HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO

Intersecting Narratives for Resistance:
Unpacking Colonization, Gender, Race, Healing and Liberation in Australian First Nations' Poetry

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Tiivistelmä (Abstract): In this thesis, I journey reflexively through seven poems of Australian First Nations' poetry collection book *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (ed. Whittaker, 2020) with the theoretical lens of decolonial queer theory and knowledge of First Nations' onto-epistemology, while utilizing Pacific Indigenous literary methodology *wayreading* (Perez, 2022), that centers marginalized voices and gives orientation in the complex relationships between Indigenous poetry, identity, decolonial politics and aesthetics, concentrating on the dynamic moving signs of Indigenous culture and the role of narratives. Combining wayreading to Australian Indigenous poetic context, it serves as revealing how the subjectivities and agency of Indigenous Peoples are shaped by the discourses of race, class, gender and sexuality. Perez' analogy concentrates on Pacific wayfinding and navigating on the seas, and in the Australian First Nations' poetry's context, while acknowledging its Pacific roots, I combine it to this context to navigate the journey of the *Fire Front* relating to my research question, that concentrates on three thematizations: how the critique of colonization and colonial history of Australia, notions on intersections of gender and race, and liberation and healing are depicted in the poems. The concentration on these three intertwining and overlapping narratives may form a pathway to understanding the ways how the poems might dislodge racialized and gendered colonial discourses and introduce the meanings of Indigenous collective liberation and healing.

The seven poems analyzed in this thesis, with the analogy of a burning Fire Front, burn through critique of colonization and colonial history of Australia (*Yúya Karrabúrra [Fire is Burning]* by Alice Eather, *Many Girls White Linen* by Alison Whittaker), unmasks the intersectionality of gender and race in the resistance against colonial power structures (*Black Woman* by Ruby Langlord Ginibi, *Expert* by Ellen van Neerven) and starts to feed the fire for Indigenous liberation and healing (*Say My Name* by Meleika Gesa-Fatafehi, *Custodial Seeds* by Yvette Holt, *I Run…* by Melanie Mununggurr-Williams). Reflexive wayreading through the poems show that the critique of colonization and colonial history of Australia is a prominent theme in the poems, when depicting the experiences of abuse, survivance, and strength of identity during the colonial disposition of families. Intersectionality is depicted through the diversity of experiences and intersecting oppressive relations. The poems actively deconstruct and queer the colonial, white, cisheterosexual patriarchal gaze and the power structures they form, with the reconstruction of and reconnection to the critical agency and gaze of Black and Indigenous women, queer, and non-binary people. Oppositional and interrogative gaze is utilized to reimagine and counterview history, culture and discourses, and this deconstructs the centrality of whiteness and disrupts conventional sexist and racist stereotypes of Indigenous agency. Healing and liberation are

depicted by freeing oneself from the coloniality of power and oppressive organization of life, re-emerging a collective identity and resilience healing the colonial wounds, emphasizing the strong connection to kin, land and Dreaming, and working for collaboration and respectful interaction to conserve Indigenous cultural diversity. These depictions form an important notion on Indigenous self-determination. I write my thesis to reveal that knowledge is diverse, and that poetry is an effective way of knowing, speaking, and executing collective political agency and decolonial literary activism. The research background in my writing is in Indigenous and gender studies, as well as ethical research conducted in respect and companionship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Throughout my writing, I acknowledge my positionality in white Western academia and put emphasis on the intention of not essentializing or neocolonizing Indigenous knowledge or experience, but instead on queering the existing gendered and racialized europatriarchal discourses by centralizing Indigenous collective voices in poetry.

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Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the sovereignty of Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognize the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. I pay my respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and to Elders past, present and future.

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgment of Country allows the wider community (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to show respect for and acknowledge the Traditional Owners; their rich culture, their heritage and their continual relationship with the lands and waters. It demonstrates that we value and recognise the Traditional Owners' customary place within Australian society today.

Anyone can make an Acknowledgement of Country. It does not have to be an Indigenous person and Indigenous people may or may not be present.

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1 Introduction

> *Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of 'talking back,' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject — the liberated voice.*
>
> *- bell hooks, 1989*

Genuine change towards equality in a racialized and gendered patriarchal world seldom happens with the tools provided by that world: in the words of Audre Lorde, 'for the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house'. She asks: 'What does it mean when tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?' (Lorde, 1984, in Sister Outsider, 2007, p. 110). I find value in Lorde's reasoning, that interdependency of different and equal strengths can generate power to seek new ways of being in the world, as well as social change.

Poetry has globally had an influential role in literary art and aesthetics. It may serve as activism with decolonial and queering notions of the world. In Black feminist literary history, poetry has provided with countering, re-imagining and even satirizing discourses challenging white, colonial, western and heteropatriarchal perspectives (e. g. Lorde, 1984; hooks, 1989). This type of poetry may rebuild the world beyond the white patriarchal gaze and enact collective healing from colonial wounds. Interrogative poetry has also been a strong part of Australian Indigenous Peoples' art, that has taken many different forms in oral and literal storytelling. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples belong to the oldest continuous cultures on earth, with at least 65,000 years old history (Clarkson et al., 2017, in McCartan, Brimblecombe & Adams, 2022). Aboriginal absence from Australian national histories, ancestral land and political spheres is discursively replicated in their absence from the poetic canon, which in turn reinscribes this power on social, economic, political, and literary terms (Bouwer, 2024, p. 339). However, the active agency and voice of Indigenous Peoples in art and texts has been vital and resisted through the hardships. As Alison Whittaker argues in an anthology *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (2020, ix-x), poetics are practiced extensively by their communities: 'across oral storytelling, embedding storytelling insights into Language itself, music and

song, conversational wordwork, published poetry with major publishing houses, small press poetry, self-published print poetry, slam poetry, protest poetry, performance poetry'.

In this thesis, I aim to journey reflexively through a First Nations' poetry collection book *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (ed. Whittaker, 2020) and concentrate especially on seven of its poems, depicting language and notions on interrogating white settler colonialism, reimagining and counter-viewing the colonial history, intersections of gender and race in the resistance against colonial power structures, and Black and Indigenous liberation and healing. The research background in my writing is in Indigenous and gender studies, as well as ethical research conducted in respect and companionship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Through the theoretical lenses of Indigenous studies and decolonial queer theory, I am interested in finding discourses for collective political agency against oppressive relations (Keddie, 2012) as well as reflecting and reimagining the world beyond and otherwise – acts that can be seen as a common shared ground for queer theory and Indigenous studies. Thus, I will draw my analysis on the possibilities and critique of the combination of queer and decolonial theories, which may work simultaneously as queering and decolonizing of normative and oppressive discourses, those that have been distributed globally through colonization. In addition, this helps to address in Bakshi's (2020, p. 535) words, 'the normative coloniality of queer studies by enabling a dialogue between queer and decolonial analyses, productively resisting (and healing from) Euro-American-centrism of queerness'.

The pre-existing research specifically on Australian Indigenous poetry has been predominantly done in Australian literary studies and postcolonial studies, and it has concentrated on Australian settler colonialism (i.e. Shallit, 2022), female subjectivity in Australian Indigenous women's poetry (i. e. Čerče, 2022) Indigenous sovereignty (i. e. Brewster, 2009), possibilities of poetry as a pedagogical tool that can accommodate and discuss painful knowledges (i. e. Keddie, 2012), exploring grief via poetry as a therapeutic technique (i. e. Hennessy & Truneckova, 2022), and critical reviews of Australia's identity and history (i. e. Disney, 2023). A more recent research paper is Reardon-Smith's (2023), where they analyze queer Indigenous poetry and its storytelling practices of affirmation, and the possibilities of them for unsettling the ontological stability of colonial-settler ideology and subjectivity. In addition to Indigenous poetry, previous research has considered the role

of 'allies', collaborators with mutual goals and active contributions, in breaking silences in a wide project of decolonial literary activism (i. e. Bouwer, 2024). Bouwer (2024) has demonstrated an influential Australian anticolonial ally poet Judith Wright's work as literary canon reformation and raised considerations what defines decolonial literary activism. Considering the global perspective on poetic discourses, there has been a considerable amount of research on for example how poetic discourses influence and persuade with argumentation (i. e. AlOraini, 2015), how schema theory accounts for the construction of literary text worlds specifically in poetry (i. e. Semino, 1995) as well as the semantics and feminist translation processes in poetic discourses (i. e. Díaz-Diocaretz, 1985).

On the other hand, what has not been in the center of literary research as widely is utilizing decolonial queer thinking in a self-reflexive reading of Australian First Nations' artists' poetry, that can serve as an active means for genuine social change and resilience against the oppressive discourses. Considering the context of literary activism and the intertwining themes of the poetry anthology *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (ed. Whittaker, 2020), I form my research question as follows:

> *How are critique of colonization and colonial history of Australia, notions on intersections of gender and race, and liberation and healing depicted in the poems?*

This research question forms my contribution as where for example Bouwer (2024) left off with analyzing the poetry of an anticolonial ally Judith Wright: with this formation of the research task, I am able to center the voices of First Nations' poets themselves, such as Reardon-Smith (2023) does in their work centralizing queer Indigenous poetry. The concentration on the three narratives may form a pathway to understanding the ways how the poems might dislodge racialized and gendered colonial discourses and introduce the meanings of Indigenous liberation and healing. Attentiveness to active silences can be seen as deeply significant contribution to decoloniality (Bouwer, 2024, p. 338). Adding in queer theory's standpoints, in my view, can help me better reach those active silences. These are the reasons why I chose to read and analyze poems from First Nations' storytelling collection book *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (edited by Alison Whittaker, 2020) for this thesis. The selected seven main poems of analysis are by Alice Eather, Ruby Langlord

Ginibi, Alison Whittaker, Ellen van Neerven, Meleika Gesa-Fatafehi, Yvette Holt and Melanie Mununggurr-Williams. Considering my position in white Western academia, minimizing the risks of essentializing or appropriating knowledges or narratives, and the demand for the reader's reflexivity in the poetry anthology (Whittaker, 2020, p. xi), I execute the analysis according to *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities* (2018), reflexivity of one's research position (McCartan, Brimblecombe & Adams, 2022) and speak/listen trade (Simpson, 2021). My intention in this thesis is not to essentialize or neocolonize Indigenous knowledge or experience, but to queer the existing gendered and racialized europatriarchal discourses by centralizing Indigenous collective voices and poetry. I write my thesis to reveal that knowledge is diverse and that poetry is an effective way of knowing, speaking, and executing literary activism.

> *Aboriginal poetics have always been caught within the gaze of too little, too much.*
> *– Evelyn Araluen in Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today (2020, p. 39)*

Given that the analogy of a Fire Front is prominent in the poetry collection book, I strive to execute my journey in this thesis through the themes in question in this analogy of a moving, changing, and reshaping Fire Front. First, I introduce the main theoretical backgrounds to help contextualize the research topic. This starts from journeying via the settler colonial history in Australia and Australian Indigenous onto-epistemologies connecting it to First Nations' poetry. Here I provide an insight to Australian Indigenous understanding of being and certain knowledges, that can be considered to affect the forms and contents in Indigenous poetry. Next, I introduce decolonial queer theory, guided by especially Pereira (2019), that informs my writing throughout the thesis. Relating to decolonial queer theory and analysis, I have connected Mignolo's and Vázquez' (2013) framework and theory of 'decolonial aestheSis' and decolonial healing, concentrating on centering artistic expressions that have been dismantled or suppressed in history, to the theorization of my thesis. The Fire Front journey through the depictions in the poems starts to ignite in the methodology and material chapter, where I discuss the ethics of this research and speak/listen trade, Indigenous research agenda towards self-determination, as well as the dilemmas in white Western academy, its structure and paradigms either neglecting Indigenous voices or representing them according to colonial discourses. What is central in this discussion, is my own positionality in white western academy in the global North.

After journeying ethics, I introduce the material of this analysis, the poetry collection book *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (ed. Whittaker, 2020). Considering the research question, I have selected seven poems from this book that depict either critique of colonization and colonial history of Australia, intersectionality of gender and race in resisting colonial power structures, or Indigenous liberation and healing. Important to note is that even though the poems are sectioned each to one theme of analysis, they have strong connections between and within all the three thematizations. The selected seven poems for the analysis are *Yúya Karrabúrra (Fire is Burning)* by Alice Eather, *Black Woman* by Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Many Girls White Linen* by Alison Whittaker, *Expert* by Ellen van Neerven, *Say My Name* by Meleika Gesa-Fatafehi, *Custodial seeds* by Yvette Holt and *I Run…* by Melanie Mununggurr-Williams.

After introducing these poems and their poets, Fire Front in the analysis gets its continuing sparks from a contemporary Pacific Indigenous literary methodology *wayreading*. This methodological approach of reflexively interpretating Indigenous artistic or cultural texts has been constituted by Craig Santos Perez (2022), who states that wayreading originates from canoe traditions' navigating term 'wayfinding', and that gives orientation in the complex relationships between Indigenous poetry, identity, decolonial politics, aesthetics, and diasporic migrations. By emphasizing the dynamic moving signs of Indigenous culture and the role of narratives in this process, this method helps to understand how the subjectivities and agency of Indigenous Peoples are shaped by the discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality, among others. Perez' analogy concentrates on Pacific wayfinding and navigating on the seas, and in the Australian First Nations' poetry's context, acknowledging its Pacific roots, I combine it to this context to navigate the journey of the Fire Front relating to the research question depicted by the writers.

