built up over time to the point where he could never feel fully happy. Feeling loved and safe with Nanna, and having fun with his mates and the Uncles and Elders, helped Dan cope with life. He particularly enjoyed taking the meat of the marlu they shot to the old people and he enjoyed Auntie Pearl's marlu tail stew soaked up with freshly cooked damper out of the coals. These were the times he loved, such as having a good feed and listening to the stories. In Flinders Bay he learnt so much about Aboriginal culture.

Years passed, but when Dan was finishing up his final year of primary school, Annie said he'd be moving back to Adelaide to enrol in a private secondary school. She had returned from Perth the year before to take up a job as a vocational lecturer, and was now

in a relationship with Mike, a mechanic whom she'd met at a house-warming party. They had visited Flinders Bay a couple of times and, to Dan, the couple seemed happy, although Annie was guarded about her emotions and wouldn't be drawn into talking about the relationship.

"But I don't want to go back to Adelaide, Mum", Dan said. "All my friends are here, and I want to go to high school with them. And I'm going to miss Nanna really bad."

Dan's eyes welled with tears at the thought of leaving all that he knew. His memories of his old life in Adelaide now seemed distant and strange. The Bay was his home now.

"But you will get a great education, Dan, and Adelaide has so many more jobs."

Annie's face tensed in frustration.

"And I want you back home. You're my son and I've missed you. We've been apart for too long. We're going to buy a new house close to the school, so it'll be easy to get to. Troy, your mate from primary school will be going to the same school. You'll still be able to visit the Bay whenever you want, especially during the school holidays."

Dan felt trapped. How could he say he didn't want to be with his mother without hurting her, but he couldn't imagine life without Nanna. Over the summer break there were many tears and arguments, but in the end, Nanna supported Annie because not only could she see the benefit of a good education, she was also worried about how some of the problems in the Bay were affecting Dan.

Before he knew it, dragging leaden feet and overwhelmed with anxiety, Dan was at the new school. It was so different to the Bay; stuffy uniforms, strict rules and no other Aboriginal kids. He settled into an uncomfortable and uneasy routine as an outsider, as someone who was different. Whenever he had to stand-up in the class to talk, his legs and

voice shook because he felt the other students looked down on him. Having his mate Troy there was the only positive he could see. Annie was occasionally called into the school because of Dan's "bad behavior", or his failure to complete homework, but she strongly defended him and questioned the school's attitude towards Dan.

The negative experiences at school were balanced with weekend fun and school holidays in the Bay. Dan grew closer to Mike, who took him trail-bike riding sometimes. Once, Nanna and Annie took him on an overseas trip to Singapore. He formed a band with some school mates and was heavily involved in cricket, football and basketball. Even though he missed the Bay terribly, life was as good as it could be in the city. But, over time, as he grew into an adolescent, his moods started to change. He was quick to feel anger and resentment about being forced to move away from his "home". Annie put it down to hormones but the friction between them, and even with Mike, seemed to increase, sometimes over trivial matters. She worked hard at keeping the peace, or at least an exterior appearance of calm, in spite of the tension they all lived with.

One-night Grandad Franz phoned Dan, which was a fairly rare event. He'd clearly been drinking because his German accent seemed more pronounced.

"Dan", he said, "I haf' to tell you somesink important. Neville rang me and he told me who your real farder is".

"What do you mean?" asked Dan. "Mum always said it was that man from Port Lincoln."

"No. She lied. I know this will be hard to take, but I thought you haf the right to know. Your farder is your Uncle Harry, Tante Ruby's husband."

"What?" There was shock in Dan's voice, "that can't be right!"

Dan sat on the nearest chair, trying to make sense of what Grandad had just said. He couldn't speak, his breathing became ragged. In the end he hung up, even as he could hear Grandad saying his name distantly down the phone line. He stormed into the kitchen to confront his mother.

"Is it true? Is it true, Mum?"

"What?" asked Annie.

"That Uncle Harry is my father! Grandad told me! Is it true?"

Annie inhaled deeply and her face dropped in shock.

"Yes, it is, but I didn't want you to know, to hurt you. It's very complicated."

"I have a right to know!" Dan growled. "You should feel ashamed having sex with your uncle, even if he's not a blood relation. How disgusting. What a whore! No wonder Neville left you."

He went to his bedroom and slammed the door. Dan's tenuous hold on the life his mother wanted to give him quickly fell away after that. Disbelief, shock and blame were reflected in the many heated arguments in the following days. In the end, Dan stopped talking to Annie, but made it clear to Mike that he couldn't live with them anymore. The following weekend Mike drove Dan to the Bay, back to Nanna. Dan was sixteen years old. He knew there were apprenticeships in the railways and at the powerhouse that he could apply for, or there were jobs through the Aboriginal employment program.

Slouched deeper into the seat now, Dan feels the rhythm of the rolling car tyres under his feet. He finishes the beer in his hand and asks Connor to pass him another. Lulled by the highway stretching in front of her, Annie, too mulls over the events of the night Dan had been told the truth about his parentage. She remembers collapsing on the lounge in tears, overwhelmed by remorse. Mike had put his arm around her, muttering soft words of

reassurance. He knew the circumstances of Dan's birth, and was angry that Neville hadn't respected his wife's confidence and had taken a cheap shot for whatever vengeful motive. Neville was an angry alcoholic who was unpredictable when he was drunk. Dan was never supposed to find out about his father. When Annie was pregnant, Gracie and Franz had tried to persuade her to have the child adopted out, but when the baby was born, she decided to keep him. They frequently denied that earlier position over the years when suited to Dan's alcoholic version of events. They wanted to be seen as the supportive ones. With great sadness, Annie remembers the four years that passed after that night before she and Dan really spoke again, by which time he was an alcoholic who had reinvented the stories of his life to cast himself as the victim with his mother portrayed as uncaring and selfish; someone who'd kicked him out because she didn't want him.

Annie pushes away her thoughts as she pulls into a service station at Wubin, forcing a smile because she doesn't want Connor to see she is upset. Loaded up with drinks and hot chips, and more beer from a pub, Annie now drives past salt lakes. Dead trees sticking up like burnt scarecrows out of the crusty surfaces, scrubby bushland and thick stands of gum trees towering resolute as sentinels to her Country. Patches of gugurdung start appearing on the side of the road with their papery petals and bright yellow centres. They are mainly white ones, but with small splashes of vibrant pinks, purples and yellows, transforming the barren red dirt country into vibrant displays of colour.

Ninghan

Annie feels the familiar thrill as she crests the small rise and sees the Ninghan embodied in the blue hills in the distance, rising strikingly against the clear blue sky. On this occasion her mother's passing tinges the usual elation with sadness. Gracie had always loved coming

back here. As Annie drives closer, the outline of the echidna starts to emerge. Two hills next to each other, one resembling the Ninghan's body, and the other its head. Her creation ancestor is embodied in these hills.

Hello, my Country. I bring my mother to you on her final journey home.

She is overwhelmed. This is the place of her birth with which she has a profound spiritual connection. It is hard to put those feelings into words, as if they are too deep and intuitive, making words too limiting to explain her connection to this place. Her childhood memories come flooding back, of family, place and culture; her sleeping passengers oblivious to her rising emotions and the growing call of Country.

"Wake up, Connor, we're almost there. Look at those hills."

In the back seat, sleepy eyes are rubbed and slowly opened, squinting against the glare of the spring sunshine.

Dan stifles a yawn with the back of his hand, and twists straighter in his seat, another beer firmly gripped in his hand which is resting securely against the console.

"We're home. We're finally here. The homestead is just on the other side of those hills. Connor, can you please check that Nanna Gracie's urn is still OK in the box?"

"That was a long drive, Nanna", says Connor who, having checked the box, is perched high on the edge of the back seat to get a better view. I can't wait to meet Auntie Rosie and Uncle Bill."

As they pass close to the Ninghan, Annie remembers her healing ceremony fifteen years before, when she had been living in Perth. Gammi Edie, who has since passed away, had sensed a deep spirit wound in Annie when she came to visit Country. Her marriage had broken up, her son, Dan was not living with her, and there was a spiritual aura of trauma about her, that Gammi Edie sensed immediately. Annie was resistant to talking about her

life issues. Gammi Edie knew there was bad stuff inside Annie so she arranged for her to be taken by a group of Gammis to the base of Ninghan where they entered the body of the ancestor through a maze of caves. In the largest cave, the group of senior women sat in a circle as they clapped their message sticks in unison and sung the Ninghan song cycle. Annie had lain on her back in the middle of the circle, and a bright light from an unknown source shone down on her. She felt herself lifted into the air upwards, into the body of the ancestor. She kept rising until she came to a large curved area pitted with many holes. She realized they were the Ninghan's spikes, hollow inside, like tubes. Suddenly, all the negative dark energy of past pain and hurt dissipated from her body into the air, rising to disappear into the spikes. After some time, waves of colour, full of positive vibrations, emitted from the spikes. They washed over her body time and time again, until they faded, and she was gently lowered to the ground. She felt renewed and euphoric.

Annie remembers the experience as if it was yesterday because it was then that her life had transformed from one of pervasive negativity to hope for a different existence in the future. She had been liberated from her deepest trauma and could face life with renewed optimism. Worrying and destructive thoughts didn't monopolise her time anymore, and she started to enjoy life for the first time in many years.

Thank you, my ancestor. You healed my mind, body and spirit. You saved me.

They finally approach the Ninghan turnoff and Annie slows the car. As she rounds the corner the tyres crunch on the familiar road, a red dirt ribbon surrounded by masses of white wildflowers, like snow in the high country. Soon they cross the river and drive around the bend to the stand of huge Moreton Bay fig trees, which almost block out the old stone homestead. The house is surrounded by a semi-circle of brown hills, with the high, blue Ninghan hills rising behind them. As car doors slam, Aunty Rosie and Uncle Bill appear

through the front gate. Annie introduces Dan, who is swaying a little by now, and Connor, and there are subdued hugs all round. They are here on Sorry Business.

“Would you like a cuppa tea?” says Aunty Rosie, looking sideways at Dan. “And what about some cordial for you, young Connor?” They all enter the homestead, and over tea and scones, still warm and soft, they share memories of Gracie, their Countrywoman, who has been brought home. Uncle Bill starts off:

“She was a good woman. Family were so important to her, and she loved her Country, even though she didn’t get back here much.”

“True,” Auntie Rosie joins in, “even when she was a kid she loved all the big family gatherings, especially at Wardagga.” She sighs. “I’m going to miss my sister cousin, Gracie, but there’ll be a big mob here tomorrow to see her off. The O’Reilly’s are camping at the shearing shed, and some of the oldies are staying at the motel in town tonight. I know some of the Simmons and Feeney cousins are driving up in the morning. Pity your brothers couldn’t come, Annie.”

“Nah. They’ve never been close to country or interested much in the culture over here, Auntie, being born in South Australia, but they said their goodbyes at the memorial.”

Auntie Rosie nodded her head in understanding and slowly took a sip of tea. Later, as Annie rises from the table, Aunty Rosie says, “I’ve put fresh linen in the old shearer’s cottage, and you’re welcome to join us for a feed.”

“No thanks, Aunty. I’ve got a few chops, so we’ll just make a fire and chuck them on the hotplate. I’ve got some potato salad in the esky too.”

After they unpack at the cottage, they collect wood to make a fire.

“Don’t drink too much tonight, Dan”, says Annie, running a hand through her hair, “we’ve got a big day tomorrow”.

Dan harrumphs as he takes a long swig. Annie knows it will be very hard to get him to stop; the loss of his grandmother has hit him very hard.

Sitting by the fire after tea, Connor gazes at the stars.

“Nanna, look! It feels as though the stars are raining down on us. They’re so bright and clear. There’s the Milky Way and the Southern Cross!”

He has never been so far out in the bush before. Growing up in Adelaide he rarely has the chance to get out of the city.

“When I was a little girl living here, we often used to sleep under the stars and my older cousins would say, don’t count the stars or the *Mundung* will get you.”

“What’s a *Mundung*, Nanna?” asks Connor quizzically.

“It’s a sort of devil, or boogey man. We kids were so scared of it, and if we did anything wrong the oldies would say, ‘the *Mundung’s* gonna get you!’ When I was a kid in Perth, I once saw a nun all dressed up in her black and white clothes walking down the street. I had never seen one before and I turned to Nanna Gracie and shouted, ‘look, *Mundung!*’ before hiding behind her skirts.”

They both laugh at the story.

“I hope I can sleep OK tonight, Nanna, and the *Mundung* doesn’t get *me*.”

They both giggle at the thought, although Annie still remembers the fear from her childhood. She then looks at Dan and notices his eyes are glazed with a faraway look.

“Dan, you don’t want to have a hangover tomorrow. How about an early night?”

A deep angry growl rises in Dan’s throat. “Don’t tell me what to do!” he spits, “you have no right to say anything!”

“I feel gutted too, but we all need to be strong as family now.”

A sob escapes Annie’s mouth as the grief kicks in, unbidden and unexpected.

“Dad”, says Connor quietly, reaching out to hold his Grandmother’s hand, “please don’t drink anymore. You know you’ll feel bad in the morning”.

“Lemmie alone”, Dan shouts, rising and stumbling over an empty beer bottle, before stomping around the corner of the cottage. A guttural, visceral scream tears through the silence, echoing around the hills. Fists pummel the galvanised iron wall. Dan sobs, huge racking sobs, as he cries for the first time since his Grandmother’s death. Annie leaves him alone. She knows he needs to let out all his pent-up emotions. The facade of stoicism has finally crumbled. The Country feels his pain.

That night, Annie feels Country wrap itself around her and her little family. It breathes and sighs in deep contemplation. There is a deep, soft rumbling echo around the hills. They are protected by the omnipresent ancestors in the hills, trees, waterholes and rocks. The ancestors have been there since the beginning, protecting their human form, their people, until the time comes for that form to return to their ancestors. They are sleeping in the shadow of her ancestor, the Ninghan. She was born at this homestead when her mother was working as a cook for the station owners. Her father, whom she has never met, was one of the seasonal shearers who came to the property for work. It was a short-lived relationship, and he had been told of her birth, but was never seen again. He never featured in Annie’s thoughts as an important person. Even when her step-father was being cruel to her, she never yearned for her biological father. She doesn’t know why she feels this way.

Bemarra

Gracie's ancestor is the Bemarra, the water serpent, which lives in the extensive networks of underground water courses. Waterholes, large and small, are scattered across the land; the small gnamma holes are covered with tree branches to keep the water clean for those who walk along the tracks that have been worn into the earth since Coodoroo – the beginning.

Annie wakes in the morning to a sound she hasn't heard in a while - the crowing of Aunty Rosie's rooster - and she smiles at childhood memories of dodging angry roosters while collecting the eggs. She wakes Connor with a gentle shake and a cheerful greeting. Dan is on his back, snoring, a thin film of sweat on his top lip.

"Time to get up, Dan. There's cereal or eggs for brekkie, and then we'll need to get ready." Dan rolls away from her to face the wall.

"Go away", he croaks. "Five more minutes."

When they eventually get away after breakfast, Dan rests his head on the car window frame. As usual, there are a few tell-tale signs of the night's drinking: a slight reddening of the eyes, and a sheen to his face underscored by shadows under his closed eyes. Annie knows he will be trying to shake off a headache and calm the trembling in his hands. She wonders whether he has taken his anti-depressant tablet.

As they drive out she keeps a fair distance from Uncle Bill's car in front to avoid the worst of the red dust. The road is rutted with deep ridges and corrugation, and progress is slow and laboured. They arrive at Wardagga Rock, a huge granite monolith jutting out of the red earth and Annie immediately looks hard through the windscreen seeking out the tall gumtree next to the Waterfall, at the edge of the Rock.

The Waterfall, as it is known to the family, is a wide, rounded overhanging rock worn by thousands of years of water streaming down its face. Today it is not running, but during

occasional heavy periods of rain, it turns into a spectacular cascade of fast-running water, tumbling and crashing down into the rock-hole. The gabi dhaa is a permanent fresh-water spring about fifteen metres wide and ten metres in depth. It is very deep, connected as it is to the network of underground springs.

As they drive closer to the gum tree, Annie makes out the gnarled knots, and the white and grey texture of the bark, much of it peeling to reveal the burnished wood beneath. She inhales spontaneously and deeply, and the thrill comes back.

Mum was born under that tree and now her spirit will return.

Dan and Connor are silent. This is a strange new environment for them. Everything is red, broken only by the green softness of the trees and the blue starkness of the sky.

Smoke trails softly from some campfires as Annie pulls up. Her relations turn towards the car in sombre greeting, unsmiling and watchful as this is not an occasion for celebration. Annie is embraced as she leaves the car. Her eyes soon fill with tears, as soft words of condolence are uttered. She looks at the dear and familiar faces and thinks of those who are no longer with them. Each year more and more Elders pass away, taking their irreplaceable cultural knowledge with them. After she pulls herself together a little, she takes the boys around to introduce them to everyone. Dan and Connor are anxious and tentative, and while Dan remains that way, Connor soon starts to relax as he is gathered into the warmth of family. Annie watches, and not for the first time thinks a little guiltily:

Why didn't I bring Dan here when he was young? Why haven't I come back more often? This is his heritage, too. Life gets in the way, but this is life.

They finally approach the most senior Elder, and Gracie's eldest brother cousin. He and Annie fold into each other's arms in a deep embrace. Annie can feel his strength seeping into her body.

“G’day, young Annie, my gadya murni. Bin a long time since I seen you. You all grown up now, and you got your own djubas.”

“Hello, Gammi, this is my big gadya, Dan and his little gadya, Connor. Boys, this is Nanna Gracie’s brother, Gammi Clarrie.”

The boys nod their heads and shyly shake hands, as Gammi gently pats their shoulders.

“Welcome home boys”, he says. “Good you finally ‘ere. Country’s bin waiting for you long time now. ‘Ere are my two dhudhus, Bungardi and Mudilya”.

He points his pursed lips towards two sandy-coloured dingoes, one of which has only three legs. The dingoes look at the boys with sharp, intelligent eyes before they lope away as another car arrives.

“Come with me. Let’s get billy tea, and we see if damper’s cooked. Got some juicy bardi grubs on coals too. You should try ‘em.”

Connor eagerly follows Gammi, getting more hugs from the Aunties on the way to the campfire. Dan hangs back, drawn and subdued, but eventually makes his way to the fire for a strong brew and steaming damper dripping with Golden Syrup. Gammi approaches Dan and curls his gnarled fingers around the young man’s shoulder in a soft, but firm grip. One of Gammi’s eyes is opaque with a cataract, but the other, deep brown, almost black, is alert, taking in everything, and searching Dan’s face questioningly. Annie sees Dan almost flinch from the penetrating gaze, looking away as much to avoid the scrutiny as to show respect.

“You have trouble, boy. Deep inside. I can feel it. A bad spirit inside you, long time. I’m mabarn healer.” Seeing the look of fear and alarm on Dan’s face, Gammi adds, “Don’t be scared. It will all be good. Trust me.”

As Gammi removes his hand, Annie sees Dan stumble away, confused and breathing heavily. She nods to herself and briefly closes her eyes. Gammi Clarrie moves towards the tree, and Uncle Bush calls for quiet from his loud family. There is a hush as Annie joins Gammi with the turquoise urn; her mother's favourite colour.

"We 'ere at this gundila to farewell Sister Gracie and return 'er to where she belong. Our old people bin born 'ere and come back when they pass. They need to be 'ere so their spirit can return. Gracie proud of family and love 'er Country. She belong with Bemarra – she is Bemarra. We people must protect our Ancestors, keep the water clean, make sure it's cared for our djubas. We must let Bemarra know we belong to this place. When you go past the rock hole throw in some sand to let 'em know you 'ere."