In the analysis chapter, the Fire Front burns through critique of colonization and colonial history of Australia (*Yúya Karrabúrra [Fire is Burning], Many Girls White Linen*), unmasks the intersectionality of gender and race in the resistance against colonial power structures (*Black Woman, Expert*) and starts to feed the fire for Indigenous liberation and healing (*Say My Name, Custodial Seeds, I Run…).* In the conclusions chapter, I go through the results of the analysis based on my research question, first under the three thematizations in my research question, and then discussing their intertwining narratives

with and between those themes. In this chapter I also consider the ethical perspective and execution of my thesis according to *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities* (2018). In addition, to end the conclusion chapter, I consider how decolonial queer theory answers when considering decolonization of agencies, bodies, sexualities and knowledge, and what future research could provide to take steps toward Indigenous self-determination.

2 Theoretical backgrounds and context

2.1 Settler colonialism in Australia and Indigenous self-determination

According to McCartan, Brimblecombe and Adams (2022, p. 1), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples belong to the oldest continuous cultures on earth, with at least 65,000-year-old history behind them. Globally, settler colonialism has severely harmed and often destroyed cultures, traditions and ways of living for many Indigenous Peoples. This has also led to social and health inequalities. Settler colonialism seeks to 'replace the Indigenous populations of a colonised territory with foreign settlers who establish an ongoing system of control, domination and marginalisation' (McCartan, Brimblecombe and Adams (2022, p. 1). Settler colonialism can be divided into two categories, external and internal: in external colonialism, parts of Indigenous lands (i. e. minerals, non-human-animals, plants) are extracted to build the wealth and privilege of the colonizers, and in internal colonialism different modes for control are used (i. e. prisons, policing, schooling) (Tuck & Yang, 2012, in McCartan, Brimblecombe & Adams, 2022, p. 1). Settler colonialism and its processes normalize the settler occupation, while ignoring and erasing the pre-existing relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their lands (McCartan, Brimblecombe & Adams, 2022, p. 1). According to Jaworsky (2018, in McCartan, Brimblecombe & Adams, 2022, p. 1) this structure is deeply embedded within legal, economic and political systems, that continuously oppose to Indigenous Peoples' rights to their lands and sustain racism as well as socioeconomic inequities.

The history of Australian settler colonialism started in 1788, when the continent was settled by the British on the claim of *Terra Nullius* (unowned land), illegally. The myth of *Terra Nullius* was an origin of 'patriarchal white sovereignty' in Australia, that was seen to justify the violent and controlling acts of British Crown (Moreton-Robinson, 2009, p. 64). In addition, sovereignty of the land has never been ceded by any Indigenous Peoples. In settler institutions, such as education facilities, churches, prisons, government and healthcare, Eurocentric ways of thinking maintain and reproduce privilege and power structures. Throughout history, Australian Commonwealth Governments have evaded constitutional provisions and treaty-making with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. (McCartan, Brimblecombe & Adams, 2022, p. 1).

Dying race theory as well as cultural assimilation grounded in biological notions of race (Moran, 2005) were used as tactics to oppress Indigenous peoples. The white Christian settlers found that they had a duty to provide for the dispossessed, and 'half-cast' policy was made in 1885 (Ann Bon) – 'full blood' Indigenous people were provided by the state to get by while 'slowly dying out', children were taken to be adopted by white families or to children's homes, and families torn apart. The 'half-casts' were 'in the eyes of many in the settler community, simultaneously Aboriginal but not Aboriginal … [and they] posed a direct threat to a pure white race and/or culture' (Moran, 2005, p. 173). Moran (2005, p. 174) states: 'For settlers and their governments, the 'half-caste' or 'mixed-blood' was the category of Aboriginality crucial to the imagining of absorbing or assimilating Aborigines into the white nation.'. Race was articulated very provocatively being something 'to be disposed of', at the same time being tied to 'colored' peoples, continuing their racialization. The violent race discourse reproduced the categories of so called 'submissive' racialized groups, that would be somehow 'homogenously submissive species'. Moreton-Robinson (2009, p. 65) describes how Indigenous people were considered as 'primitive people, nomad, … irrational, emotive, deceitful, simple minded, violent and uncivilised' by white settlers.

In addition, Lawrence (1982, p. 48) states that the racist ideologies have been popular because they succeed in reorganizing the common-sense racist ideologies of the white working-class, which means that the racialization relates closely to class struggles. The 'common sense' discourse has also been part of the naturalization of the social construction of gender roles, that rooted in the biological differences of the sexes – creating specific images of femininity and masculinity, that are considered as 'natural' attributes of sexes (Lawrence, 1985, p. 59). White nuclear family's status where men worked and women were mothers was emphasized by early governments' legislation of Commonwealth of Australia (Lake and Reynolds, 2008, p. 164). All this equates that the construction of race, class and gender between the forces of colonialism and capitalism are intertwined, also in Australian colonial history. Moran (2005, p. 193) suggests that the perceptions of Aboriginal people that their culture was diminished under governmental policies of assimilation contributed to their increasing resistance to those policies.

Thus, the scientific racism in essentialist anthropological science and its discourse had its basis in biological determination and social Darwinism, that are hence proven to be scientifically false – 'there is no biological basis for diving the human species into groups based on the idea that certain physical traits … are tied to attributes of behaviour, intellect,

and morality' (Torrens, Miron and Inda, 1999, p. 5). Relating to this, Moreton-Robinson (2009, p. 64) refers Foucault in stating that race surfaced as a biological construct in 18th century, because disciplinary knowledges came in front and regulatory mechanisms were developed to control the population (i. e. *biopower*). These so-called scientific ideas were used to justify Native peoples' 'subordinarity and inferiority' in relation to white settlers, as whiteness was constructed as being somehow 'primary, default, fundamental, pure and normal' form of human groups (e. g. Evans, 2002; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). The settler state started a regime of cultural assimilation, in which 'Commissioner of Native Affairs' A. O. Neville took the regime to extreme levels, and his idea was to merge Aboriginal Peoples into the white community, for example with 'mixed marriages'. This ended up in deep manipulation of Aboriginal Peoples' relationships, as Neville was trying to 'breed out the colour'.

Australia's state foundation and legislations have leaned towards the dichotomous racializing thought of 'us and them', white savior complex (Evans, 2002), and whites and non-whites (Lake and Reynolds 2008, p. 164). This has constructed the foundation for a settler colonial idea that 'history starts when white history starts', and Indigenous existence, rights and ontologies have been diminished from those perspectives. Evans (2002, p. 185) refers 1900s politician's Alfred Deakin's words that 'one of the central thrusts of Federation was to make Australia, as far as possible a white man's country'. This was the discourse of 'White Australia' concept and policy, dictating for example citizenship rights, freedom of movement and trade, and that was eventually critiqued by many feminist, socialist and even conservative movements (Lake and Reynolds, 2008, p. 158-159). White Australia discourse was also an ideology of possession considering territory (Moran, 2005, p. 171). In addition, other different legal acts, such as the Aboriginal Protection Act in 1915, have been means to oppress, maintain, disposition, and take advantage of the racialized Indigenous groups, and the impacts of this process have continued until this day. The legislation was put to force to justify the mistreatment and violence of the unvalued 'other'.

According to Smith (1999, p. 109), Indigenous Peoples across all states in Australia had had a long struggle for land rights and recognition as citizens of Australia. Around the 1960s, Aboriginal groups challenged for title to lands which were consistently refused by the state governments. In 1967, ironically, white Australians were asked to vote whether Indigenous Australians could have rights in their own land, and because of referendum's wide-range support, they made the changes in the constitution – that eventually did not radically make

transformations for Aboriginal Peoples (Smith, 1999, p. 109). The activism and political work over land rights after 1967 continued with direct action, petitions, a tent embassy in 1972, silent protests during white Australia's celebration of two hundred years of settlement in 1988 as well as challenging through governments and courts (Smith, 1999, p. 109-110).

The policies and legislations considering land and sea – especially as settler possessions – can be seen as non-Aboriginal accommodations designed to protect the interests of the state and non-Indigenous people. 'Equal rights' seem to have been understood as possessions, that white people and the structures within have used to compromise the horrors of the second world war. By maintaining them, they work in advantage and assets of white gaze and agency, to ensure the benefits and privilege as well as economic interests while seeming as 'progressive'. This has meant that Indigenous people have had to exist within the Western capitalist neoliberal system whilst also maintaining their cultural heritage and obligations. Racism, cisheteropatriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism and Eurocentric forms of knowledge production are all things that maintain and reconstruct colonial power dynamics that determine the distribution of power among all people (e. g. Lugones, 2007). I suggest that the colonial power structures, with this understanding, can be seen as constituting of white, Western, patriarchal and racist discourses, Eurocentric knowledge, binary gender system, wide-range state control and legislation. This summarizing statement can be seen as a motivation for decolonizing projects.

The concept of Indigenous self-determination, having genuine decision-making power and responsibility, has gone through as complex history as the processes of colonization. According to Moreton-Robinson (2009, p. 66) it has been part of governmental policy discussions since the 1970s. She suggests that self-determination was considered to relate to control over policy and decision making, and specifically the determination of structures, processes and priorities. Later in 1989 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was founded and represented to the world as 'the epitome of Indigenous self-determination by the Keating-led Labor government' (Moreton-Robinson, 2009, p. 66). Still the regional councils did not have full autonomy and were controlled and monitored closely. The self-determination models changed throughout the political surroundings, and ATSIC was reviewed, claimed and closed, and the government suggested Indigenous Peoples having received more rights than their entitlements as citizens, and the amendment of Native Title Act 1993 was seen as an end of an Indigenous-rights-based policy (Moreton-Robinson, 2009, p. 67). The politics considering Indigenous rights were guided by neoliberal

individualist pathology, that perpetuated Indigenous welfare dependency (Moreton-Robinson, 2009, p. 69). Moreton-Robinson (2009, p. 77) states, that if patriarchal white sovereignty did not refuse Indigenous sovereignty, the 'Indigenous entitlements to resources would allow Indigenous people to engage in the economy on a different basis – as self-determining property owning subjects …'.

Despite the wide-range oppressive actions by white settler occupation, Indigenous Peoples have resisted and fought for their rights since the beginning of Australia's colonialism. Too often the discourse of Indigenous Peoples staying as passive victims revolves in the center. Noongar and Yawuru academic and storyteller Elfie Shiosaki took a poetic lens to this and described the reverting, reimagining, truth-telling Aboriginal oppositional gaze. According to them there was no problem with speaking out, but rather with listening deeply and properly. Shiosaki (2015) suggests, that new national and transnational narratives of Indigenous political autonomy are emerging which contest and negotiate accounts of Australian history. The author writes, that for example many Noongar people adapted writing to dynamically engage with an international distribution of ideas and movements, and they actively presented parts of a new discourse of Indigenous human rights: 'their writing represents a transnational history of an idea and movement, around a century before Indigenous human rights were recognised in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [in 2007]' (Shiosaki, 2015, in Curtin University: Reimagining Australia: Encounter, Recognition, Responsibility, 2016).

The historical and ongoing process of colonization of Indigenous peoples and their lands has for long been determining constructions of gender, sexuality and race in mainstream discourses, media and arts. The constructions of gender were – and are – informed by race and racism (Lugones, 2007, p. 206). Lugones (2007, p. 186) argues that colonialism imposed a new gender system on colonized peoples, that concentrated on heterosexual white patriarchy. Throughout the colonial history, representations of Black and Indigenous people have been extensively constructed by white people and settlers, and there is a significant amount of negation of black women from cultural representation (e. g. hooks, 2003). Moreton-Robinson (2015, p. 85) suggests that the construction on Aboriginality has been done as the 'Other' of the universal humanist subject of the West, and these constructions fail to understand that Indigenous intellectual production may be inspired by different understanding of the human subject. Similarly to Moreton-Robinson's statement, Carangio et al. (2021, p. 81) write that race in so-called white Australia is seen to belong to the 'Other',

particularly immigrants and Indigenous peoples. This type of 'othering' is one way how coloniality operates, with actively considering Black people 'inferior' to white. According to Wynter's (2003) notions on categorizations of 'being human', such as class, gender, race and (dis)ability, the formation of those social categorizations creates an understanding who is considered as 'human' and whose existence has value – these formations throughout social and historical shifts centered around prioritizing 'Man'. Linked to countering this 'othering', according to Habibis et al. (2016) and Vincent (2010, p. 65), whiteness theory helps to deconstruct the universalized idea of 'White' as an 'unraced' social location – it is a necessary to make this subject position visible, to be able to interrogate racialized and gendered power relations.

The arrival of white settlers to Australia a couple of hundred years ago included its colonial gaze, that meant 'a desire to impose traditions and cultural practices, carried halfway across the world, onto this new land and its indigenous inhabitants' (Disruptr, Deakin University, 12.7.2019). Throughout history there has been considerable amount of research on how settler Australians view Indigenous people but less has been researched on how Aboriginal people view settler Australians and institutions (Habibis et al. 2016, p. 57). As Habibis et al. (2016, p. 59) suggest, the stigmatization and refusal to represent or see Indigenous heterogeneity by settler Australians has serious implications for everyday lives and Indigenous identities. They argue that it increases 'racial tensions, reduces non-Aboriginal empathy, - - maintains informal racial segregation and contributes to racial prejudice and racial violence' (2016, p. 59).

From the start of white settler colonialism, Indigenous Peoples have faced and actively resisted the oppression relating to rights, autonomy, identities, cultures, countries, land, and agency. This oppression was attempted through violence, dispossession, segregation and assimilation actions by white settlers. There has been a substantial lack of opportunity for Indigenous peoples to speak their own truths, and that means that 'typically, settler Australians speak for, to and about Aboriginal Australians, leaving Aboriginal people with few opportunities to describe their own subjectivities and provide counter narratives' (Habibis et al., 2016, p. 58). Bouwer (2024, p. 339) accompanies this view by describing how the exclusion of Indigenous voices from the Australian literary canon by 'revoking their ability to self-identify and denying them a meaningful platform on which to voice their experiences' is the continuous enactment of 'violent history of forced relocation, theft, and genocide'. As Bouwer (2024, p. 339) points out, a foundational national(ist) literary canon

enacts a certain type of possession relationship through the circulation of voices and narratives that legitimize settler occupation.

2.2 Australian Indigenous onto-epistemologies and poetry

To clarify the tasks and meaning of this thesis, I introduce some Indigenous and also specifically Australian Indigenous onto-epistemology from Indigenous studies scholars considering knowledge, language, and tradition, and why poems can be seen as vital artistic means of connecting to one's culture and challenging colonial power structures. I aim to emphasize, that even though (non-&) Indigenous scholars in Indigenous studies have paid attention to similarities in certain knowledge traditions of Indigenous Peoples globally, such as the plurality and relationality of knowledge, they are still unique in their own contexts and those place-based knowledges are not to be 'universalized' (e. g. Virtanen & Seurujärvi-Kari, 2019).

There are two recognized Indigenous Peoples in Australia: Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Aboriginal Peoples refers to the Indigenous Peoples historically and geographically located in the mainland of Australia, and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on the other hand are the Indigenous People of Torres Strait Islands, many of whom now live on the mainland of Australia. The terms First Nations and Indigenous Peoples are used to refer to both Indigenous groups, and Indigenous is linguistically also used similarly to an adjective (e. g. Indigenous art). (Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities, 2018). According to the guidelines of *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities* (2018, p. 1), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities have their own established protocols and values, and they express them uniquely. It is important to note that there are differences and diversity within and between these groups. According to the ethical guidelines (2018, p. 1), many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prefer to identify with their language group or groups and traditional land or lands of their ancestry.

According to Virtanen and Seurujärvi-Kari (2019, p. 13), Indigenous knowledges have been produced and shared by different oral and nonverbal methods throughout history. These knowledges relate for example to various practices, governance models, art, landscapes, spirituality, healing and storytelling. Indigenous epistemology and ontology, also combined

as *onto-epistemology* in Indigenous studies, is considered to be relational. These relational approaches to knowledge, existence, relations, and communication mean that everything has value and agency in relation to others. This is why reading First Nations' artists' poems provides the reader with an active and positional agency. The onto-epistemology in Australian Indigenous context refers to the relation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and process ontology (Tempone-Wiltshire, 2024, p. 43), that varies in the cultures of Indigenous Peoples.

A connecting central element to Indigenous cosmology for Australian Indigenous Peoples is *Dreaming* or *Dreamtime*, that passes on central values, traditions and knowledge to future generations. According to Artlandish Aboriginal Art Gallery (searched on May 2nd 2025) this philosophy represents the time when the Ancestral Spirits progressed over the land and created life as well as central physical geographic formations and landscapes. Dreaming is based on the inter-relation and sacredness of all people and all things, and it explains the origin of the universe as well as being of nature and humanity. The past of the Spirit Ancestors which live on in the legends are handed down through stories, art, songs and ceremonies, and Dreaming shapes and structures life through the regulation and understandings of relations. None of the hundreds of Aboriginal languages have a word for time, and Dreaming is not seen as it either – it refers to the concept of moving from 'dream' to reality, it is there with them and not a long way away. Time itself refers to past, present and future. (Artlandish Aboriginal Art Gallery, searched on May 2nd, 2025).

According to Artlandish Aboriginal Art Gallery (searched on May 2nd, 2025) Aboriginal families and individuals identify with specific Dreamings, that provides them with identity, defines how to express their spirituality and tells them which other Aboriginal people are related to them in a close family. One can have multiple Dreamings to them. The gallery depicts:

> 'In most stories of the Dreaming, the Ancestor Spirits came to the earth in human form and as they moved through the land, they created the animals, plants, rocks, rivers, mountains and other forms of the land that we know today. These Ancestral Spirits also formed the relationships between Aboriginal people, the land and all living beings. Once the ancestor spirits created the world, they transformed into trees, the stars, rocks, watering holes - - These are the sacred places of Aboriginal culture and have special meaning. Because the ancestors did not disappear at the end of the Dreaming,

> but remained in these sacred sites, the Dreaming is never-ending, linking the past, present and the people and the land.'.

The spirits of the ancestor beings are passed on to their descendants, as for example shark, kangaroo, honey ant, snake and so on, which have become totems within the diverse Indigenous Peoples. The Elders choose storytellers, who will pass the stories along for younger generations. (Artlandish Aboriginal Art Gallery, searched on May 2nd, 2025). Virtanen, Apurinã and Facundes (2021, pp. 565, 576) emphasize the material means of language, especially the commodification, impact and importance of storytelling, and its performativity with different body techniques. The stories are being constantly narrated – stories as oral communicative expressions are central for the peoples' cultural and historical consciousness, practiced in the material presence of the community members (Virtanen, Apurinã & Facundes, 2021, p. 566-567, 576).

Thus, the central parts of this onto-epistemology can be seen as understanding of non-linearity of time, the important role of custodianship in respectful interaction between living beings, animacy of cosmos and Country, holistic reasoning and mind-body connection, place-based totemic mythology and understandings of complex systems as self-organizing, patterned, and adaptive (Tempone-Wiltshire, 2024, p. 42). According to Indigenous studies' scholars, Indigenous language and knowledge production is strongly place-based (Virtanen & Seurujärvi-Kari, 2019, p. 3), which can be seen also in Dreaming. In addition to plurality and relationality, Indigenous studies' scholars have considered how different Indigenous local knowledge traditions are holistic in their context and concentrate on multispecies communities as well as the importance of process and content. Knowledge is shared by community by non-verbal as well as verbal learning of belonging. Human social life is also seen to be affected by the life-worlds of non-human-animals and -entities, and how species affect each other in shared landscapes.

Connected to singing and storytelling, the importance of poetry in many Indigenous cultures can be seen as vital: Alison Whittaker writes in the Introduction of *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (2020, p. ix), that poetics are practiced extensively by Australian First Nations' communities. Whittaker equates Indigenous poetry next to oral storytelling, embedding storytelling insights into Language itself, music and song, as well as conversational wordwork (2020, p. ix-x). In addition, Evelyn Araluen points out in the book (p. 39), that Aboriginal poetics have always existed: '… The form has changed, as have we,

but the songlines still hum in the soil while we read and write upon it.' According to Whittaker (ed. 2020, p. xiii), it is clear that Indigenous poetry is a collective task like passing the Fire from one front to another, offering them to burn within new audiences and to serve as a collective memory of Aboriginal poets' wordwork and 'its burning power'. Considering the wide-range enactment of poetry among First Peoples, Whittaker (2020, ix) and Bouwer (2024, p. 339) both talk about poetry's discursive power and where it emerges from. Whittaker (2020, ix) asks if the power comes from challenging and subverting the English language or Western poetic forms and traditions and continues to ponder if the power comes from creating a space for other ways of thinking and rethinking, or from nurturing its Indigenous readers. Bouwer (2024, p. 339) suggests that power may emerge from its negotiation of culture and prestige, when 'it straddles the personal and the collective in its articulations of identity, lyrically mediating the entanglements of individual and dominant narratives'. I find that both these perspectives include the re-articulations of discourse. Thus, Bouwer (2024, p. 339) forms an important notion, that Anglophone poetry has had a role in the colonial project, protecting colonial identities and interests. They state: 'For a non-Indigenous ruling class concerned with sustaining its illegitimate claims to the land, canonical poetry is a means through which literary visibility is restricted to their own interests, thus undergirding the dominant social order.' (Bouwer, 2024, p. 339). What partly constitutes the theme in this thesis, is Bouwer's (2024, p. 339) point of decolonial poetics: it must 'destabilize the dominant narratives of ownership and delink from the colonial matrix of power that constitutes them'.

Importantly for Indigenous poetic discourse, Aboriginal writers Romaine Moreton and Lisa Bellear have written poetry with the perspective of destabilizing the continuum of colonial power relations and confronting continuing stereotypes of Aboriginal women constructed on racist and misogynistic colonial ethos (Čerče, 2022, p. 103). Reardon-Smith (2023) connects the conversation to queer Aboriginal poetics: queer Indigenous storytelling and artmaking actively resist strict categorizations, 'drawing upon untidy complexities and bleeding across the lines of genre, form and artistic mode'. Thus, according to the author, queer Indigenous artists engage in storytelling as speculative worldbuilding, to rethink past, present, and future. Participation in this type of storytelling also reconfigures and imagines worlds in which their stories are not 'othered' or 'outside', but instead 'form central narratives from which to understand community, place, and relationality' that reimagines a future with self-determination as well as alternative narratives about their identities and

futures (Saunders, 2022, in Reardon-Smith, 2023). As Reardon-Smith (2023) emphasizes, Indigenous speculative writing insists upon vulnerable reading that interrogates colonial notions of realism.

2.3 Decolonial Queer Theory and Decolonial Healing

To form an understanding of how I aim to journey through the First Nations' poetry in question, I introduce the theories of decolonial queer thinking and healing. Pereira (2019, p. 403) describes how *queer theory* 'delineates transgressive interventions and possibilities beyond binary construction of the sexes … rethinks ontologies … opposes itself to the hetero epistemologies that dominate scientific production'. According to the author, queer theory reveals how heteronormativity has been directing history, and that existence does not limit itself to the division of feminine and masculine or woman and man (Pereira, 2019, p. 421). Queer studies emphasize developing research and theories that go beyond identity as well as representational politics, and uncover the logics of settler colonialism, since they have broad effects on all life-areas (Smith, 2010, p. 63). Queer theory presents possibilities of nonheteronormative sexualities, and virtually, it reveals how colonial logic is masculine, hetero, and white (Pereira, 2019, p. 421). *Decolonial thinking* on the other hand seeks out an oppositional or countering position to structures of coloniality by introducing other political, cultural, and economic experiences as well as productions of knowledge (Pereira, 2019, p. 403). With this thinking it is possible to go towards geopolitics that have been used for making specific people 'into suppliers of experiences, and other into exporters of theories to be applied and reaffirmed' (Pereira, 2019, p. 403).

Difference between decolonization and decoloniality refers to the former as liberation of state apparatus from a colonial rule, and the latter as the liberation of knowledge and being, to reconstruct epistemically the patterns of re-existence (Mignolo & Walsh, in Bouwer, 2024, p. 338). Although, decolonization has been considered in some Indigenous research (i. e. Marshall, 2011) as a process that has involved dreaming, (re)membering and (re)creating the Indigenous ways of understanding the body and soul, and the means to heal it: for example in Hawaii, Wai'anae, decolonizing meant rejecting the shame and self-loathing that defines colonized people (Marshall, 2011). According to Bouwer (2024, p. 338) the decolonial literary projects have a possibility to unravel the norms of state, possession and sovereignty. I find similarly to Raewyn Connell (1997, in Bhambra, 2014, p. 117) that those

norms in knowledge refers to that of homogenous, standardized and limited in diversity, and the power structures around them limits cultures' possibilities to contribute their legitimate knowledges. Decolonial thinking, according to Lugones (2007, p. 187) seeks to reveal how constructions of race, gender and sexuality overlap in or are the products of colonialization. Similarly, Mignolo (2018b) emphasizes the connection between colonialism and critical and dependency theory when articulating modernity/coloniality: decolonial thinking and doing 'aim to delink from the epistemic assumptions common to all the areas of knowledge established in the Western world…' (Mignolo, 2018b, p. 106). The author also emphasizes, how this delinkage may be done for example by engaging in nonacademic work where Western epistemology has 'trickled down framing subjectivities, education, ways of eating, health, and destroyed conviviality' (Mignolo, 2018b, p. 108). Bhambra (2014, pp. 117-118) states that decolonial action has radical potential to unsettle and reconstitute the processes of knowledge production. Power in these relations, according to Mignolo (2018b, p. 114), constitutes as an 'instance of the colonial matrix in which all of us, human beings, are being ruled, and the ruling includes of course the creators and gatekeepers of the rule…'. The author states that decoloniality on the other hand implies the exercise of power, within that colonial matrix, that undermines the mechanism that keeps it in place demanding obeisance – this mechanism can be considered epistemic and that is why decolonial liberation equates epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2018b, p. 114).

Pereira (2019, p. 403) discusses and reflects the possibilities of combining queer and decolonial thinking into *decolonial queer theory*, in which they encounter and create a critical perspective on the coloniality of power, meaning a construct created in Europe in the early stages of colonization. The author points out, how decolonial thinking approximates, virtually, what is called queerness: 'in opening ourselves to other logics, claiming the importance and magnitude of these other-thought, questioning theories, and believing in a multitude of theories and bodies … ' (Pereira, 2019, p. 407). In addition, what I find similar to Pereira's (2019) view, Alqaisiya (2018) suggests that decolonial queer theory reimagines the production of white colonial heteronormativity and challenges notions of 'civilization' through a different racialized, gendered, and sexualized account of human experience. Thus, it questions what 'liberation' looks like through these experiences (Alqaisiya, 2018). Relating to this bringing of other-thought theories into center, Mignolo (2018a, *foreword*, *x*) writes about pluriversality, that enables the pluriverse: a decolonial political vision, where many worlds would coexist and constitute the world with many cosmologies. As Bakshi

(2020, p. 548) formulates, in this work I bring in artistic expressions in the form of poetry, that reconstruct critical viewings of universal appellation of Eurocentric knowledge. These artistic expressions also enact the vital task of personal and collective healing. This process can be seen as an act for theorizing pluriversality and pluriversal knowledges, without renaturalizing embedded hierarchies of domination (Bakshi, 2020, p. 548).