Annie removes the lid from the urn, and soon a line of people forms, and as each approaches they remove some of the ashes and gently scatter them at the base of the gum tree. Sounds of loud, mournful wailing cut through the air, making the hairs on the back of Annie's neck stand. This is the way Sorry Business is always done. There is no quiet restraint. Grieving is loud and intuitive. As each person then moves on to the Waterfall, they scoop up a handful of sand and throw the grains into the deep pool, greeting the water serpents. Dan holds back until the last, following Connor to his mother, and then after reaching into the urn, gently sprinkles his grandmother's ashes beneath the tree. He then stands at the edge of the pool, fresh tears welling, before gently releasing the sand through his fingers into the water. He stands there with his head bowed as the rest of the family gradually make their way back to their camp sites. After some time he slowly moves to a stand of trees nearby. Annie observes he may be seeking a quiet place to grieve in private and take a swig from his flask.

Bibi Garradu

After a short nap, followed by a cup of tea, Annie fills her water bottle and makes her way to the women's business end of Wardagga Rock. This place is where the young boys were prepared by the women to transition into adulthood at the men's business site at the other end of Wardagga. She finds the series of small caves on the outside of the monolith, and enters her favourite one to sit and think. There are ochre hand prints made by the young men on the gravelly granite walls. Annie runs her hand over the roughness of the surface, enjoying the cool texture under her palm. She thinks about the generations of young men who have been through the Law and went on to become the protectors, guardians, keepers of wisdom, fathers and eventually Elders of their group. All gone now. Her bibi is gone too, but she still can't believe she's no longer here. Annie and her mother's relationship had been complicated, and although there was hurt and pain, they had always loved each other, and any tensions were always patched up.

For a long time, it was only the two of them, and her memories still remain vivid of the time as a child when she had her mother all to herself. Driven by the downturn in the sheep industry and job market they had moved to Perth when Annie was nine years old so that Gracie could get a job. It was only when her mother took her to the city for the first time that Annie realised there were different worlds to hers which were both frightening and alien. The red-roofed houses, all the cars and people, the noise and bustle, all intimidating for a little girl from the bush. But she was allowed, from the age of ten, to take the rickety Collins Coaches bus, belching smoke, to visit family back on Country.

About forty years ago, during an argument with her cousin Jo Jo, a deep family secret emerged. Annie's sense of identity and self-worth had been shaken as a result, and her despondency was only finally resolved, decades later, at the Ninghan healing ceremony.

Only then did she feel a sense of release from the past. The secret Jo Jo had revealed was that while pregnant with Annie, her mother had travelled to a Salvation Army hospital in Fremantle to arrange to have the baby adopted. After Annie was born her mother changed her mind and took her little daughter home instead, but still, today, Annie sometimes wondered: *What would her life have been like if her mother had gone through with adopting her out? Where would she have ended up?*

Her pulse quickens as she recalls the scene when she confronted her mother with this new truth, tearful and shouting with the bewilderment of a lost child. Full of remorse, Grace had tried to explain how hard it was for an unmarried Aboriginal woman in the 1950s, and how she had changed her mind as soon as Annie was born and had never regretted bringing her home. She talked about the twins, Susan and Simon, who were born four years after Annie, and how she had only fostered them out after caring for all three children became impossible. Gracie became subdued and tears also fell down her face, compelling Annie to rush to her, hoping the embrace would help her make sense of it all. But no sense could be made straight away. Annie's anger lasted a long time, until the healing through the Ninghan ancestor on Country. In time she came to understand, and reconcile, her mother's actions. Her work helped: her research on transgenerational trauma, and how it manifests, also helped her come to terms with the circumstances surrounding Gracie at the time of Annie's birth.

Over the years, as Annie learned more about her mother's life, she realised that it had not been easy, and in some ways, Annie was repeating similar life events to those that had shaped her mother's life. Bibi's early years were spent on Country, and it was only when her father, Tom, enlisted in the army that her mother, Ruth, and her two younger sisters had moved to Perth to be near Tom's army barracks. Ruth was an Aboriginal woman who,

with her younger brothers and sisters, had been removed from her quarter-caste mother, Sarah, when her mother wanted to marry a 'half-caste' man after her white husband died. This posed a problem because Sarah wasn't 'half-caste'. Eugenicist policies were in place to breed out colour, and relationships with darker-skinned Aboriginal men were seen, by the authorities, as regressive.

Relinquishing her own twins had been a blow for Gracie but fostering them had left a sense of an open door; however, eventually the foster parents pushed for a permanent arrangement, and under force by the police, Gracie signed adoption papers. Annie was unsure of the whole story, but when she found out about the twins she felt like she'd been punched in the stomach. Later in life she met Susan and Simon, but Simon died of a heart attack in his early forties, and Susan married an American sailor she'd met in Perth and moved with him to Florida. She and Annie keep in touch through Facebook and Annie shares family stories and photos with her sister.

When Gracie met Franz in Kalgoorlie while visiting her sister, Annie had only been thirteen years old. It only seemed a little while before she and Bibi travelled to Flinders Bay with Franz. Married soon after, Franz made it clear to young Annie that he rejected her by insisting that she call him, Mr Reinhardt. Their relationship had always been problematic, and she doesn't think 'hatred' is too strong a word for how she feels about him. Gracie and Franz had three sons over a five-year period and when the youngest started school Gracie began training as an Aboriginal Health Worker. She was part of the very first class in the new course and she subsequently went on to enjoy a twenty-one-year career in Aboriginal health. With Franz she had found some stability, although she always carried the early trauma of losing her twins and the reputation, she had around the sheep stations for being promiscuous. But by the time she retired she was a respected senior Aboriginal woman and

health worker in Flinders Bay. Her retirement was short-lived as she contracted non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. The chemotherapy and radiotherapy were brutal, ravaging her body as she dropped to thirty kilograms. But she survived. Annie often said to her, "You're a tough, resilient bush woman. It'll take more than a little cancer to knock you off".

While Gracie survived that scare, a few years later she was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. She managed the symptoms well until she had a fall and broke her hip. Despite rehabilitation she eventually ended up at the local nursing home under twenty-four-hour care as she could no longer walk. Eventually, a fatal stroke took her in her sleep at the age of eighty-six. Annie reflects that in spite of much suffering Gracie had lived a good life; she'd been a loving mother and grandmother, had gone back to Country when she could and she'd been dedicated to her work. Her frugal husband's investments had allowed her to travel the world, often taking Annie or one of her sisters with her. The heavy drinking and occasional conflicts were the only public displays of things not being all good. She'd been a private person and rarely spoke about any unresolved grief or inner demons; her generation did not speak of such matters. Annie often wondered if trauma had been able to be expressed more openly by that generation, and even those before, whether some of the hurt and pain wouldn't have been all-consuming.

For many years now, Annie has reflected on all the pieces of the family jigsaw, trying to make sense of the whole cumulative and transgenerational experiences of trauma and the implications for her family. She has dealt with the last vestiges of feelings of rejection and resentment and forgiven her mother. Healing has been a long, hard-won journey, a drawn-out process, culminating in the healing ceremony that has mended her broken spirit and given her the strength to accept the reality of her situation. But still she worries for the young ones.

Will Dan ever heal? He is always so angry. And because he wasn't born on Country he can't turn to the ancestors for help like I did. Who would have thought I would find myself in the same situation as my mother? Mothers and their children – a unique bond but also one that is fragile and tenuous.

Annie is startled into the present by the melodious warbling of a couple of kulbardi outside the cave.

Oh, Kulbardi. Can't I have any peace? You know you are one of my favourites, Mr Kulbardi.

She laughs briefly and then stands up dusting the dirt off her pants. By the time she leaves the cave the kulbardi are flying away, their satiny black and white feathers gleaming in the late afternoon sun. Back at the camp, family are preparing food for the evening meal around the fires. Annie helps Auntie peel vegetables for the lamb roast which has been cooking slowly in the camp oven for a couple of hours.

Sorry Business continues late into the night as family reconnect around the fires and the Aunties and Uncles tell their burda-burda to wide-eyed young ones. Later, a couple of guitars are brought out and everyone joins in singing favourite old hymns and Country songs. As the moon rises higher and voices soften the little ones creep into their swags to sleep. With fatigue catching up, Connor finally wiggles into a sleeping bag on the back seat of Annie's car. Dan has disappeared. Annie, sitting at the campfire, scans the nearby bush but it is dark. She thinks he may have found a hiding place to drink a bottle of scotch he hid in his duffle bag. Long after midnight, Annie makes her way to the swag next to the car and quickly falls into a deep slumber.

The next morning everyone is slow to rise and soft voices carry through the air as fires are lit and billies put on to boil. Sorry Business will continue for another few days as a

time for reflection, reconnection and enacting law and ceremony, especially for the young ones. These days the family is spread far and wide and it seems the only time they all get together is at funerals. The days of Lore Business, and regular gatherings for ceremony and trade, are long past. When the children were taken away the old people couldn't pass on all the important knowledge. The cycles of knowledge transmission have been broken by colonisation.

Annie crawls out of her swag and stretches to ease the stiffness in her neck and shoulders. She then sits cross-legged next to Auntie Rosie, rubbing her on the back and smiling at her before pouring a strong brew of tea into her enamel mug. Looking around the camp she spies Connor playing with some other kids, but there is no sign of Dan. Glancing back, she can see he is still asleep in his swag near the gum tree. She leaves him to sleep while she and Connor have eggs on toasted damper for breakfast. Afterwards, she grabs another mug of tea and then moves from group to group, chatting and thanking them for coming. She becomes emotional as old memories are shared about Gracie by various family members, many of whom she hasn't seen for a long time.

Eventually, when she can break away, she heads towards a large, nearby stand of eucalyptus trees. After five minutes of walking she locates the tree with bright pink fluorescent tape tied around the trunk and the metal spikes driven into the ground at the base. This is the tree next to which Gammi Tom was born over 100 years ago. His mother gave birth in a gulu made of sturdy branches with thick wads of leaves and mud mixed together to make it strong. Back then it would have been a scrubby sapling but now it is tall and imposing. Annie touches the bark and then pulls down a low-hanging branch to smell the eucalyptus leaves. She sits at the base of the tree and leans against the trunk. She can hear children laughing and screaming as they run around, a low murmur of voices and an

occasional dog bark. The sounds provide solace as Annie gazes at the trees and then at Wardagga Rock, taking in the Waterfall and the gum tree next to it. This place is very special to her family. Both her mother, Gracie, and grandfather, Gammi Tom were born here, and her great-grandmother, Galena died here when she was a young woman.

Kadji Wiru

Annie feels a despondency settle on her as she reflects on what she has learned about the colonial trauma experienced by Galena. She was Gammi Tom's mother who had her children forcibly removed by the government. Sadly, she died at the age of 31 years from a severe asthma attack when her youngest child was only one month old. Involuntarily, Annie touches her asthma puffer in her pocket for reassurance. The disease is wide-spread in her family. She could only imagine the deep sadness Galena would have felt, and unbearable confusion about why her children had been taken.

Had Galena carried that raw, unresolvable grief with her until she died? Was it then that the trauma really began for our family? How has it affected generations of us with new, as well as remembered, trauma?

Galena lay on her side, her head supported by her outstretched arm. She hummed listlessly to herself and moved her other hand through the soft, red dirt. Her long, brown body stretched out under the shade of a gum tree. Her round face was covered with a thin film of perspiration. Willara sat next to Galena, gently waving a eucalypt branch to keep her daughter cool, her own face crinkled with concern for her only child. Galena gazed through the shimmering heat haze at Wardagga. The Bemarra often came out of the waterhole at sunset, their bodies twisting with iridescent, sparkling scales as the water fell from them. A deep thumping sound from under the ground accompanied their ritual. Galena watched her

ancestors in awe. A lightness settled on her and she felt comforted by their presence, despite her laboured breathing. Galena was a Kadji, a person with extraordinary spiritual powers, who could control the elements like rain and storms and who possessed healing and psychic abilities. Unfortunately, her illness was weakening her and her powers were diminishing. Ultimately, her special abilities would not save her. To wajellas, she was known as a Clever Woman.

The gugurdung were a carpet of colours around the rock and usually Galena looked on in thrall at the transformed landscape but her breathing difficulties only increased now when the flowers and trees were in bloom. At these times it felt like a heavy rock lay on her chest and each rasping, crackling breath was hard earned.

As Willara sat in watch over her daughter she waited for the mabarn to arrive to heal Galena. She always called on the mabarn when there was an illness as traditional healers were important people in the community's life. Some wajellas, Willara knew, especially stock hands, didn't believe in the mabarn's special powers, calling them witch doctors and describing their healing work and bush medicine as mumbo jumbo. Willara didn't know English very well but Galena's wajella mardungu, James Mortimer, had explained things to her in the little language he'd learned. He often spent time at Wardagga with Galena in their gulu when he wasn't at the sheep station attending to business.

While Willara reflected on the child she could see and comfort, Galena, exhausted now, thought about her children who had been taken away. It had been six seasons now and James had said it had been eighteen months in wajella time. Alex, May and little Tom were taken by the policeman who came from Yalgoo in his black car. He had some papers in his hand which he gave to Boss whilst pointing at the children. Galena remembered the anger on Boss's face when he read the papers. Later he told Galena and Willara that one of

their neighbours had seen 'half-caste' children at the homestead and reported them to the authorities. Under the Aborigines Act of 1905, the Chief Protector of Aborigines had guardianship of all the mixed-race children in Western Australia. They were removed from mixed parentage of their 'full-blood' and white mothers and fathers, to be civilised through missions and reserves which were set up throughout the state to assimilate the children into white society. When it was obvious that the policeman was going to take Alex, May and Tom in his car, Galena and Willara had leapt to their feet and run towards the car fast as they shouted and screamed at the children to run. The children's eyes had been wide with fright as they were bundled into the back seat. The women reached the boot of the car and pummelled it as it started driving off. As the car disappeared from sight around the bend Galena fell to her knees and wailed and as Willara lifted her daughter from the ground the two women fell into each other, cried loudly, and hit their fists on their heads in shared misery. As Galena looked at her mother her features contorted into a look of anguish.

Alex and May were taken by train to a strange new place, a collection of poorly built dwellings in thick bushland that housed unhappy Aboriginal children. Some of the parents lived in gulus on the fringes of the run-down community so they could be near their children. Years later, when the children had learnt English, they would be able to read the sign at the railway station: Moore River Mission. Following their removal to the mission they would come to know a life of servitude, deprivation and hunger; happy memories of warm, red earth where they had chattered in language, dug for bardi grubs, and picked delicious bimba from the trees, eventually faded.

Because Tom was only three years old, he travelled further on the train to a place called Edenville, which had a nursery for the youngest ones. The buildings, made of imposing stone, were set in grassy, undulating hills with a nearby creek. When Tom arrived

at Edenville he felt alone and afraid and he cried for his family at night. One of the older boys, Jack, would come and sit on the side of the bed every evening until Tom finally fell asleep, until Tom eventually became used to his new “home.”

The day after the mabarn arrived Galena went into labour, struggling all the while with her breathing, her chest rising and falling shallowly. She endured an arduous five-hour labour, all the while gasping for air through the intense pain. The mabarn said they were unable to help because her breathing problem was a wajella disease. She was very weak after her baby boy was born. He cried thinly as he was wrapped in a kangaroo skin rug and placed in his mother’s arms. Willara cared for Galena and helped her to feed the child. Galena’s condition didn’t improve, and she never regained her strength. When her little one, named William and known as Bill, was about one monthold, Galena finally succumbed to her illness. After Galena died, Willara put aside her grief as she prepared her daughter, in the gulu, for burial while she also tended to baby Bill. As she did so, a strong wind sprung up, eddying red dust around the gulu and violently shaking the branches that kept the structure together. Rain began to fall, softly at first, and then fat heavy drops fell rapidly, creating muddy pools of waters and threatening to flood the area. The gulu held tight and very little rain got in. Willara held little Bill close to protect him. The storm moved rapidly, bringing wild lightning flashes and shattering, cascading thunder claps, like a giant walking down steep steps.

BOOM, BOOM, Boom, Boom, boom, boom.

The Kadji Kadji were expressing their rage and vexation as they mourned, but also honoured, one of their own. They had invoked their supernatural powers to pummel down a fierce tempest in a roar of angry turmoil and furore. There was an eerie light outside that bathed the surroundings in a golden diffused light.

James eventually arrived, soaked through, to see his wife in calm repose. Her facial features were relaxed for the first time since her breathing difficulties began. James took a turn to hold Bill, and he and Willara kept vigil through the night. By morning the Kadji Kadji had stopped and the land was still, leaves glistening with raindrops, streams of red water and the earth soaked with more rain than would normally be seen in twelve seasons.

One of Galena's cousins came from a neighbouring sheep station with her own little one to help feed Bill while her family, including James, gathered for Sorry Business. As a Kadji, Galena had held an important position in the community. The family mourned and performed ceremony as she was returned to the spirit ancestors. Willara was inconsolable in her grief at the loss and she thought of baby Bill left motherless, and the other children who had been removed. They would never know or remember their mother. Willara raised Bill and he went on to have a fulfilled life as a station hand and sandalwood cutter.

After Galena died, James wrote to the Chief Protector to broker an arrangement for his children. He would pay for their education, which unfortunately was very basic, if his children could return home when they reached sixteen years of age. This was a very unusual arrangement as most children eventually went into the domestic servitude of station work, or in private homes. James, however, was a respected pastoralist and his financial contribution to cash-starved institutions was welcome. The blemish of his relationship with an Aboriginal woman and the fathering of half-caste children was met with disapproval in some quarters, such as with the Chief Protector, but his family had been early settlers in the mid-west of Western Australia and his transgressions were subsequently overlooked.

When Bill was four years old the same Yalgoo policeman came for him. When he arrived at the station homestead, Bill and his grandmother were nowhere to be seen. After Alexander, May and Tom were removed, James had employed a Chinese man, Eddie Wu to

keep lookout at the entrance to the station and the place where he camped is still known as Chinaman's Rock. If Eddie saw an official looking person, or a strange car, he would ride his horse through the hidden valley, which was a shortcut to the homestead, to warn James. Willara would immediately take Bill to hide in the bush, safe from the policeman. After James pleaded ignorance as to their whereabouts, the policeman left frustrated, but also with a sense of relief. After three attempts, he wrote to the local protector to advise the boy had disappeared, probably taken elsewhere, and couldn't be located. No further action was taken, much to everyone's relief.

Annie shudders as she ponders Galena's story. To lose her children and then to lose her own life when she was so young seems so unnecessarily cruel. Eventually, the other children returned home from various missions as each turned sixteen. Even though they couldn't fully remember their mother, the older ones recalled the scent of smoky eucalyptus and emu oil that had enveloped them when they cuddled up to her, and the songs Galena had sung while rocking them to sleep at night. Although other relatives looked out for them, and cared for them, Galena's absence had a profound effect on her children's lives.

Annie is shaken from her musings as a large Warriedar screeches overhead. It flaps its wide brown wings languorously as it circles looking for prey, its white, hooked beak perfectly formed to swoop on small animals. The Warriedar are creation ancestors to many of her family. As he flies low over the clearing near the trees, she can see the rich detail in his lustrous brown feathers, and nearing, he turns his head downwards to look at Annie with his keen brown eye to acknowledge her.

"Hello, my countryman. I am home again", Annie whispers, continuing to shade her eyes and looking up into the bright sky as he flies away.

With the sun now directly overhead, Annie wonders how long she has been sitting under the tree. Slowly rising, she throws the dregs of the tea on the ground before walking back to camp. Lunch is in full swing as she arrives with the smell of barbeque meat wafting through the air. When she reaches Auntie Rosie's camp she helps herself to a couple of crispy lamb chops and some salad.

"Thanks Uncle Bill, I didn't realise how late it was. I was over visiting Gammi Tom's tree."

"That's good, darlin'. We go to the tree every time we're out this way", says Bill. "We're going in a convoy to Bullamania after lunch. A lot of the young ones haven't been there, so it'll be a good chance. Dan and Connor are coming too."