The way Alqaisiya (2018) and Pereira (2019, p. 408) write about challenging the notions of history's gazes through white colonial heteronormativity forms an understanding how constructing and interpreting gender and sex are part of the colonial project. I find that this is also visible in Lugones' (2007, p. 186) points, when they make direct connections between decolonial criticism and feminism: they argue, how gender itself is a colonial introduction, that is used to 'destroy peoples, cosmologies, and communities as the building ground of the 'civilized' West'. Lugones (2007) suggests how the colonial imposition of gender intersects through ecology, economics, government, spiritual world and knowledge. In sum, the combination of queer theory and decolonial thinking provides means for viewing other bodies, histories, and theories, and is an effort of centralizing Indigenous forms of knowledge (Pereira, 2019, pp. 408, 415).

However, I find important to note a critical perspective towards the notions of what queer is, its power positions and geopolitical context. For example, Pereira (2019, p. 405) notes, 'when queer theory travels to the global South, it carries with it the challenges, dangers, and potentialities that all voyages present'. That is why it is important to break a cycle of incorporating theories from global North that do not criticize imperialism. The geopolitics of queer theory and queerness could mean that applying queer theory, that was formulated far away, can be considered as an escape from the field of queerness: it becomes a trick against queerness itself (Pereira, 2019, p. 405). In addition, the author adds (2019, p. 406), that queer of color critique has been questioning the white middle-class nature of the analyses that were first recognized as queer theory. They add that a rediscussion of queer genealogy has appeared, which strives to recognize Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa as one of its creators. In Indigenous queer studies, a Cherokee theoretician Qwo-Li Driskill (2010, p. 86, in Pereira, 2019, p. 415) joins the conversations in how the promotion of queer theory as 'criticism without a subject' collaborates with Indigenous studies in' centralizing Indigenous forms of knowledge and in carrying out a critical investigation of colonialism'.

Why these theories together are a possibility is also because queer reading of the colonization of Native peoples recognizes queer Natives who challenge colonial heteronormativity and patriarchy (Driskill, Finley, Gilley & Morgensen, 2011, p. 22). Thus, decolonial queer theory and its analysis can create a fruitful land for critical readings of history, existence, and knowledge. In many Native contexts, Two-Spirit critique concentrates on the responsibility of queer studies to 'examine ongoing colonialism, genocide, survival, and resistance of Native nations and peoples' (Pereira, 2019, p. 416). Decolonial queer theory is able to create new by challenging and dislocating theories, ontologies and epistemologies, which makes new ones emerge, and it suggests a rereading of the global North's theories 'in order to revise them, bend them, scrutinize their silences and obliterations, and to make them speak differently' (Pereira, 2019, pp. 421-422). Like Pereira (2019, p. 422), I find it important to note however, is that queer theory or decolonial thinking cannot serve as a ready mold for 'encapsulating these other-theories, these other histories'.

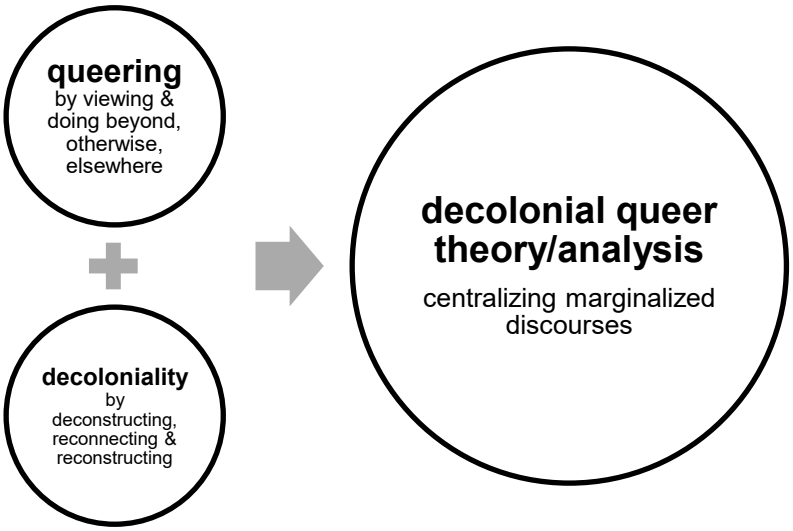

Figure 1. Combination of queering and decoloniality creates basis for decolonial queer theory/analysis.

Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez (2013) introduce a concept and critical framework of 'decolonial aestheSis', that can be utilized to interrogate and counterview different colonial structures of Western aesthetic norms. Their writing examines how the controlling 'modern aesthetics' construct Eurocentric standards of tastefulness and beauty, and marginalize non-Western forms of expressiveness. Decolonial aestheSis strives to center 'alternative' artistic expressions that have been dismantled or suppressed in history. It is about bringing in the

voices of place, community, meaning of art and the embodied knowledge around those aspects. Similarly to *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (ed. Whittaker, 2020) and many other decolonial discussions by Indigenous Peoples, Mignolo's and Vázquez' (2013, p. 17-18) theorization emphasizes the importance of collective healing by confronting and acknowledging the historical and on-going colonial wounds, that departs from an embodied consciousness of the colonial wound and moves toward healing. According to Mignolo and Vázguez (2013, p. 16-17) this healing process consists of resistance to colonial (power) structures and active re-emergence of Indigenous practices depicting ways of knowing, eventually 'advancing a world of art in which many options can coexist'. In my view, these notions are able to form an understanding of decolonial queer literary activism, that can be enacted through poetry.

3 Research methodology and material

3.1 Igniting the Fire Front journey

Writing this thesis can be seen methodologically as a decolonial academic contribution itself. By utilizing poetic discourse analysis as wayreading (Perez, 2022) informed by Black and Indigenous feminism and research (e. g. hooks, 2003; Smith, 1999; Anzaldúa, 1987 & Lorde, 1984, in Keating, 2010), decolonial queer theory and the onto-epistemologies of Australian Indigenous Peoples in question, I am able to practice an approach, that goes beyond deconstructing to reconnecting and reconstructing (Bhambra, 2014;2024). This approach aims to create a history by setting the overlooked histories of marginalized peoples in the center, while also examining the processes and impacts of colonialism critically. In my view, this approach applies to many directions: deconstructing the Eurocentric views on history and its victimization of (queer &) Indigenous peoples, emphasizing on-going critical self-reflection as a reader, and executing my effort in bringing the discourses in the poetry anthology into the center of one part of so-called Western academic writing. An important part of this approach is to acknowledge the resilience of marginalized cultures as well as their complexity beyond the classification as colonized subjects (e. g. Mignolo and Vázguez, 2013; Lugones, 2007).

Considering the goals in this thesis, I will direct my focus on the poetic expressions of the themes, contexts, tones, language and some poetic techniques. My methodological and theoretical backgrounds for this thesis help to thematize firstly the poems' interrogation and critique of colonization and colonial history of Australia, second, the notions on intersections of gender and race in resistance against colonial power structures, third, how liberation and healing is formed, and the thesis as a whole, queering of colonial heteropatriarchal discourses by centralizing the voices striving beyond and otherwise. I suggest that these methodological choices help the analysis in decreasing the risks of producing colonial subjects as invisible and dehumanized (Maltonado-Torres, 2007, in Bhambra, 2014, p. 131). It is why my analysis requires the commitment to the production of knowledge that is decolonial in intent and practice: reconstructing narratives of for example power, gender and race with integrity to Australian Indigenous knowledges is central to this process.

3.2 Journeying ethics: speak/listen trade and the dilemmas in white Western academy

Crucial parts of this thesis are the ethics considering the topic of analysis, my own positioning, and the decisions related to the methodology in question. McCartan, Brimblecombe and Adams (2022) highlight the importance of implementing critical reflexivity, colonial power analysis and demonstrable anti-racist action to academic research considering particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' cultures. This active work involves staying reflexive towards one's power and sociocultural position. In McCartan, Brimblecombe and Adams' (2022, p. 2), the authors suggest that research conducted by non-Indigenous people without consultation, permission or involvement of Indigenous Peoples may perpetuate settler colonialism. This connects to their suggestion: 'research that describes and quantifies health and social problems in Indigenous populations has dominated, sometimes without critique of structures that give rise to inequities or offering positive models or solutions' (McCartan, Brimblecombe & Adams, 2022, p. 2). Like the authors point out, very often this type of Indigenous-focused research has failed in improving the conditions of Indigenous Peoples subjected to research. In addition, I want to recognize the controversy in institutionalizing Indigenous knowledge in academia, when entering dialogue and as Tempone-Wiltshire (2024, p. 43) puts it, 'the requirement to commence such an engagement with cultural humility'. I find meaningful value in their words: 'process scholars ought not seek to categorize Indigenous metaphysics in Western terms but rather reveal Western philosophical presuppositions through an Indigenous perspective' (Tempone-Wiltshire, 2024, p. 44). This type of research needs to be mindful of not recreating or maintaining systems of control.

Having met a Yuwaalaraay author Nardi Simpson on a course of Indigenous studies in University of Helsinki, I consulted Simpson on this research topic. She provided me with an essay of hers in Griffith Review (2.2.2021), that speaks about sacredness in everything, while taking the reader/listener through her home country and its lands, water, air and inhabitants, as well as her traditional history of reciprocal providing and exchanging between mobs (tribes) and caring for the country. This was a way she wanted to connect to what my research interest was.

Simpson provides the reader, or the listener, with the 'speak/listen trade', that relates strongly to the reflexive positionality and ethical conducts of researchers in other research material (i. e. McCartan, Brimblecombe & Adams, 2022; Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders, 2018) . Simpson explains it as follows: 'Usually this type of trade sees words tumbling between people, some finding their way into dhuwi or spirit essence, others dissolving into burruguu. This way of talking is beautiful. Thoughts and fragments of information form and then melt away, others emerging to take their place. Our conversation becomes what is needed, rather than what is sought. When this happens, bodies and minds feel good because we are connecting. It means we are looking after each other and the words we exchange are caring for us too.' (Simpson, 2021). I see that I am journeying in the speak/listen trade crucially in this thesis, and the role of the listener is central in my writing.

Simpson (2021) emphasizes in her essay that writing down in this trade relationship is trickier, because it freezes the words, and it does not involve the people who inspired it, and their connection is paused. In this way, the best option would be to speak directly while connecting with each other and the earth beneath. In the context of reading a poetry anthology, the role of the listener is also exhausted by the artists – this way some of that connection and mutual exchange may extend to lived experience. Simpson (2021) describes the trade connecting the words and conversation to each one's own dreaming, and the role of the future listener being 'personal, silent, reflective'. She also emphasizes, that everywhere is somebody's special dreaming place.

Simpson (2021) also exhausts, that writing down the trade has consequences for the people involved. She says: 'It means now my grandchild and great-great-grandchild will inherit this conversation; they will become part of the exchange'. She also emphasizes that the speak/listen trade can give listener ownership of the conversation, but the speaker will be custodian of its words. This process ensures, according to Simpson (2021), that the context and meaning stays within the community, family and country, while being a good deal to the listener. Another point I find valuable in Simpson's (2021) words is the contextuality of the trade: what was real in the time of it happening, might not be real now in the present. She states that the context and the spirit in which the words were given, belong to a different time, and the listener's mindful space is to reflect what the interaction has inspired for them.

In sum, my goal is not to 'seek answers' or 'knowledge as possessions' from Indigenous artistic expression for white Western academia. Similarly to what Reardon-Smith (2023) states, I will read the artistic expressions and stories that are collected and created for the reader taking their gaze and lived experience into account. I agree with Reardon-Smith (2023), that here the interest is not about depicting diversity for the colonial-settler, white and cis-heteronormative gaze: as Moreton-Robinson (2009, p. 77; 2015, p. 191) writes, the logic of possession is central to the construction of whiteness and patriarchal white sovereingty within the colonial-settler nation state. Thus, the intent of my thesis needs to stay mindful of not centralizing the possessive white gaze. What I find central is that conversation, respect and reflection that is needed, is happening in these structures. As Simpson (2021) states about caring and respecting: 'Our country does not cradle an object; it embraces relationship, it is oriented around respect and care for networks of people outside our own existence'.

> 'We elevate the language and the way we interact with trade concepts because they are matters of life and death. Only by sharing do we sustain life. These ceremonies connect us to a network of people and places, ensuring we will never go hungry, never be in danger and never be friendless or unknown. Our ceremonies are investments in each other's success. We are good at sharing and trading, at this way of being; our landscape means we need to be this way and we love to be this way with those around us.' (Nardi Simpson, 2021).

In addition to concentrating on speak/listen trade, I want to acknowledge the dilemma in Western academy's paradigm considering Indigenous Peoples. Many settler discourses have framed Indigenous Peoples from a deficit paradigm, and there have been calls for changing that (McCartan, Brimblecombe & Adams, 2022). In addition, the Indigenous research ethical guidelines (2018) provide some directions for non-Indigenous researchers conducting research with Indigenous Peoples in Australia, which I will follow in my writing. It is also important to note that most research methodologies and practices have emerged from Western concepts that sometimes do not include other conceptual viewpoints (Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders, 2018, p. 2). I recognize that research in Indigenous contexts is closely linked to European imperialism and settler colonialism: the Westernised academy might still serve to threaten or disrupt Indigenous ways of knowing

and being, that has happened in history (McCartan, Brimblecombe and Adams, 2022). That is why I have strived to intentionally centralize Indigenous scholars work in my writing.

According to a Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 115-118), in Indigenous research, themes which emerged in Indigenous movement in the late 1960s have been developed as a strategic agenda for action. The Indigenous research agenda (Appendix 2) connects local, regional as well as global efforts, that move and shape them towards *self-determination* of the Indigenous world. This agenda of self-determination becomes a goal for social justice 'which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural and economic terrains' (Smith, 1999, p. 116). The process involves transformation, decolonization, healing and mobilization as peoples. I strive to execute my thesis by incorporating these processes into my methodology and analysis, to be a part in creating a pathway towards Indigenous self-determination.

The racialized system has made it easier for some and very hard for others. I'm a non-Indigenous white person from global North with certain privileges, who has not been institutionally and systematically discriminated against throughout history. I am also privileged to have been able and allowed to travel to Australia, and study and stay on the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation. Thus, I think it is also my responsibility to tackle the unequal systems that are founded upon neoliberal capitalism and colonialism, with their unrecognition of rights and ignorance of power structures, in the ways that I can, while reflecting critically on my own positions and views.

Throughout this thesis, I aim to execute critical self-reflection and vulnerability and acknowledge my position as a white non-Indigenous student while listening and reading with the First Nations' poets. This means that noting the ethics and intersections of Indigenous Standpoint Theory (Moreton-Robinson, 2013) is central: Moreton-Robinson (2013, p. 331) suggests, that Indigenous women's standpoint constitutes problematics informed by their knowledge and experiences. This is why I find co-called reflexive companion-thinking important. It is also important for me to note, like Reardon-Smith (2023), that the poems are not written in the first instance for me (i. e. for a white gaze) and their meaning is not to teach the reader 'how to be an ally' or reduce the reader's complicity in their context. In addition, with a poststructuralist discursive basis, it is ethically central to note that the poems can reflect real-life experiences and stories of First Nations' artists,

and by viewing and analyzing them, they partly become representations or readings of their context.

3.3 Introduction to the material: Poems from Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today

The poetry collection book *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (2020) consists of poems and essays written by various Aboriginal artists: it is a collection of 53 poems which have been previously published and/or spoken between 1964 and 2019 (Cordite Poetry Review, Sentance, 11.8.2020). It is an anthology curated by Gomeroi poet and academic Alison Whittaker. The book is divided into five themes, and the different sections start with an essay from a leading Aboriginal writer, where the poems follow next. The five themes in the book are: 'Ancestor, you are exploding the wheelie bin', 'Despite what Dorothea has said about the sun scorched land', 'I say rage and dreaming', 'Because we want it back, need it back, because they can' and 'This I would tell you'. The introducing artists to each section reflect on the power of First Nations poetry based on their own thinking and experience, relating it to the theme in question. Some poem review and literature websites, such as Cordite Poetry Review (Sentance, 11.8.2020), describe the poems in the book as timeless, since they belong to the continuum of millenia-long storytelling of First Nations. This exact storytelling has been connecting First Nations to the Country, ancestors and kin since time immemorial (Cordite Poetry Review, Sentance, 11.8.2020). In addition to storytelling, the book can be seen as an elemental part of 'a long-lasting resistance to the colonial invasion of [Indigenous] lands that has continued since James Cook's boat came to [Australia's] shores' (Cordite Poetry Review, Sentance, 11.8.2020). Reading the anthology, I too felt that this storytelling collection that has been put together highlights the collective refusal to be silent when facing colonial forces.

Given that the theoretical lens of this thesis roots in decolonial queer theory concentrating on centralizing marginalized discourses, I could choose any of the powerful poems in the book for this work. Thus, to take as much diverse storytelling and content into account as possible, I decided to continue with drawing poems from each theme in the book into my analysis. After reading the anthology I found that many of the poems confront colonization and colonial history of Australia and also consider the intersections of gender and race in the resistance against different colonial power structures, as well as the notions of liberation

and healing, to their own extend, so those themes seemed like a good focus in choosing the poems for this thesis. For this thesis and its purpose, I selected seven full poems by seven different poets, to keep the analysis in the limits of the maximum length of the thesis. Furthermore, for the meaningfulness of the analysis and centering the main discourses in the book, I will also connect short passages from other poems and essays from the book into my discussion. The selected main poems of the analysis are *Yúya Karrabúrra (Fire Is Burning)* by Alice Eather (Appendix 3), *Black Woman* by Ruby Langford Ginibi (Appendix 4), *Many Girls White Linen* by Alison Whittaker (Appendix 5), *Expert* by Ellen van Neerven (Appendix 6), *Say My Name* by Meleika Gesa-Fatafehi (Appendix 7), *Custodial seeds* by Yvette Holt (Appendix 8) and *I Run…* by Melanie Mununggurr-Williams (Appendix 9).

Yúya Karrabúrra (Fire Is Burning) by Alice Eather (pp. 29-32) from the chapter 1 'Ancestor, you are exploding the wheelie bin' depicts her position between two divided worlds of 'the black and the white' and calling for their collaboration and living side by side. Eather was a Kunibídji teacher and poet from Maningrida in the Northern Territory. Another poem from the same chapter as Eather's is *Black Woman* by Ruby Langford Ginibi (p. 34), who was a member of Bundjalung People and an author and lecturer. She was also a historian on Aboriginal history, culture and politics. According to Grimshaw (2012, p. 315) Langford Ginibi's writings have recorded the history of the Bundjalung people of the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales, and that Langford Ginibi was a central part in national discussions on Indigenous issues. Up until her passing, she continued to make writings to inform non-Indigenous Australians about the experiences of her people, and to persuade people to acknowledge the oppressive character of settler colonialism (Grimshaw, 2012, p. 315). Precariousness of Indigenous Peoples' livelihoods and social inequalities were leading themes in her work, that she herself also experienced. This is visible in her short text-like poem *Black Woman*.

Many Girls White Linen by a Gomeroi poet and writer Alison Whittaker (pp. 57-58) is situated in the chapter 2 'Despite what Dorothea has said about sun scorched land'. It reimagines the missing girls from Joan Lindsay's novel 'Picnic at Hanging Rock'. According to Cordite Poetry Review (25.3.2019) the poem considers the physical labour of Aboriginal women with the process of reimagining and counterviewing: 'The reference to Australia's literary past, however, is a throwaway, almost as if the scripts were flipped and, in this alternate history, it is the white women, rather than their black counterparts, who are not

deemed significant enough to be mentioned.'. The poem is part of the chapter, where poems bring out resisting directly settler imposition on Indigenous Country and bodies.

Expert by Ellen van Neerven (p. 78-79) from chapter 3 'I say rage and dreaming' expresses the complexity of queer and (non-)Indigenous relationships, abuse and conflicts, as well as national politics, power, and their discourses. Van Neerven writes openly about their queerness and non-binary identity, while bringing their voice up as a member of the Mununjali clan of the Yugambeh nation, and having Dutch heritage with strong ancestral ties to south east Queensland (Overland 223, 2016). Van Neerven has written about gender as a colonial construct and the wider conceptions of gender and sexuality among First Nations, ideas of masculinity and femininity, as well as interracial relationships and self-love toward their 'blak kweer soul', generally often with humour and tenderness (Overland 223, 2016). *Say My Name* by Meleika Gesa-Fatafehi (p. 105-106) in the same chapter as van Neerven's poem considers the theme of ancestors, history and the dignity of one's name, and essentially their relationships and resilience during times and situations of oppression. Gesa-Fatafehi is a Torres Strait Islander and Tongan writer, and they bring their close relationship to ancestors of Zagareb and Dauareb tribes of Mer Island and Fahefa village of Tonga, meaning a heritage from Black and Indigenous, Pasifika and West Asian sides (The On Being Project, Tippett, Poetry Unbound, 2025).

Custodial seeds by Yvette Holt (p. 133) appears in the chapter 4 'Because we want it back, need it back, because they can'. She belongs to the Bidjara, Yiman and Wakaman Nations of Queensland, and she is an award-winning poet, essayist, editor, stand-up comedienne, academic, and photographer. According to a publishing house UQP Teacher's notes (searched on April 28th 2025) on Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today (ed. Whittaker, 2020), in Holt's poem the reader follows a pregnant girl who may be following the birthing ritual her elders have taught her, but there is a suggestion that this is ancient women's business being applied to a new situation, by contact with white settler colonizers. Holt describes in an interview by Debbie Brennan (FSP, 2009, searched on April 29th 2025) that her poetry are observations made through 'a window that refuses to shut'. In addition, in the interview Holt describes how her work interprets 'deep marks of racism Indigenous Australian women who are same-sex attracted face two battles almost daily', meaning the intersectional basis of the oppression. Considering this thesis, I find her following words

crucial: ‘learning, observing and acknowledging past injustices brought about through the process of colonisation’.

Lastly, one of the main poems in the analysis with the six others is a slam poem *I Run…* by Djapu writer and performer from Yirrkala in East Arnhem Land Melanie Mununggurr-Williams (p. 150-151) from the chapter 5 ‘This I would tell you’. According to Red Room Poetry’s website (searched on April 24th 2025) ‘her writing is all-encompassing of her identity as Yolngu, the triumphs and struggles of motherhood, neurodiversity, being queer and connections to land and culture … [She] uses her connection to her land, culture and language to decolonize the literary and performance space through the use of Dhuwal language weaved throughout her poems.’ Mununggurr has stated in an interview by Mecca M-Power (5.7.2023), that she wants to change the world one poem at a time. She says: ‘I hope that through my poetry, I am able to speak, perform and write in a way that people will listen and will actually internalise the messages that I’m trying to send. I want to help people to see the world from a different perspective.’ She also emphasizes, that all the inspiration for her work comes from her identity as a queer Blak woman, her culture, language, Country, Land and her family connections. Given that her poem is a part of spoken poetry, reading it will give a different experience of it – but she states, that it can also be a beautiful experience (Mecca M-Power, 5.7.2023).

3.4 Reflexive poetic discourse analysis in Indigenous literary research context: Wayreading

Perez (2022) argues for a contemporary Pacific Indigenous literary methodology called *wayreading,* that originates from canoe traditions’ navigating term ‘wayfinding’, and that gives orientation in the complex relationships between Indigenous poetry, identity, decolonial politics, aesthetics, and diasporic migrations. The idea in wayreading is that ’Indigenous identities and cultures are not static, unchanging islands; instead, Native culture move the way islands move’ (Perez, 2022, p. 32). Therefore, interpretating these texts has to acknowledge those texts’ dynamic mobility and persistence (Perez, 2022, p. 31-32). In the process of wayreading, narratives can be seen to play an essential role: the subjectivities of Indigenous peoples are shaped by the narratives and discourses of race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on (Perez, 2022, p. 32). Wayreading consists of interpretative methodology, that navigates Indigenous culture and identity with mapping the moving signs

of Indigenous presence, which can include language, customs, histories, values, beliefs, and arts. Thus, wayreading reveals the continuity, vitality and resistance of a particular Indigenous culture and identity (Perez, 2022, p. 34).

The author argues that the art of First Nations' authors and poets has navigated through extreme and traumatic histories, relating to colonialism, militarism, missionization as well as ecological imperialism, which is visible considering the Australian context. Perez' (2022, p. xii) work verbalizes how for example Indigenous CHamoru poetry approximates 'empowering act of protest, resistance, and testimony in the decolonization, demilitarization, and environmental justice movements …'. CHamoru refers to the Indigenous Peoples of Guåhan (Guam) and the Northern Mariana Islands. From Perez' work, I find valuable similarities with the language used in the material Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today (ed. Whittaker, 2020).

Wayreading involves tracking how the primary themes (i. e. the content) of Indigenous literature express the survival and vitality of Indigenous language, customs, values, and practices, and how the primary narrative structures (i. e. the forms) of Indigenous literature embody Indigenous aesthetics, technologies, and ecologies (Perez, 2015). In sum, Perez' wayreading method equals an interpretive approach to artistic or cultural texts from a marginalized perspective: it emphasizes reading of experiences, that can be seen as racialized, queer, or 'non-normative'. I am interested in finding out if and how wayreading serves as a tool for cultural reclamation and a transformative reading practice, that critically intervenes with dominant narratives, and how it brings silenced voices in the front. Why I find wayreading a fruitful method for this analysis, is that Perez emphasizes wayreading as rooting to our interpretation of a text within Indigenous histories, cultural practices and epistemologies, and prioritizing analysing the literature with the perspective of customary Indigenous aesthetics (i. e. in the context of this thesis: storytelling, language, dreaming, reciprocal relationality, Indigenous and/or queer identity) and how they 'function as primary structural logic' and not only as themes within texts (Perez, 2022, p. 158). In the context of the material in this thesis, the poetic anthology itself strives to achieve cultural reclamation and a transformative reading practice already by telling it to the reader from the start, in the title and preface – it is about reclaiming Aboriginal power, agency and emancipation.

Even though queer theory strives further and beyond identity or representational politics (Smith, 2010, p. 63), many of the Indigenous poets in the poetry anthology have self-identified themselves as queer or generally part of LGBTQ+ community (i. e. Whittaker, van Neerven, Mununggurr-Williams, Holt), thus the narratives in the poems may be shaped by these experiences. In addition, I see that the method of wayreading virtually involves the experiences, position and affectivity of the reader, and how they influence how these narratives or discourses are interpreted and transformed. That is why I see that the emotional effects created by the writer towards the reader, and reflecting on them, are central in this process. This is also what the poetic anthology *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* asks the reader to execute (2020, pp. xi, 147). In addition, by journeying through the analysis with this methodology, I see that it can extend to some form of steps towards a cultural and social change and not stay only on the pages of academic writing – for example by me listening to the Indigenous poems in question as a reader and reflecting my position and actions as a white person located mainly in global North.

Like Perez (2022, xii) argues about CHamoru literature being a powerful and creative way to interact with important questions of Indigenous identity, culture, decolonization, history, and politics, I believe the same for Australian Indigenous poetry – even though my material is only a fracture of all the art of 500 different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Considering Perez' methodological and research backgrounds and knowledge about Pacific, Indigenous, American and international literature (2022, xii), this methodological approach could possibly be implemented in mapping different Indigenous presences and voices of different places – this is why it can work in this analysis of the Indigenous Australian context. Perez (2022, p. 28) also points out how traditional readings of art and texts can be often shaped by dominant discourses and cultural norms with traditional versus modern discourse, that eventually might erase or 'inauthenticate' the current perspectives of these certain marginalized groups by classifying their literature as 'not pure Indigenous literature'. According to Smith (1999 p. 117-118), considering the history and range of oppression, many Indigenous peoples can feel cynical about the capacity, motives or methodologies of Western research to deliver any benefits to Indigenous peoples – especially when Western science regarded and classified them as 'not human'.