Annie glances around to find her boys. Connor is playing marbles with some other boys and Dan is on a large nearby boulder set back from the camp, smoking a cigarette. He looks morose and pale as he fidgets with the lighter. He is beginning to show signs of anxiety as the cravings take hold again. This is a dry area and no alcohol is allowed and Annie knows he'll have to wait for nightfall before he can have a drink out of view of the family, especially the keen-eyed Aunties.

After lunch, everyone makes their way to the cars for the trip, djubas chattering and tumbling while racing each other. The old people slowly bring up the rear, aided by walking sticks, or a supportive arm under a shoulder. Annie and the boys pile in with Aunty and Uncle but Dan's demeanour has changed for the worse and, scowling, he looks like he wishes he was anywhere but here. Annie and Aunty chat brightly to lighten the mood.

Clouds of red dust are soon billowing above the rough dirt track and after ten kilometres of slow progress the convoy hits the bitumen. Another fifteen kilometres north on the smooth black ribbon, and the lead car, with Gammi Clarrie sitting up front, slows to

turn left onto yet another dirt road. This road is much smoother and in only fifteen minutes the convoy arrives at a rough track leading off the road, in bad shape, with large potholes and ditches created by running water, proving challenging for the smaller cars. A couple of hundred metres off the road there is a large grassy clearing and behind a large granite monolith, similar to Wardagga, but a bit smaller. A fresh water spring, at the base of the rock, is shimmering with clear water and dragonflies hover lazily above. After parking their cars everyone gathers around Gammi Clarrie as he speaks.

“Long time ago, Bemarra moved across this land makin’ songs and rocks full of water. So everywhere there plenty waterholes for our people. Bemarra live ‘ere at Bullamania, and Wardagga, and many places on Country. Every year, many, many yamatji from other places travel ‘ere to Bullamania. Plenty water, plenty places for camping. We ‘ad trade, for ochre and special spices, furs and stones for carvin’ weapons. There was dance and song for Bemarra. Everyone good, everyone follow law.”

Gammi pauses for breath and clears his throat before continuing.

“Then somethin’ really bad ‘appened. Pain still bad after long time but we must remember. Follow me.”

Gammi Clarrie, his two dhudhus and Uncle Bush lead the way as people file through two granite rocks that form a natural pathway around the larger granite rock. There is moss at the bottom of the rocks from the continual seepage of water from the underground. Annie is filled with trepidation as she can already feel the negative, toxic energy moving through the air.

I know what happened here is a soul wound that will never heal.

Up front she can see the hackles on Bungardi and Mudilya rise. Goose pimples suddenly pop up on her arms in dread and foreboding at revisiting a place of so much angst and terror. Connor can sense the distress in the group and turns to his grandmother, asking:

“What happened here Nanna? It feels really bad here.”

Annie grabs him around the shoulders and pulls him close so she can whisper in his ear.

“The story that you are going to hear is very awful, but it is very important you know our history. I am here for you. We can talk about it afterwards if you like.”

She glances at Dan and is surprised at the passive look on his face. Eventually all the family spill out into another clearing, carpeted by lush green grass, which is smaller than the other one and surrounded by large boulders and kurrajong trees. As Annie and the boys enter, she can immediately feel a change in the atmosphere. There is a chill as the temperature drops and a dark malevolence pervades the area.

Gammi, with a solemn look on his face, stands at the front of the group again:

“Don’t go over that way”, he says as he points to the far side of the clearing. “That bad place now. Many, many seasons ago, some mob camp here. More than twenty.”

He holds the fingers of both hands up twice.

“Four wajellas come with guns. They ‘unting yamatji who stole sheep. They very angry, want revenge. One of our yamatji warriors, Ngawila, get up tell wajella go away, no-one ‘ere stole sheep. Boss man point ‘is gun at Ngawila who then rush ‘im to grab gun. They pull each other ‘round and ‘round, both fall on ground. Gun go off and wajella shot in chest, ‘e dead. Yamatji all stand up run fast, wanna get away. Very scared, screamin’. Bibis hold djubas safe. Wajellas shooting yamatjis, fall down dead, hurt. Blood, screamin’ everywhere. But two boys get away. They run fast to yamatji camp at Oudabunna. They bring back men

with spears but all yamatji at Bullamania dead. Big, big Sorry Business. Big mob come from all 'round."

Gammi Clarrie pauses, and even though he has told this story many times, he always feels devastated at the loss of his countrymen and countrywomen, and all the little djubas who never got to grow up. He walks away towards a wide granite archway through which there are enclosed walls and a high ceiling of rock. As the group gathers close, Gammi points to the ochre images on the walls of the enclosure.

"Our mob think important to tell story what 'appened 'ere. They drew pictures so story not lost. See ochre drawings of people, stick figures, there three wajellas holding guns shooting, one wajella lie down, 'e shot, and then Ngawila, and all the other yamitji, lie down, dead. The little fellas are the djubas."

Everyone crowds around, trying to see. Many of the oldies have tears in their eyes and some are gently weeping. A little djuba turns her face into her mother's skirt, her face crumpled after hearing the story. There is a collective sense of shock and sadness at what happened. Annie feels moisture at the corner of her eyes and Connor looks at the ground, not wanting to see the ochre images. Annie notes that Dan's face lacks emotion, so she is not sure what he is feeling.

Out of nowhere, two white bulldogs appear on the rock above the cave. Their sharp teeth are bared, and noses wrinkle as their lips are stretched back showing their gums. They emit an eerie, deep-throated guttural growl as saliva drools from their mouths and their tongues hang out. Some little djubas start crying, quickly comforted by family and adults gasp in fear and surprise. Annie looks up and is shocked not only by the intense blue of the dogs' eyes, but also the look of pure hatred they emanate. Connor looks shocked so Annie draws him close and then glances worriedly at Dan, who is rigid with fear.

Deep howls rise in the throats of Bungardi and Mudilya as they scale the rock towards the dogs, their powerful muscles and agility carrying them swiftly. The bodies of the four animals crash violently, furiously, with limbs askew, fur flying, locked in deadly combat. Blood-curdling sounds cut like knives through the air and strong claws tear and ravage flesh. Teeth draw blood as jaws clamp and muscles puncture, and ears are ripped. The four duelling canines split into pairs, barrelling around intensely, locked together in death rolls. High pitched whines of pain are heard as some of the bites penetrate deeply. As quickly as the clash began, it ends as the bulldogs retreat over the back of the rock, whimpering in submission.

The two dhudhus stand silently, they do not chase, they have won the fight. Their chests heave as they struggle to regain their breath. Both are covered with blood and welts and Bungardi has a torn ear, with deep bloody claw marks down his side and back. Mudilya has a bite on his front left leg and another large wound bleeding on his chest. He is limping when they both descend from the rock and go straight to Gammi, who pulls them close. He is very shocked, but relieved too. They are not just pets; the dhudhu is his totem. He is them, and they are him, they are one.

There is stunned silence. No one can believe what they have just seen. Eventually, Gammi and Uncle Bush pick up a dingo each, and filing through the granite pass, go straight to the car for the first aid kit. The others follow, silent or speaking in lowered voices, some looking cautiously behind to see if the bulldogs are following them. Everyone makes their way quickly to the cars, and after Gammi tends to the dhudhus, they all leave in convoy again. When they eventually arrive back at the Wardagga campsite, everyone is subdued, many still stunned, as they quietly prepare simple evening meals - tinned spaghetti or corned beef on slabs of damper, followed by a strong brew or cordial. Bungardi and Mudilya

have been cleaned, bandaged and fed and seem recovered despite their ordeal. With people feeling emotionally drained it is decided that an early night is in order. While a few oldies sit away from the camp to talk about the day, the majority crawl into their swags and are either soon asleep or contemplating the story of the massacre and the strange, inexplicable occurrence of a dog fight out here in the bush.

Connor is soon asleep, and Dan, who was pale and shaking during the drive back, has disappeared again by the time Annie gets into her swag. She feels exhausted but maybe she is overtired as she can't get to sleep. Annie reflects, once again, on the massacre and then tries to fathom the dog fight. It's almost as if the fight uncannily echoes the massacre, with the bulldogs symbolic of the invading British and the dhudhus being Indigenous to the land; only on this occasion we won. It was like some sort of delayed justice had been gained. How fantastical.

For some reason her thoughts turn to Gammi Tom; maybe it's because she can feel his presence. Family has been weighing heavily during this trip because she feels so close to them in this place, on this Country. Their spirits are all around her and she is sure they sense her presence just as she feels theirs.

Bagalibaya

A gust of chilly wind whipped around Tom's face, stinging his eyes. He turned from the barn door, shuddered and grasped his thin wool coat tighter around his chest and swept his wavy black hair from his eyes. He was a tall, slim boy with a round face and wide mouth that crinkled at the edges when he smiled. His skin was a deep, soft brown, like the other children at the mission, but all the adults he knew had light coloured skin, often with blue eyes, and he sometimes wondered at this difference.

Tom had never seen an adult with the same colour skin as his because once the other children turned fifteen or sixteen, they were sent to farms, sheep stations and private houses to work as domestic servants and stock hands. He never saw them again, although an occasional letter arrived. Walking back to the mission house he gazed around at Edenville, taking in the familiar sight of the green grass, being whipped in the wind today as it gently sloped downwards to the creek.

Bundara Creek flowed at this time of year and when it warmed up there would be slippery tadpoles, and then frogs singing in chorus, hidden amongst the tall reeds. Tom and the other boys loved playing there after they had changed out of their best after church on Sunday. Mrs Feehan wasn't pleased when they came back with muddy trousers and tadpoles in jars. Roundly growling, she'd make them wash and change into their pyjamas straight after tea and send them promptly off to bed.

As Tom reminisced, a soft, shining light from the paddock on the other side of the creek caught his eye. He stared, puzzled, as the light grew brighter and the green grass began merging with strange vibrant reds, yellows, pinks and whites. He was drawn to it, almost involuntarily, slowly stumbling and then running towards the growing light. As he approached the creek, his mouth fell open and his heart quickened; he could feel the warmth from the light on his body, warmth like sunlight. He could see everything more clearly now, but nothing made sense, nothing was familiar. The sandy dirt of the Perth area, and green grass, was replaced with a reddish covering. Was it sand? There were strange daisies, like nothing he had ever seen, covering the red earth, clusters of small yellow and bright pink flowers scattered amongst large white daisies covering the ground.