Even though multidisciplinary and complementary research combining Western and Indigenous research approaches has developed in the recent years in different fields (i. e. Kimmerer, 2017), regarding the context of this thesis as well as Indigenous research agenda

towards self-determination of the peoples (Appendix 2), I think it is vital to utilize the Indigenous literary method wayreading for this reflexive poetic discourse analysis. To strengthen this method in my writing, I will support the analysis with providing it concepts and literary structure from a reflexive poetry analysis of queer Indigenous Australian poetry made by Reardon-Smith (2023). Their paper considers the poetry also through self-reflection of settler-colonial subjectivity, Australian Indigenous onto-epistemologies (e. g. non-linear time/present/futurity), queering of survivance and 'othering', resistance to containment, as well as storytelling as speculative worldbuilding in order to rethink the past, present, and future. In addition I want to note, that my intention is not to appropriate the method of wayreading or diminish or fracture its roots in Pacific Indigenous wayfinding. I find that its character and structure of making the analysis can reach to other Indigenous contexts as well but while shaping it to fit the context in question. Perez' analogy concentrates on Pacific wayfinding and navigating on the seas, and here in Australian Indigenous poetry's context, it can possibly navigate the journey of the Fire Front depicted by the writers.

By taking intersectionality, decolonial queer theory, Indigenous studies, and wayreading as a reflexive poetic literary analysis together, I believe will make a fruitful ground for centering and interacting with the creative resilience and continuous power of Indigenous poetry in *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today*. Wayreading across the anthology book in this thesis happens through the analogy of the Fire, via the storytelling and arising notions of the seven poems in the book related to my research question, and via strengthening the fire by visiting the other poems' lines that evoke reflections relating to the research question. This way I am able to center the voices in this whole anthology more effectively, while finding my reflexive way through most of the Fire front in the book. Considering the limitations of the maximum length of a thesis, I am not able to visit every poem in full but have read and noted all of them – with excessive emotional responses. Like Perez (2022) and the poetry anthology itself (ed. Whittaker, 2020, p. xi) emphasize, the responses and reflexivity of the reader are vital in this process, so I visit especially these places in the main poems and the book that affectively reflected those on me. Like Evelyn Araluen (p. 44) states in the book: 'Speaking with and to Aboriginal poetry, there's so much more to be said about what we're doing, than we are not.'

Applying wayreading to the Australian First Nations poetry's context, I form the pace of my analysis according to the language apparent in the material and its effects on the reader, not in a linear or chronological timeline, but like the analogy of the non-static and constantly moving Fire Front depicted by Alison Whittaker (p. ix):

> 'It licks at the edges of the colonisers' language. It hems it into a workable, imperfect shape. It tears through the settlers' plantations, their arrangements of the trees and their form. It takes its restorative heat to the right flora, which release their seeds and bear down hard for the burn. It loosens and enriches nutrients from the top of the ecology. It brings them down to bring other things up. Fire Front, a thin and precise incision into the colonial Australian imagination, is ready when the wind changes. When the wind changes, everything that is burning becomes the front. Big. Bigger and more powerful than we could have ever envisioned.'

The Fire Front moves, reshapes, acknowledges relationality: it is 'about Country and everything contained and woven and moved into it' (Whittaker, 2020, p. xii). Similarly to the anthology's themes, the journey of the Fire Front in the analysis journeys through working out the relationships to Country, kin, and ancestors in the context of colonizer's violence, continues to resisting settler imposition on Indigenous Country and bodies (deconstructing), then spreads to viewing the envision of the ways of speaking back and to one another, and the account for loss and planning for repair (reconnecting) and finally burns as a direct collective nurturing and healing (reconstructing). These themes are guiding my way on finding the notions on the poems critiquing colonization and colonial history, considering the intersections of gender and race in colonial power structures, and finally forming an understanding of Indigenous liberation and healing.

4 Wayfinding towards, through and with the Fire of the poems

This analysis concentrating on the artistic storytelling and language as a Fire Front consists of seven poems in the poetry anthology *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (ed. Whittaker, 2020). According to my research question, I concentrate on the depictions of the critique of colonization and colonial history of Australia, intersectionality of gender and race in resistance against colonial power structures and finally the notions on Indigenous liberation and healing – by listening to the speaker, their voice, intent and arising themes, use of words and language, and the form of the poem, all while understanding the context and actively staying reflexive. According to the method of wayreading, it is central to question what the poems do to the reader: in the poetry anthology Ali Cobby Eckermann provides a metaphor for this, describing it as a seesaw, that works in a way of 'Medicine in, Obligation Out' (ed. Whittaker, 2020, p. 143-144). Oftentimes people who come to listen do not respond: thus, it is important to read and also act (p. 147). As mentioned in the methods chapter, the selected main poems for the analysis are each part of one of the five themes found in the book. The Journey towards, through and with the Fire Front is paced by dividing the analysis into three sections: interrogation or critique of colonization and the colonial history of Australia, intersections of gender and race in racial and gendered colonial power structures, and finally the depictions of healing and liberation. Even though I have distinguished these sections as their own, they are closely linked and related to each other.

4.1 The Fire as a critique of colonization and settler colonial history of Australia

The burning Fire Front touches the grounds of devastating settler colonial history on the first pages of the anthology. It starts building the Fire Front as working out the relationships to Country, kin, and ancestors when facing the colonizer's violence. The second poem's *Beautiful Yuroke Red River Gum* by Lisa Bellear (p. 15-16) speaker passes the burning sensation to the reader with describing: 'Not too long and there are / fewer red river gums, the / Yarra Yarra tribe's blood becomes / the river's rich red clay'. Reading Archie Roach's *Took the Children Away* (p. 23-25) very quickly affects by shivers and tears, when imagining the separation of families and erasure attempts of Aboriginal agency and sovereignty in the disguise of 'doing good' in the early stages of Australia's colonization: 'And how they fenced us in like sheep / Said to us, 'Come take our hand' / Sent us off to mission land / Taught us

to read, to write and pray / Then they took the children away'. The poem's speaker later provides the reader with hope and a sense of counterviewing with when the children came back to their Country: 'The children came back / Back where their hearts grow strong / Back where they all belong'. These poems bring out the meaning of Country to one's sense of identity: the Peoples belong to the Country, they are the Country and it is them.

This is what *Yúya Karrabúrra (Fire is Burning)* by a Kunibídji poet Alice Eather (Appendix 3) executes as well. Having its roots in slam poetry, that combines elements of writing, performance and audience participation, this poem affects the listener traditionally beyond paper. It is about connection to land, effects of colonization on Aboriginal Peoples, and the heritage and identity between her mother's Indigenous family and father's British convict sides. Intersections of one's own position, described as not only as Black or only as White, describes the diversity and complexity of one's subjectivity and may queer the dichotomous understanding of race in colonial history:

> *I wear a ship on my wrist*
> *That shows my blood comes from convicts*
> *On the Second Fleet*
> *My father's forefathers came*
> *Whipped beaten and bound in chains*
> *The dark tone in my skin*
> *The brown in my eyes*
> *Sunset to sunrise*
> *My Wúrnal mother's side*
> *My Kíkka who grew up in a dugout canoe*
> *In her womb is where my consciousness grew*

The speaker reminds the reader about the devastating and violent reality of the convicts where they might have lived in. In addition, the speaker ponders the collision of her cultures as 'I walk between these two worlds / A split life / Split skin / Split tongue / Split kin / Everyday these worlds collide / And I'm living and breathing / This story of black and white'. Serving as a better option, instead of continuing the history of violence, the attempt to join those cultural divides and bridge separations by collaboration and listening each other serves as a main theme in the poem: 'Sitting in the middle of this collision / My mission is to bring / Two divided worlds to sit beside this fire / And listen / Through this skin I know where I belong / It is both my centre / And my division'. The paradoxality and plurality of

the speaker's positionality relating to the history of colonization at the same time in the centre, but also in the divide, awakens the notions of queer characteristics of the poem. The poem brings in the importance of decolonization efforts of so-called mixed Indigenous subjectivities – it can be seen as queering of the notions of what race or belonging to a group is in colonial Australia. Similarly to what Moreton-Robinson (2013) suggests of intersecting oppressions experienced by Indigenous women, the poem's speaker depicts the colonizing relationship that position them as 'belonging but not belonging'. By connecting with white settler groups, the poem evokes reflections for the white reader to think about their part and efforts in the conversation considering the critique of colonization, as well as the intersections they might be facing themselves: 'I will not point my finger and blame / Cause when we start blaming each other / We make no room for changing each other'. Complementary premises and collaboration of Indigenous and settler experience and identity is something the poem's speaker seems to strive towards to, like Kimmerer (2017, e. g. p. 133) describes teaching, learning and collaboratively discussing ecological knowledge in the terms of combination of natural science and Indigenous knowledge and language.

The interrogation or critique of colonization is apparent when the rich culture of her mob, or her tribe, that is threatened by fading away, is described in a stanza as 'The sacred songs are still being sung / But the words are slowly fading / The distant cries I'm hearing / Are the mothers burying their babies / The Elders are standing strong / But the ground beneath them is breaking'. Fire Front as burning in stages in the poem can symbolize parallelly the destruction of Indigenous Peoples by colonization but the following stanza emphasizes that it is the fire, that is Aboriginal People and what keeps the cultures alive – be it resistance towards challenges and/or strong connection to ancestors and land: 'We've got to keep this fire burning / With ash on our feet and coal in our hands / Teach Barra-rodjibba / All them young ones how to live side by side / Cause tomorrow when the sun rises / And our fires have gone quiet / They will be the ones to reignite it'.

The analogy of fire burning evokes the feeling of symbolism connected to possible anger but passion at the same time, as well as a strong will for change. The composition of natural elements, such as ember and smoke, may connect the speaker with the land and culture, as well as their vital role in understanding the move and reshaping of the burning fire as interrogation but making connection. Her Yugambeh language heritage incorporated in the poem emphasize the survivance of this Indigenous language and an on-going belonging to

the group and Country. The use of language is a crucial way of strengthening one's identity, that may serve as a critique of colonization. As Kimmerer (2017, p. 134) states: 'Every word I learn comes with a breath of gratitude for our elders who have kept this language alive and passed along its poetry.'. In this sense, any word spoken in Indigenous language keeps the culture and knowledge alive. The abundance of metaphors, repetition, alliterations and cultural allusions as poetic techniques are parts of strengthening the argumentation in Eather's poem: Yúya Karrabúrra, meaning 'Fire is Burning', is repeated after every set of stanzas. Resilience, understanding, harmony, acceptance and hope as well as the importance and celebration for the Aboriginal culture's thriving in present and future are leading themes in *Yúya Karrabúrra (Fire is Burning)*.

In addition and relating to stating criticism towards colonization and colonial history, the poetry anthology interrogates settler colonial poeticism, like in Evelyn Araluen's words in the book (ed. Whittaker, 2020, p. 44): 'These poems demonstrate that there's fun to be had in satirizing the transplanted cadence of Anglo-Saxon verse through fragmentation and irony - - None of these poems leave English, or the structures it has projected over our Country, unscathed. Across the thematics of temporality, Dreaming, custodianship and love, these poems juxtapose every afterlife of Eurowestern verse imported here off the tall ships against the perpetuity of Culture. We invent new forms: post-canonical, land-centric, kinship-connective, everyday-assertive. As poets we try things on for size, and discard that which cannot speak us.' Words can serve as knowledge, and grammar can restrain them: even the first languages are being reiterated in 'new forms' while striving towards the textures and memories of those languages. Like the poetry anthology tells the reader, this way of interrogating colonization in language is speaking to the kind of always that is not threatened by worlds spinning on around it.

The Fire Front continues to ignite the resistance against settler imposition on Indigenous Country and bodies. Whittaker, a Gomeroi poet and writer, has written her poem *Many Girls White Linen* with the idea of reimagining the missing girls from Joan Lindsay's novel Picnic at Hanging Rock. The usage of words, fractured sentences, rhythm and organization of stanzas emphasize the heavy history of colonial Australia, giving the reader pauses of reflection: 'many girls white linen / men with guns and / harsher things white women / amongst gums white linen / starch'er things later plaques / will mark this war / nails peeling back floor / scrubbing back blak chores'. As a reader, it reminds me of a critique of white

feminism, that Lugones (2007, p. 187) formulates as a ‘persistent absence of a deep imbrication of race into the analysis that takes gender and sexuality as central in much white feminist theory and practice’.

According to Cordite Poetry Review (25.3.2019) the poem considers the physical labour of Aboriginal women with the process of reimagining and counterviewing colonial history: ‘The reference to Australia’s literary past, however, is a throwaway, almost as if the scripts were flipped and, in this alternate history, it is the white women, rather than their black counterparts, who are not deemed significant enough to be mentioned.’. The poem is part of the chapter, where poems bring out resisting directly settler imposition on Indigenous Country and bodies, and this poem emphasizes the racialized misogyny of the settler colonialism. I find that this depiction and rhetoric applies to bell hooks’ (2003) theory of oppositional gaze – meaning a way of looking that challenges the ideas of visual world by using film, image and arts to construct new images of self. She defines oppositional gaze as a type of looking relation that involves political rebellion and resistance against the repression of a Black person's right to look, in this context fighting the historical oppression of Black people in relation to the construct of whiteness and their exclusion from white prose. Without too much knowledge of the original novel as a reader, the poem provides them with a metaphor of rotten and sick linen and cotton, which may possibly refer to the ‘ordeal’ of white settler imposition’s attempts in assimilation as well as serving as a remembrance of the mass murders done to Indigenous Peoples during colonization: ‘later plaques will mark / this sick linen’s rotten / cotton genes later plaques / will track the try / to bleed lineage dry / its banks now flood / a new ancestor, Ordeal, / plaits this our blood’.

This type of storytelling in the stanzas can be also considered as decolonial queer viewing of cultural material: looking otherwise, beyond and bringing in ignored subjectivities or experiences. I argue that this representation of Indigenous existence and resistance practices an interrogative oppositional gaze towards colonization and invites the reader to enact it as well. Bell hooks (2003) points out the intersection of race and gender in relation to the construction of the category ‘woman’ especially in film, but this applies to this work of prose as well. Hooks (2003) writes how representations of black people in the cinema are constructed by white people, and there is a significant amount of negation of black women from the images. Whittaker’s firey poem challenges the power position of white settler gaze and agency by leading viewers to think about Native Peoples’ perspectives, histories and

identities in new deeper ways, that unmask the hidden colonial histories and take back the power to Indigenous peoples, their communities and identities: ‘from this place a / roll of white linen / dropped on slight incline / amongst gums collecting grit / where blak girls hang / nails hang out picking / them hangnails’.

The poem is an intertextual creation mixing the active agencies in a culturally well-known novel. Whittaker’s level of writing almost as with irony towards white power structures feel empowering to me as the reader. Thus, it enacts as a reimagining of Indigenous girls’ experience as the center, while marginalizing white colonial-settler women and their comfort. The speaker of the poem twists the language of the colonizer into revealing the vital sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples and grows out the Fire Front even bigger.

4.2 The Fire burning through the intersections of gender and race: resistance against colonial, white and cisheteronormative power structures

The intersections of gender and race can be seen visible in the poems when enacting resistance against colonial, white and cisheteronormative power structures. Working out the relationships to oneself, kin and surrounding environments in the context of colonizer’s violence and its racialized and gendered continuum seem as a dominant theme also in the poem *Black Woman* by a Bundjalung author Ruby Langlord Ginibi (Appendix 4). The poem consists of lines as sentences all connected to form one stanza in a chapter-like style. Every sentence starts with repetition of the statement ‘I am every black woman’ followed by emotional descriptions of relationships such as love, betrayal, birth and raising of children, and later responsibility in domestic care and powerful protest against racial state power structures such as jail come into the picture, ending the poem in having been survived ‘this calamity of life, in this multicultural Australia’. ‘I am every black woman’ may emphasize the collective community, mutual struggles and active agency by centering Black women. The poem’s speaker navigating the complex relationship between one’s personal life and society’s structures immediately brought a well-known statement to my mind: the personal is political. A well-known lesbian Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa rejects western culture’s dichotomy between the private and public spheres (1987, in Keating, 2010, p. 82). It seems that *Black Woman* by Langlord Ginibi relates also to Chandra Mohanty’s thought of the necessity of ‘conceptualizing notions of collective selves and consciousness as the political practice of historical memory and writing by women of colour’ (1991, in Keating, 2010, p.

82). Like Mohanty's thinking, the poem's speaker invents an image of female identity in close connection to reaffirming her ethnic roots, and in the process, politicizes her work.

The poem's speaker describes love experienced by black women: 'I am every black woman who's ever been loved. I am every black woman who's been serenaded by a guitar on a starry night. I am every black woman who's ever been betrayed by a selfish lover. …' The stanzas concentrating on building a love relationship and facing betrayal distinctively highlight and describe the firey emotional affection in the poem. It starts to build up meaningful relationships in the speaker's life, while connecting with the reader's possible similar experiences. It evokes thoughts of Black feminist poetry of Audre Lorde and bell hooks, with similar depictions of confronting and addressing injustices both in personal, and in political realms together. The speaker writes their way of navigating together with other black women on the journeys of love and pain. The repetition of the subject position as a Black woman brings out the feeling of becoming heard and resilient, locating the feelings of love and betrayal into their story.

What can be seen relating to the intersections of gender and race in the poem are also the family relationships and the norms integrated into them. The speaker highlights in the following stanzas the loving motherhood and possibly the economic and social pressures in the family life, that have been brought upon her and many other Black women. It evokes thoughts of balancing on the boundaries of a woman's and mother's roles or norms, between the divisions and intersections of race, gender and class: 'I am every black woman who's given birth to loved children. I am every black woman who's had to work on fence lines to raise them too! …'.

What stood out for me as the reader was especially a sentence between raising children, working under pressure and being responsible for domestic care and work: 'I am every black woman who's hungered after truth! …'. This line seems like a passionate but very frustrated scream for certain knowledge between the intersectional societal pressures of being a Black woman in settler-colonial Australia, or that some information that she craves for is being isolated from her. The story unfolds as what seems to be a critical insight into the structural racial incarceration of Indigenous Peoples: '… I am every black woman, who's had a son, or husband jailed! I am every black woman who's had iron doors slammed shut, going to visit them too! …'. The repetition of exclamation marks emphasizes the strong, will-powered language towards the reader, who is listening.

The structural racism in incarceration and jails in Australia has received more light of day in recent years. According to Smith (1999, p. 154), Indigenous peoples across the world have disproportionately high rates of imprisonment and suicide, and 'inside the incarceration rates for indigenous peoples are similar rates for youth offending and for indigenous women'. Like another poet, whose work is also part of this thesis, Melanie Mununggurr-Williams, states of high rates of incarceration of Indigenous Peoples: 'in the [Northern Territory], where, for many months of the year, the [largest] percentage of youth incarcerated are Indigenous boys. When my son turned 10, it meant that he was old enough to be incarcerated, and so I write for a world where he doesn't have to be fearful of being a statistic or a target' (Mecca M-Power interview, 5.7.2023). The speaker of the poem provides a reader with a powerful stance against structural racism embedded deep into the settler colonial nation's blueprint and power structures, also reminding that the oppression of Black people around the world has been wide range that has still continuation until the present.

The poem leaves the reader reflecting on the conditions of Black Indigenous women, their resiliency and survivance. *Black Woman* by Yvette Holt gives the reader an honest mirror, to show the complexity of life and one's position between racialized and gendered power structures, as well as a possibility for other Black women to gain affirmation of one's experience and beingness – as Mununggurr-Williams states of the strength of Blak women, 'As Blak women or women of colour, we experience the world so differently. The strength of Blak women that has been passed down through the generations, through all the intergenerational trauma, through all the beauty and the power, is something that needs to be recognised and celebrated' (Mecca M-Power interview, 5.7.2023).

After burning the Fire Front through Country, kin and white settler impositions, to envision ways of reconnecting to the way of speaking back and to another Ellen van Neerven demonstrates and tackles with abuse and meaning of race within same-sex and queer relationships, as well as violent state politics in their poem *Expert* (Appendix 6), while giving the reader dizzying goosebumps. Van Neerven's poem's speaker speaks emotionally in internal talk as well as to the reader and the surrounding world about gendered and racialized partner relationship violence. The 'expert' refers to the poem's speaker's white girlfriend stating that she is an expert in finding answers to racialized issues with superficial knowledge: 'Poor me / don't know how it happened / think I got / a non-Indigenous girlfriend / who thinks she's an expert / don't know how she's got her expertise / think I'm

the first one she's met / yet / she tells me I'm closed to other sides of the debate / that she has the answers because she saw a television ad / for Recognition / and though most Indigenous Australians are opposed / she says it's for our good'. It depicts a white savior discourse and criticism towards it.

In addition, the poem brings out a discourse of certain Indigenous peoples referred to as 'too urban' to have a say in Indigenous knowledge or issues regarding communities in rural areas. The white girlfriend's talk reminds me of Perez' (2022, p. 14) discussion on traditional versus modern and authentic/pure versus inauthentic: this conception constructs Indigenous culture as 'static, bounded essence that once existed in a 'pure' and 'authentic' state before [colonial] contact…'. This logic ignores the moving and changing characteristics of Indigenous Peoples, and that their cultures would have become degraded and inauthentic. In addition, the poem points out colonial power structures as white privilege in different relationships of knowing as well as the stereotypes about rural Indigenous Peoples with alleged substance- and sexual abuse.: 'talks about drunks and sexual abuse 'up north' / devalues my own knowledge (too urban) / and anything I get from black media / (not the whole truth / I wouldn't trust it)'.

Furthermore, valuable to ponder in fact is the speaker of the poem: how can I know of their gendered position or subjectivity? Regarding the position from where van Neerven writes and how they have verbalized it, the reader can be quick to assume the queer nature of the poem. This can be also seen as a moving of representations of queer identities in non- and Indigenous communities and relationships, and how identity as LGBTQ+ Indigenous person can take shape as their customary Indigenous aesthetics and structural logic.

Contrasting, but emphasizing the violence in van Neerven's poem's story, its speaker shows the continuum of domestic abuse by taking a strong stand in colonial power structures when depicting the parallel of domestic violence and national racialized abuse by the state: 'she likes to argue when she's had a few / *13 times more* / her voice loud / *(87%) of intimate partner homicides* / fresh tears on my face / involving Indigenous people, are alcohol related / she's drunk, I tell the booliman / still shaking. Sitting on the steps. / no, I haven't had any / won't let her forget this statistic / tonight it's her / in the paddy wagon'. The last two stanzas refer to the girlfriend getting arrested in a police van. The complexity and affectivity of the situation in the poem is highlighted emotionally by adding multiple layers of speakers between the stanzas, regarding the statistics on violence involving Indigenous people and

giving a countering perspective to the girlfriend's statements by depicting the white person being responsible for committing that violence and then getting arrested. As a white reader, the poem evokes frustrated feelings of unstable, contradictory and untenable communication by white settlers and their need to tell what is 'right', trying to find justifications on their actions from almost anywhere, but at the same time the feelings of justice when the state forces catch the abusive culprit. Throughout this story, the poem's speaker brings out the colonizing epistemology and racialized state control, that is often used especially towards Indigenous Peoples. It is partly a call for Aboriginal sovereignty, the right and ability to practice self-determination (Moreton-Robinson, 2004, pp. 37, 40).

4.3 The Fire as liberation and healing

The Fire Front has burned through my journey of viewing how First Nations' poetry's Fire is making its way in deconstructing dominant white-settler discourses on Indigenous history, knowledge, agency and bodies by criticizing colonization and depicting intersections of gender and race as a part of the resistance against colonial, white and cisheteronormative power structures. The analysis shows how the poetry navigates towards reconnecting to the way of speaking back as well as to one another. Now the Fire reconstructs the discourse by accounting for loss and planning for the repair and reforming the sense of liberation and collective healing. The liberation, also depicted in the poems, can be understood by freeing oneself from the coloniality of power considering heterosexualist patriarchy and the oppressive organization of life constructed by modern/colonial (gender) system (Lugones, 2007, p. 187). It can also constitute as a strong re-emergence of collective identity by acknowledging the colonial wounds (Mignolo and Vázguez, 2013), and by emphasizing the connection to spirit, kin and land.

An author and comedian Steven Oliver states in the book that he had to make peace with the label forced upon his ancestors, the label of Aboriginal. He writes: 'Identity and sense of self meant aligning my being with a name pushed upon the Old People. There were no Aboriginal people here over two hundred years ago.' (*Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today*, ed. Whittaker, 2020, p. 109). He takes the reader to the world beyond the classifications as we know them. The poem *I Am the Road* by a Noongar writer Claire G. Coleman starting the chapter 'Because we want it back, need it back, because they can' (p. 117-119) underlines the feelings of loss and surrounds the reader of the intertwined

relationship of First Nations and their Country: ‘My grandfather was the bush, the coast, salmon gums, / hakeas, blue-grey banskias / Wind-whipped water, tea-black estuaries, sun on grey stone / My grandfather was born on Country, was buried on Country / His bones are Country / I am the road.’.

The strong connection to identity, and strive towards liberation and healing all based onto land are depicted also in Bruce Pascoe’s essay in the book: ‘- - our people have always sung in verse: we named a bend in the river Kardinia after the first rays of the morning sun; we named a hill Bellawein which may mean either a view from where the water sparkles like fire or perhaps leaning on our elbow by the fire - - whoever created the expression was a poet and perhaps a poet long before Europe had chanced upon the idea of aesthetic language. - - we spoke seven to ten languages and used long and complex words in all of them to explain long and complex philosophical statements. - - [words and their use are] our heritage’ (ed. Whittaker, 2020, p. 74-75).

Say My Name by Meleika Gesa-Fatafehi (Appendix 7) continues to strengthen the Fire Front like the justice in van Neerven’s poem. It takes a stance against mispronouncing and whitewashing Indigenous name(s), dispossessing Indigenous existence and people from their lands, and emphasizes the importance of language for identity and culture: ‘My name was my name before / I walked among the living / before I could breathe / before I had lungs to fill / before my great grandmother passed / and everyone was left to grieve’. Dreaming, as a customary basis of onto-epistemology for Australian Indigenous Peoples, is a leading theme in the poem. Dreaming and connected ancestry from different Countries is depicted to connect to oneself as: My name was birthed from a dream / a whisper from gods to a king / a shout into the stars that produced / another that shone as bright / They held me without being burnt, humming lullabies in pidgin’ and ‘My name was passed down from my / ancestors / They acknowledged my roots grew in two / places / So, they ripped my name from the ocean / and mixed it into bloodlines of my totems’. The name-giving in Gesa-Fatafehi’s Indigenous group(s), like depicted in the stanzas, is place-based and not individual based, and the place is related to one’s kin. The poem’s speaker reflects their Dreaming, which the totems are parts of, linking one’s subjectivity to collective kin for liberation and healing. As a reader, I find that the strongly intertwined subject positions from multiple places (between/and) as well as the notions of diverse important meanings of one’s name awake notions of queering the thematic of white settler name-giving practices and understandings, and the notions of a subject position or self being somehow

‘unchanging, stable and single-sided’. In addition to sense of liberation and the healing nature of it, this name-giving practice can be seen as a vital part of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty.