Near the top of the flower-covered slope, Tom could see movement; a tall, hazy outline with what seemed like an extended arm, walking away. He moved forward, and

tentatively put his bare foot on the red sand, which was surprisingly soft and warm. He made his way through the tall, white flowers and they made a soft, crackling sound, like rustling tissue paper as they gently brushed over his slim, brown legs. He was tall for his age, towering over the other boys, who after a growth spurt when he was eleven, nicknamed him "Big" Tom. He hurried to catch-up and while he got closer, he could never quite reach the distant figure. He could make the outline of a tall, slim woman with burnished brown skin, waving her right arm, beckoning to him. She looked distressed, her face creased with concern, like Mrs Parsons was when her husband passed away last year. Tom felt a deep sadness and hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach, but he didn't know why. While everything was strange, it was familiar at the same time, particularly the woman. He wanted to go to her but couldn't quite get there. The heat suddenly made him feel light-headed, dizzy and then he fell, enveloped by the soft, papery flowers.

He opened his eyes to the dull, overcast sky. He was lying in the grass with the wind whipping and swirling around his body. Wondering how long he'd been there he slowly rose and gazed around. He remembered the light, the warmth and colours, all now gone, replaced by a grey reality. Had it been a dream, had he imagined it all? It had seemed so real and as Tom ran back to the mission house to warm up he couldn't shake the sense of wonderment and strange anxiety. If he spoke to anyone about his experience, they might have thought he was crazy, so he decided to remain silent. As he quickly closed the door behind him, he could smell Mrs Parsons scones cooling on the wire racks. Always hungry, Tom approached the kitchen bench.

"Away with ye Tom", Mrs Parsons growled. "They're for Mrs Feehan's visitors this afternoon."

She had a ruddy face that was perpetually reddened as she bent over the large, wood oven. Her deep-set eyes were green, and often had a kindly twinkle, but nowadays they were always dull, and sometimes red-rimmed, as she grieved the loss of her husband.

“But you always give some of them to us boys”, Tom pleaded, eyeing the strawberry jam and cream.

“Oh, alright, get some of the golden syrup out of the pantry and put a dozen of them in a clean tea towel and mind you bring the towel back later”, she warned.

Tom quickly wrapped the scones before Mrs Parsons changed her mind, as she was often prone to do, then raced out the door to the thick bushes outside the boys’ dormitory. He sat there and ate each scone, one after the other, relishing the taste of the dripping golden syrup and light, warm scones. By the time he finished he felt satisfied, but slightly nauseous, as he wiped the syrup from his mouth with the back of his sleeve. There was an unwritten pact between the boys. Any food given was not expected to be shared but enjoyed by the boy fortunate enough to be given extra food.

In the mornings the boys tumbled from their dormitory beds, eyes smudged with sleep. They fumbled for their clothes and lined up in front of the basins in the large bathroom. The older boys helped the little ones get ready in the morning and at bedtime. Mrs Feehan came in making sure faces were washed and hair combed and flattened on their head with a little water. Tom looked after Sammy who was only five years old. When Sammy had first arrived at the mission at three years of age, he cried at night and often wet the bed. Tom had taken Sammy under his wing, allowing him to sleep in his bed, dealing with any soiled sheets well before dawn and in time Sammy stopped. He became very attached to Tom, and would try to follow him everywhere, which, at times, also got him into trouble.

Mrs Feehan believed in tough discipline and was ready to use the strap on her belt if anyone broke the rules. She was more even-handed than Mr Feehan though, who was all too quick to punish, sometimes dispensing a thrashing resulting in large, red welts on a boy's legs that took weeks to heal. The boys were rightly scared of him, keeping their distance and disobeying his instructions at their own peril.

After morning prayers, the boys ate their breakfast porridge in silence, gazing occasionally through the windows as the sun rose and listening to the lyrical birdsong of the magpies and parrots. It was a quiet time many of them relished before the start of another long day. Tom, and some other boys, Arthur, Henry, and Jimmy, went straight to the barn after breakfast to milk the cows. Tom and the others were able to talk freely and laugh at jokes. The cows were docile and usually cooperative. Tom's favourite, Bessie, seemed happy to see him most days. He gave her an affectionate nuzzle as he led her back into the pasture.

As time passed, Tom's life before the mission became more distant, consisting of vague images that lacked substance and definition. He knew there had been a life before, but he couldn't remember the details of it and eventually he gave up trying to remember. It became too hard. As Tom grew into a young man, he often remembered the woman in the fields of flowers who'd waved to him. He knew it had to have been a dream but he couldn't shake off the sense of the familiar and the real. A gut-feeling, an intuition suggested to Tom that it had been more than a dream.

A few days before his sixteenth birthday, Mr Feehan asked Tom to come to his office. Tom had been told some years before that his father was paying for his education and that Tom would return home to his father after this birthday. As Mr Feehan explained the arrangements for travelling, Tom started to have mixed feelings. The other kids at the

mission were like his brothers and sisters, especially young Sammy. Even though he didn't like the harsh punishments and strict rules at Edenville, he was used to the routine and predictability of this place. Tom was scared about "going home". He didn't know anybody there; even though they were family, they were strangers to him. Tom had been told he was of the Aboriginal race, but he didn't know what that meant. He couldn't imagine a life that was different to the one he was living now. Tom wondered if he would have to do strange things like hunting and dancing in ceremony or be made to go about without clothes. All that he knew about Aborigines he'd read in the history books, where Aboriginal people were described as primitive and uncivilised, and from occasional photos he'd seen of stiff, posed family groups. In one photo there'd even been a group of men with large incisions across their chests. That had really frightened him. Would he have that done to him?

On his birthday, Tom had a special afternoon tea that broke the monotony of the usual sparse food offerings consisting of watery stews with little meat, or boiled potatoes with cabbage. The children were always hungry. Mrs Parsons cooked up a storm of delicious cakes, including a triple sponge with cream and jam. The candles were deformed from frequent use, but they still added a special touch to his farewell. There were lots of hugs and a few tears. Tom promised to write to everyone, and he reassured a distressed Sammy that he would try to visit him, and that he'd even ask his father if Sammy could be employed on the sheep station as a stockman when he came of age.

Tom packed his few belongings, including the gift of a book on geography from Miss Geddes and caught the early train from the local station. Mr Feehan shook his hand and wished him well as billows of steam from the engine and two sharp toots indicated it was time to leave. As the train pulled out of the Midvale station, Tom looked around,

nostalgically, at the green hills and winding creeks dotted with trees. He couldn't believe he was leaving.

The trip north seemed to take forever, as the landscape became drier and more alien, a never-ending red vista that defied reality, or at least Tom's imagination; although in some strange sense it was also recognisable. Anxiety built in his stomach. It was a fear of the unknown and confusion about where he belonged but underlying these feelings were some excitement and hope for new beginnings.

As he pulled into the railway platform at Pindabunna, he saw a tall man with thick, grey hair, a weathered face, and a kind and welcoming smile. Tom stepped off the train and awkwardly lugged his satchel towards the man.

"Hello, son. I'm your father. Welcome home. Everything will be strange for a while, but you'll get used to it. Let's go to the car."

Tom, eyes downcast, grunted a greeting and then followed his father. As they bumped along a dusty road, he took everything in.

This was home? This was where his family was? Why had he left? Didn't they want him?

After an hour they arrived at Ninghan Station. Moreton Bay fig trees at the front, an old whitewashed stone homestead with wide verandas, and grassed areas bordered by palm trees next to the buildings. It was so different from anything he'd known. A small Aboriginal woman and three young Aboriginal people — a girl and two boys — burst out of the front door, chattering happily and smiling at him. He knew they were Aboriginal from all of the photographs and drawings he'd seen and from the other kids at the mission. Suddenly there was silence. They sensed his shyness; he towered over them, but not being able to contain themselves anymore they rushed forward and embraced him in a group hug.

The woman hung back and his father smiled at the reunion. Tom felt uncomfortable, but he let the girl and one of the boys lead him by the arms into the cool, dark house with shiny wooden floors, to sit him in a chair on a large, richly-coloured rug.

“I’m May, your big sister”, said the girl. “And these are your brothers, Alex and Bill. Welcome back. It’s good to see you. We went away too and now we’re back livin’ with the Boss. That’s what Father likes to be called. And this is our second mother, Warlandi.”

The small woman stepped forward and placed her hands softly on Tom’s shoulders and smiled in greeting. She would become one of Tom’s most beloved family members. The Boss signalled for the other children to sit down and Warlandi went to the kitchen bench, returning with a platter of cold mutton, boiled potatoes, snow peas and carrots from the kitchen garden and jug of gravy. The children had all sorts of questions they wanted to ask Tom but their father stilled them with his hand.

“Plenty of time for that. Let the boy have a rest after his long trip. You can talk to him tomorrow.”

Tom was grateful when he was led to a small room with stone floors and a little window that looked out on the lush garden. He was to discover there was a natural spring nearby and that the water supply was permanent. The wooden bed had a thin mattress and was covered with white sheets, two navy blue army blankets and the pillow looked lumpy. He had a chest of drawers for his clothes but otherwise the room was spartan and clean. He liked that as it reminded him of the orderliness of Edenville.

After being woken by a rooster at dawn, he dressed and had a wander about the property, curious about his new home. The garden was well tended, and the sheep paddocks and nearby shearing shed were well-maintained. He was impressed by it all, but he felt like an imposter, an outsider, like he shouldn’t be here. The smell of some sort of

meat cooking wafted through the air, tempting him into the main house. Warlandi was preparing breakfast on the big wood oven, humming as she did so. She turned around as he came in, wiping her hands on her apron.

“Ello, Tom. You bin sleep good? Breakfast soon. Sit down.”

“Yes, I slept really well”, he said awkwardly, before making his way to the table.

Soon the rest of the family came in, ready for the working day, laughing and chatting as they ate breakfast. Tom had never eaten bacon, although he’d had an occasional egg and he had savoured his first taste as he bit into the crispy skin.

After learning that Roy, the station hand, was going to show him the ropes, Tom was kitted out and taken to the horse paddock to learn how to ride. At the end of a day of lessons, Tom thought he walked like a cowboy with legs wide apart.

All he needed were two six-guns strapped to his hips, he thought wryly.

Every part of his body ached and he was sure he was covered in bruises from falling off the horse a few times. Warlandi had been through this before with the other boys and she had prepared a warm bath for him, into which he sank gratefully.

The next few weeks flew by as he learnt everything about working on a sheep station. It was hot, dusty work with long days only broken by a rest day on Sundays, when the family went into the nearby goldmining town of Sturt’s Find to attend a church service. Tom was getting to know his family better and had met some of the locals at church and at the Mid-Winter Ball at Yalgoo.

Sometimes he was so busy working that he didn’t have time to sit down and think about things. Weeks turned into months and after Tom had learnt how to do all the jobs well, he fell into a routine working closely with his father and brothers. While he loved being in the bush, he didn’t enjoy the work like other family members did.

In time, all his questions about his family and past were answered and he worked out for himself that the woman in his vision at Edenville, so many years earlier, had been his mother who had come to say goodbye to him. When he saw a photo of her in the living room at the homestead, he immediately recognised her. He knew how she had died and thought how painful it must have been. The only comfort he took was that he knew she had given birth to him, fed him, held him and loved him. He took the photo and held it to his chest, willing himself to remember her when he was little boy. He felt a rush of warmth envelop him and then he smiled at the memory of her soft breath and warm lips on his cheek.

The old Gammis would come to the homestead sometimes and take him out to learn about culture and those were the times he enjoyed best. He was taken to Wardagga Rock and told of his responsibilities as a custodian to his ancestors, the Bemarra. Over time he learnt where all the ancestors across their Country were located, how to hunt, find water and care for the ancestors. He could survive in the bush and he could read the land. For the first time since leaving Edenville, he felt he belonged. This *was* his home. Finally. He understood what it was to be a yamatji and he felt strong and proud in his identity. And safe; Country protected him.

After a couple of years, he grew used to his new lifestyle, although he liked to get into town whenever possible. Sometimes, at the end of shearing season Boss would take all of his family to Perth. If a tea house or restaurant weren't welcoming of his Aboriginal children, he left immediately.

Tom enjoyed the Friday night dances at the community hall in town and it was there, when he was eighteen years old, that he met his future wife, Ruth. She was from Mingenew visiting her cousin, Tilly, at Sturt's Find. She was the same age as Tom and soon they were

inseparable. Ruth was a very good cook and managed to get a job at the Sturt's Find Hotel, serving hearty meals to travellers and locals alike. They developed strong feelings for each other, sneaking kisses and cuddles in the hotel storeroom whenever Tom was in town. In time they became intimate, and a few months later Ruth realised she was pregnant. They had both spent time in Christian institutions, so they believed in marriage and after gaining reluctant approval from both families, they married at Yalgoo in 1931, with their daughter, Grace being born five months later in 1932. Boss wasn't pleased but it was more to do with their youth than the impending baby. They returned to Ninghan to live, with Ruth helping Warlandi, but the next few years were tough as there was a downturn in the wool trade during the recession. The Boss, however, was a clever businessman and he had put aside savings to see them through times like this.

After six months of spending most of his time at the homestead with Ruth and Gracie, Tom started going to the hotel again and as his drinking increased, he often didn't come home at night. Ruth and the Boss were worried and they both tried to talk to him. Tom told them that the grog helped him forget things from when he was away and stopped him from feeling anxious. He couldn't stop drinking and the more he drank the more depressed he seemed. Tom and Ruth were always arguing now, in raised voices, threatening ultimatums. Everyone at the homestead tip-toed around them. A dark pall hung in the air.

Finally, when Gracie was fourteen months old, Ruth returned to stay with Tilly in town. Tom pleaded with her to return, but as he was still drinking heavily, she refused. A few months later, Ruth and Gracie went to live with her mother, Sarah in Mingenew. Ruth had had enough and could see her husband was gripped by alcohol addiction. Tom was despondent, and he missed them profoundly, but he couldn't give up the beer and spirits. When Ruth next visited Sturt's Find about six months later she discovered that Tom had left

Ningham and was prospecting for gold all over the eastern part of the state. After being confined to one place for so many years, Tom made the most of the opportunity to explore the world around him.

When Gracie was five years old, Tom and Ruth decided to make another go of it. He had a job at the gold battery at Sturt's Find and on Sundays he would go out prospecting. He'd built a little house near the battery, and cut back on his drinking, although now and again he went on a binge when he couldn't fight the cravings. Tom and Ruth enjoyed being with each other, managing to rekindle some of their earlier feelings. Ruth began working again at the hotel and Tilly, who lived nearby, looked after Gracie during the day. Their daughter, Ruby, was born the following year and two years after that their last child, Joan, was delivered by Tom's Auntie Ethel, the bush midwife.

Annie is startled from her musings by the piercing scream of a woman. She quickly realises that a wilhoo is making an appearance. The birdcall is coming from the direction of Bibi's gum tree. The wilhoo is a harbinger of death and Annie has been waiting for its call to announce her mother's death. A few djubas have woken, confused and crying, and she is grateful that it doesn't call again. She goes to check on Connor, but he has slept through it, and she wonders if Dan has heard it and what sense he makes of it. Since Annie was a child, the call of the wilhoo has sent chills down her spine. But soon all quietens, and she settles into her swag again, and her mind wanders back to Gammi Tom and the stories she's been told.

After the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, which brought World War Two to the Pacific, Tom decided to enlist in the army and two months later he walked into the Subiaco enlistment office in Perth and signed up. Once they were allocated army housing, Ruth and the girls moved to Perth, but Ruth found it isolating with Tom living at the

barracks. Tom, on the other hand, loved the army for its discipline and routine. He remained in the army until 1946, so for four years Ruth moved her little daughters around to stay with family, at Sturt's Find and at Mingenew, taking up jobs when they came up. At one stage she returned to work as the cook at the children's home where she'd been removed to as a child. The nuns gave her a little cottage at Parkerville as part of her remuneration package. Although she carried unpleasant memories of her time there, she was respected now because she was an employee. Ruth often heaped extra food on childrens' plates, wiped away tears, and administered hugs freely—out of sight of the nuns, of course. The girls came to love Ruth because she had once been one of them and they knew she understood how they felt.

In 1945, just a few weeks before the atomic bombs would be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Tom was shipped out to Borneo to fight the Japanese in the last Australian campaign of the war. He approached Balikpapan, in Borneo, on an amphibious vessel. As his battalion landed on the beach, bullets whistled around his ears, forcing him to crouch low and run for cover. After they rallied, their first job was to take out the Japanese machine-gun posts. The soldiers had been there a long time and had dug a network of tunnels which were hard to penetrate. However, the Japanese were vastly outnumbered and through targeted air strikes and grenades, the battalion gradually made progress. Tom had never felt more afraid in his life. His heart raced and it felt like there was a fire in the pit of his belly; his legs felt like jelly. Worse was to come as they entered the tunnels; suddenly Tom and the others were engaged in physical combat. Bayonets flashed as they lunged into soft flesh and shots were fired to kill. Often the conflict was one-on-one fighting, with the Japanese willing to die in the process. There was a ferocity and determination Tom had never seen before, and even though Japan surrendered after the atomic bombs, the remaining Japanese fought

on; even in their weakened state they usually succumbed first. Tom saw things that no one should ever see; decapitated heads, brains strewn across the ground, entrails spilling out of guts and blood and more blood, everywhere. Death was everywhere on both sides. Tom spewed more than once as he saw another unrecognisable body. Tom's most terrifying memory involved a Japanese soldier, who, with a blood curdling scream, charged at him. His intention was clear and soon they were both rolling around in the dirt, each trying to gain leverage, punching, kicking, gouging. Strong from years of rural labour, Tom was able to finally get the upper hand. He placed his hands around the Japanese soldier's neck and squeezed with all his might. The soldier's veins popped in his neck and his face went red. His eyes bulged and his face contorted into a death grimace. When he was dead, Tom collapsed and struggled for breath, before rolling over and vomiting.

Tom came back from Borneo a changed man. He was to be haunted by terrifying dreams for the rest of his life. After he was discharged from the Army in 1946 he went back to Country and disappeared into the bush for some time. He emerged three months later, only to find that Ruth had decided to leave him once and for all. She had made a new life for herself, and with the war distancing her from Tom, she didn't want to return to married life, particularly with his alcohol problems. In some ways, Tom was relieved. He needed the freedom to heal and he didn't want to be tied down. He would still see his daughters, but he continued to travel, seeking elusive gold, working as a labourer in different communities. While working in Wiluna he picked up the Pitjantjatjara language. Family was important to him, and while he remained a heavy drinker, he took every chance to see his daughters and grandchildren.

At the age of sixty years, he had a fall on the veranda of his sister May's house, fracturing his skull. He was taken to the Royal Perth Hospital but never regained

consciousness. He wasn't returned to Country to be buried as his daughters couldn't afford the fees to have his body transported home. He was put to rest in Karrakatta Cemetery in Perth instead and in this way the connection with his ancestors was broken. After his death it was discovered that he owned a little gold mine near Sturt's Find. It was called "The Everlasting". The daughters sold the mine and divided the profit, and as all three were on low incomes their father's legacy made a positive difference in their lives for a while.

Exhausted at the toll of these recollections, Annie falls asleep at last with an image of the last photograph taken of Gammi Tom and her. She'd been visiting from South Australia. It was in front of the Moreton Bay fig trees at Ninghan. They stood next to each other, arm in arm, a tall slim man with burnished brown skin and a wide smile, and Annie, so much shorter, fair-skinned, with the only similarity being in some facial features - the almond-shaped eyes, high cheekbones and another wide smile, hiding their individual pain. That photo was taken the year before he died. She never saw him again after that day. Annie thought about the trauma Gammi Tom experienced and how much of that had been passed down from Galena, and how much he had passed to Gracie – and then there was Annie and Dan – this pervasive pain that only seem to intensify down the generations.

The next day the atmosphere at the camp is much quieter. It is a welcomed rest day, particularly after the events of yesterday. People catch up on sleep, sit and yarn or explore Wardagga, take walks, or drive down to Lake Indirri to visit the coodaroo meeting place and fresh spring. Gradually, everyone relaxes and when the next day passes in the same fashion, family come to terms with the week; both the Sorry Business and the events at Bullamania. The final night is intended to be one of ceremony and celebration and the men and women are painted with white ochre for the Bemarra ceremony. The clapping boomerangs and clapsticks start in unison and the song is sung by the Elders as the men commence the

Bemarra dance, their arms lifted out in front to make a v-shape, like the head of a snake. Weaving in and out and between each other, they represent a group of Bemarra moving in the water. The clapping and singing stops suddenly and the women rise as one, and as the boomerangs are clapped by the young men and the song restarts, the women grasp each other by the waist to form the long line of the mother Bemarra. She has birthed all the Bemarra and is responsible for protecting and caring for all the little Bemarra. The cycles of songs are repeated and eventually the two groups come together as one, and then other family and djubas join them in final celebration. Even Gammi Clarrie, with his arthritic knees, joins in the last dance cycle. Connor looks on in awe, and then he too merges with the group as they dance, copying the movements of the males. Everyone is smiling as renewal and affirmation lift the mood. Dan watches the ceremony from afar and Annie notices he looks dejected. He has run out of scotch, she surmises, and this last night is something to be tolerated, not enjoyed. She knows he can't wait to get to the pub at Wubin tomorrow. Everyone wakes early the next day for a quick breakfast and then begin packing the cars. Some family members have long distances ahead of them. There are mixed feelings. This has been a special week, but it will be good to get home too.

Dan's misery is clear for all to see. He has lost his Nanna and now he has to say goodbye. Withdrawal symptoms add to his torment. He stoops to drag a handful of dirt into his hand and walks to the edge of the rock pool to bid farewell to the most important person in his life. Small green parrots, flit from their dried mud nests attached to the granite rock as they search for food. Annie stands next to Dan, taking his arm. Below, sunlight dapples on the water and reflects shadows of motion on the overhang. Together they gaze into the clear, never-ending depths of the pool, but as he leans over the water with his sand-filled hand outstretched, Annie feels an even stronger tug on her arm, and Dan is

away, body twisting and falling, splashing forcefully through the still surface of the deep pool. There are shouts of surprise and alarm and within seconds she is joined by the family, including Gammi Clarrie.

As they gaze down, they see a flurry of motion and glimpse luminescent green and grey miri; thousands of perfectly shaped diamonds surrounding Dan. Water churns, creating foam and light refracts like cut crystal; light and shade against the underwater rocks. There are two Bemarra swirling around Dan, weaving in and out and gently caressing his skin. A black eye looks at Dan, a recognition, a knowing – *I am you and you are me.*

Though straining over the edge at the front, as if holding her family in place, Annie catches Gammi Clarrie's knowing smile nevertheless. And sees him take a small carved object from his pocket which he then rubs between his forefinger and thumb. Suddenly Dan's form clears the swirling Bemarra, and as he breaks through the surface of the pool he gasps for air, swallowing deep breaths and causing his chest to heave as if it could burst. There is a golden, luminous sheen to his skin. His face is calm and his relaxed body devoid of the usual twitches. There is silence. Everyone who is there knows what has happened, although only a few have witnessed these events first-hand before. Dan scans the faces in front of him and alights on his mother. Their eyes lock and the hint of a smile passes over his face. Annie feels tears prick as she gazes back at her son. He is so fresh and new. They can both sense it. Freedom from trauma has been gained through the process of healing. As he emerges from the pool, she steps forward and hugs him in a deep loving embrace. He whispers into her neck:

"I felt Nanna Gracie. I felt her."

Annie says nothing, but nods. She feels light. There has been a release, a shift and they both know it. Connor runs up to join in the embrace, and finally, Gammi Clarrie puts his

arms around the three of them and draws them all closer. As the little group breaks apart, Dan walks through a sea of wide smiles, not shrinking from the pats on the back and hugs. He feels a warm, spiritual embrace by family. He belongs, he is one of them. Even Bungardi and Mudilya come for a pat. He squats down and they nuzzle him, sniffing in approval.

Later Annie, Connor and Dan reluctantly say goodbye to family members who are still there, even though the atmosphere is still electric with excitement and hit the road to Perth. They have a long drive ahead. Dan is still wired, his body buzzing from his experience. He is trying to make sense of it all, but his mind feels full of light and energy. He feels euphoric and senses renewed hope for the future and an escape from a distressing past. Dan feels hopeful about his future relationship with his mother.

The car hums smoothly along the road, gradually putting a greater distance between them and Country. As the hours pass, Annie starts to feel weary, but the glow of the week remains - a sense of hope and promise lingers. She glances at Dan in the front passenger seat. Although she knows he is exhausted from the events of the last few days, he still has a look of freshness, with a smooth face and limbs relaxed in repose. As she looks at Connor in the rear-view mirror, his face is flushed with sleep. He has had a wonderful, but exhausting experience. He has been embraced into the family's cultural and spiritual life in a way that, Annie knows, is still bewildering, but also exciting for him. She settles back into her seat for the long drive ahead, breathing deeply and trying to relax. She is looking forward to some solitude to reflect on all that has happened in these past days and what it all means for the future.

Annie stops at New Norcia mid-afternoon for a quick break and some coffee. Dan and Connor each wake, groggily, to visit the men's toilets, then quickly devour some snacks before resuming napping after Annie pulls out onto the bitumen.

She starts to think about how all of their lives are interwoven and complex, how the past affects the future and deep bitterness catches her by surprise.

Five generations of my family have been affected so far by the invading bastards since they forced us off our land and now they continue to brutalise us with their cruel policies.

But there is a soothing promise of healing, too. If Connor should experience trauma like so many others, she knows now that the ancestors might help him. She hopes Connor's life has the potential to even break the cycle of trauma.

After the sun sets, they reach the outskirts of Perth as street and house lights begin to twinkle. Annie reflects that the healing Dan and she have experienced may provide a way for their relationship to be rebuilt and strengthened. But she resolves he will never, ever, know the true circumstances of his birth.

That bastard raped me when I was young and vulnerable, but Dan will never be made to wear that shame. I'm prepared for the names some cousins will call me, or the silent treatment they might dish out, but I will not be defined by that terrible ordeal. I am healed; I am a strong yamatji, and the ancestors will always protect me.

Annie is hopeful yet that her relationship with Dan will be transformed. He can rebuild his life now, just as she did after Ninghan healed her. Her ancestor took away her hurt and guilt and gave her new purpose by which to live her life, both spiritually and culturally. As the car merges into busy Perth traffic she thinks of the lives changed, the trauma healed and the privilege she has as a Yamatji who is connected to the spiritual ancestors and, by extension, to all her family for generations to come. Perhaps this is the start of a shift, where yamatji break the traumatic yoke of the colonial legacy and are able to live empowered lives of their own choosing. She hopes so.

Conclusion – Reflections on the creative writing process

When I first embarked on the creative writing journey, I did not have any particular expectations or predictions about what might arise during the process, or what feelings may be triggered. I wasn't prepared for the range of complex memories and emotions that the writing would expose; deep sadness, guilt, shame, anger, regret, and remembrances of distressing events, resulting in re-traumatisation and the resurfacing of emotional scars. I thought I had let go of the past, of the pain, but I realised early in the writing that the trauma of my life was deeply embedded and internalised within my psyche. I became aware that there had been no healing from the trauma, and that there was unresolved personal pain and suffering that was revealed in my role as an author with first-hand experience of the kinds of trauma explored in the narrative. The trauma of other generations of my family resonated with me deeply, as not only were there similarities with my own life, but their suffering was tied up with colonial trauma. The most significant revelation was my unacknowledged and unknown need for healing of some sort.

As a prolific reader of a wide range of literature from an early age I have always been engaged and captivated by diverse genres, and the power of language and literary techniques to convey rich and complex narratives. In the last twenty-years I have become particularly interested in the stories written by Aboriginal people about Aboriginal people, whether fiction or memoir, as many themes resonate with me on a personal, family and professional level. As an Aboriginal person I recognise that my own lived experiences are similar to those in varied Aboriginal literature. These remembrances are reflected not only in my personal and family life, but also in the forty-years of working in Aboriginal programs

in communities across Australia, where I have had first-hand experience in witnessing the ongoing oppression and suffering which pervades Aboriginal peoples' lives. I came to the realisation that as long as Australia is a settler colonial state where Aboriginal peoples have little control of their lives, there are limited opportunities for self-determination, empowerment, and healing to take place. I concluded that storytelling is a means by which Aboriginal writers can claim some power and engage in an Aboriginal truth telling journey about colonisation and trauma without interference from the state. This potential freedom of expression appeals to me in my desire to explore the transgenerational trauma endured by generations of my family, to better understand my life, culture, relationships and identity. I have always wanted to understand where I belong as there are missing parts in my life story that I feel acutely, and I have spent a long time trying to make coherent sense of the jigsaw. This was my chance to do so.

My preference would have been to write a biographical account, but I realise that there are too many sensitivities, cultural protocols, painful memories and complex relationships to fully expose a faithful account, as I recall, of my family's experiences. I therefore decided to write a loosely biographical account which touched on critical events but retained the anonymity required for the various characters and environments in the story. I have found the writing process to be both cathartic and emancipatory, while at the same time re-traumatising and painful as personal and family suffering was revisited. The complex range of emotions experienced during the writing journey, while initially challenging and distressing, has enabled me to gain a sense of control in my life, as well as moving in a positive direction to manage the trauma, and hopefully, eventually, to experience cathartic healing.

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