The speaker has a very close connection to their kin – referring to one’s family-like social system, that connects them to their land and community. In many Indigenous communicative relationships between and with humans, as well as more-than-humans, so called reciprocal kinship is existent Kimmerer (2017, p. 132). Kimmerer (2017, p. 132) writes how language reminds them of this kinship with all of the animate world, such as fire, water, mountains and rocks, as well as songs and stories. Gesa-Fatafehi also writes about the intertwined relationship of one’s name and land, and why mispronouncing it disrupts their connection or giving a new one whitewashes it: ‘So, excuse me as I roll my eyes or sigh as you / Mispronounce my name / over and over again / Or when you give me another / that dishonours my mothers and fathers / That doesn’t acknowledge my lineage to my island home / Or the scents of rainforest and ocean foam / You will not stand here on stolen land / and whitewash my name / For it is two words intertwined / holding as much power as a hurricane’. In the speaker’s talk, the Fire Front burns in resilience and connection, and especially the powerful ending of the poem gives a depiction of reciprocal relationship of respect and speaking and listening: ‘Say it right or don’t say it at all / For I am Meleika / I will answer when you call’. This is why I find that Aboriginal liberation, healing the collective wounds, and the call for sovereignty are possibly the leading themes in this poem.

Yvette Holt, belonging to the Bidjara, Yiman and Wakaman Nations of Queensland, has written her poem *Custodial Seeds* (Appendix 8) with her stylistic way of using metaphors and imagery, where she depicts the resonance, beauty and pain of First Nations’ women’s lives (Manning, 2008). In Holt’s work in poetry, she discusses full range of emotions as well as the pain young girls experience in the circumstances summed up by intersections of class and poverty (Manning, 2008). Considering Holt’s backgrounds in interrogating the intersections of oppression based on racism and sexism, *Custodial Seeds* is related to this by depicting a story of a birth-giving Aboriginal woman journeying by a river to deliver new life in her traditional way, while encountering what seems to be a metaphor for white settler presence along the way. The poem’s speaker starts with stanzas ‘And so she followed the river / doing as she was told / a long wide shimmering snake / sparkling across the moonlit current / dividing neighbours between / economics and class.’. The snake may symbolize a totem, a relationship and connection to one’s tribe and ancestors. The economical and class

segregation of peoples in the poem divided by the snake swimming in the river, or the current itself, brings the settler-colonial division and ripping off self-determination of Peoples to my mind, as well as the Australian state's possessive nature towards the land and extracting it for economical profit.

The speaker tells how a retired rivergum tree and tasting its sap serves as a support pillar and a torso of knowledge for the birth-giver, and amniotic liquid enriches 'the soil with a river of yolk'. The verses carry a birthing-story of tens of thousands of years old Peoples. I want to note, that because of the major diversity of hundreds of First Nations Peoples and their cultures, as a reader I am not able to make conclusions of the birthing-ceremony or tradition, that would encompass the poem's context. According to Jones (2012, in Marriott et. al., 2019, p. 17), 'Birthing on Country' is culturally significant for the future of the baby and their belonging to that country. According to Marriott et. al. (2019, p. 17) this philosophy ensures a spiritual connection to the land of the parent's community and the baby. The authors suggest that by tradition, the processes and care in Birthing on Country and after birth are intrinsically connected with other Aboriginal Lores, which are inherited through Dreaming. In addition, according to Commonground's article (Pol, 7.5.2021) the Dreaming, Law, land, kinship and beliefs about life and death are all connected to these traditional birthing practices, and Birthing on Country is about healing intergenerational trauma through cultural birthing. The importance of Birthing on Country might serve as the motivation for the poem's woman travelling by the river on feet. As a reader, I ended up asking myself: where is she walking from, in a rush of a hurry, near the 'canine bastards cross the river / digging a bowl for their midnight desire'? In all the loss, there is always a new rope of life and healing from repair: 'Finally her night cries deliver / resonating tears before a disturbing sunrise / the rope of life now rests on her flowing breasts / and again the canine bastards cross the river / digging a bowl for their midnight desire.'.

The Fire Front burning strong throughout the poems set me in reflexive flames with resonating, interrogating, re-imagining depictions. Now the flames continue to keep burning as collective nurturing and healing as reconnecting to oneself and the Country, from the nutritious earth after its burning. In the poetry anthology, Ali Cobby Eckermann (ed. Whittaker, 2020, p. 143) emphasizes the repetition of history in the poems, thus they have a possibility for creating repair:

> *I felt each poem reiterated the telling of stories, linked by the intergenerational experiences that often repeat without repair. I wanted to highlight how our history repeats. Every poem exists as part of that cycle. The poems show how the Western models of poetry and linear time are charades in Aboriginal poetry.*

I Run… by Melanie Mununggurr-Williams is an award-winning slam poem in spoken poetry, while also being incorporated in the poetry anthology as a written version. Performing one's poem can be considered as a powerful method and reading it may give a reader a different but beautiful experience. The poet actively wields her connection to language, land and culture to decolonize the literary and performance space. (Mununggurr-Williams, in Mecca M-Power interview, 5.7.2023). The poem's speaker may depict a moment of one's daily life as well as wide struggles embedded into it, and how the healing nature of running on the land helps her emotional turmoil to 'carry her away' and 'get her scent lost in the currents of the rivers'. The structure and pace of the poem tells a story of processing emotions and finding supportive ropes in existence.

After reading the poem, it leaves me with a feeling of a long deep cleansing breath, trust, transformation and reconnecting to oneself and the surroundings. This begins to form already in the couple of the first stanzas: 'When life attacks me from all angles like I'm a paper bag in a thunderstorm / I run / I run from all my problems, tune out all sounds of day and life / Until the only sound I'm left with is my feet hitting the tarmac, carrying me away / My heart thumping deep within the lonely, hollow, cavity of my chest I run'. Running resembles the reader of physically running away from traumas and sadness, but at the same time paradoxically of the process of going forward, facing the hardships and opening oneself up for healing. While running to process the history, trauma, and one's feelings, the speaker is remembering a collective experience of violence in the past and present relating to the violence done sticking with oneself: 'But like a black tracker, my problems find me / They chase me down the way white authorities chased down brown-skin babies / Hold me captive the way this country holds asylum seekers and taunt me the way my abuser does, despite me already leaving the scene of that crime / I run'.

In the next verse the speaker depicts a beautiful but striking image of the importance of acknowledging the anger in the divisions and complex relationship of oneself and the world: 'I run through beautiful boundaries that segregate real from true / Run into a blur of horizons of sadness and the gravitational pull of a woman going mad / Nice girl to bitch, good guy to asshole, the cycle posing the same question as, 'What came first? / The chicken

or the egg?' / And now I'm stuck with trying to run from her, / The beat down beauty / Suicidal psycho caught between the western white-man's world / and ancient Aboriginal antiquity'.

The striking emotional processing and healing components of running on the land and soothing one's inner child evokes feelings of empowerment and liberation: 'I run to the hills and sing my praises to my inner child cos she reminds / me of the beauty of a rainbow in the rain, / The excitement of mud between my toes, / The happiness of life's simplicities, she / Is the first pearl in my ocean / I run to the ocean where all my tears from years past have collected, / Knowing that if I blow it a kiss the least it will do is wave back, and if I'm lucky / My salty sweat from all that I have run from / Will one day / Bathe me clean.' The symbolisms of rainbow in the rain, feel of earth's mud and the ocean that waves back may resemble the animate world and Dreaming connected to Country, Land and ancestors, as well as the existing joy, hope and support in the midst of the hardest of challenges. This was touching for me to read and experience, when the world has seemed dark and cruel in ripping off peoples' human rights – both in the context of this thesis, and the immediate surroundings of global North's western world. The speaker reminds the reader of the resilience and survivance of on-going work towards equality and everyone's important actions between and in segregations, intersections and relationships, and that transformation is an affective process. For the reader, the speaker's inner struggle and keys for resolution in running could be seen to relate to Anzaldúa's depictions on inner conflict: when attempting to ignore one's fears, there is an inner conflict which leads to despair – the resolution is out of reach, until she acknowledges and explores previously suppressed emotions. As she states, 'rather than struggle to maintain self-autonomy, she consciously struggles to let it go' (1987, in Keating, 2010, p. 84).

5 Conclusions and further research

Poetry may be a way of knowing unparallel to any other. Wayreading through and with the Fire Front in this thesis has burned its way to establish a sense of Indigenous poetry as agential and dynamic, moving and resistant, as well as vital part of decolonial literary activism. These poems by Black and Indigenous, and/or queer poets, can be understood to have decolonizing and queering effects on the cisheteropatriarchal and white Eurocentric narratives, the ones that lean onto racialized, gendered and classed dichotomies of colonization. Relating to the poetry anthology's context of Aboriginal poetry and power, these complex and diverse aesthetics of storytelling and literary resistance actively incorporate reciprocity and the role of the reader into the reflexive speak and listen trade. The analysis shows, how the poems introduce interrogation and critique of settler colonialism, reflection on the intersections of gender and race and their parts in resisting colonial power structures, as well as Indigenous liberation and the healing components of the Fire Front. I want to acknowledge the intertwining and diverse thematic connections in the material: even though the poems are sectioned in three 'categories' in this wayreading analysis, they overlap between them and have many connecting elements within all the themes: the critique of colonization and colonial structures encompasses also interrogation of colonial ideas and epistemology of power, gender, sexuality, race, liberation and healing.

The critique of colonization and settler colonial history of Australia, a prominent theme in the poems, by discourse can aim to disrupt dominant neocolonial Australian discourses (Bouwer, 2024, p. 338). The positionality of settler colonial poeticism is interrogated by the contents and forms, by subverting and transforming the poetic forms of the West and bringing Aboriginal languages and Dreamings into the center. The poems, such as *Yúya Karrabúrra (Fire is Burning)* and *Black woman*, powerfully and emotionally represent Indigenous peoples' experiences of abuse, collective need for collaboration and their resistance and strength of identity during the colonial disposition of families – all this unmasking settler colonialism. The poems depict the intersectionality of one's position between and within categorizations of gender, sexuality, race and class: they actively seem to deconstruct and queer the colonial, white, cisheterosexual patriarchal gaze and the power structures they form, with the reconstruction of and reconnection to the critical agency and gaze of Black and Indigenous women, queer, and non-binary people. The oppositional gaze toward white settler colonial gaze can be understood depicted especially in the poem *Many*

Girls White Linen. The depicted intersectionality in the poems can focus the analytical attention on the dynamics of difference in the context of social movement politics, and to address the ways racial and gender discrimination compound each other (Crenshaw 1991, in Carangio, 2021, p. 78). This creates reimagining and counterviewing of history, culture and discourses in the poems.

Interrogative reimagining in the poems deconstructs a central position and categorization of 'white': whiteness informs people's actions and relations but is still not acknowledged widely as a power position in settler structures. Whiteness theory helps to make whiteness a visible social construct, and according to Habibis et al. (2016, p. 59) it is 'a location of structural advantage or privilege, a set of cultural practices that are unmarked and unnamed; and standpoint, the worldview from which those who are White understand themselves and those who are not White'. Similarly, Durie (1999, p. 149) points out how whiteness studies must expose the complexities of being white in a gendered, raced and classed world and decentre the 'centre' to expand understandings of being. This can be seen as one of the central topics in the poems, when interrogating and critiquing settler colonialism. In this thesis, I am aware of my position in white Western high education, and as so, like Durie (1999, p. 159) formulates, I am able to only ever partially see the contradictions and complexity of relations of privilege and oppression where whiteness operates – like in my position in this thesis interpreting the poems.

In addition, like hooks (2003) states of Black female oppositional gaze, the poems disrupt the conventional sexist and racist stereotypes of Indigenous, queer, and female agency, autonomy and embodiment, by critically intervening and changing conventional white settler discourses and transforming notions of agency and liberation. In my view, the anthology *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (ed. Whittaker, 2020) could be read reflexively as a critical commentary on European colonialism that was taken to Australia in 1788. In general, it can be noted that these poets are presenting their stories and histories, which were not included in white settler writings of history in Australia. The representations of Indigenous agency in these poems show evidence how agency and representative power is concretely taken back, and critical gaze towards dominant culture, politics, as well as actions of white settler Australia is widely shown, by unmasking racialized state control (e. g. *Black Woman*, *Expert*), counterviewing white prose (e. g. *Many Girls White Linen*), interrogating whitewashing and social division-making (e. g. *Say My Name,*

Custodial Seeds) and vocalizing the wounds and the importance of the land as the roots of identity and healing (e. g. *I Run…*). In my view, all this creates the notions of decoloniality and liberation.

When the wayreading journey lead the Fire forward, the *intersectionality between colonial power structures* stands in front. The poems depict the intersections of *gender* and *race*, also *sexuality* (e. g. *Expert*), while *resisting colonial power structures*. In this wayreading selection of poems, Black Indigenous womanhood rise into the center, that by itself can be understood to queer the white, colonial, cisheteropatriarchal gaze and discourse. This connects to Moreton-Robinson's (2013) notions on Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory, in which she suggests that the intersecting oppressions and the experiences in them are informed by shared social, political, historical and material conditions. She suggests that these standpoints can be seen as crucial to understand and challenge colonial structures (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 331). Similarly to the complexity and diversity of the experiences depicted in the poems, the individual experiences of Black Indigenous Women differ due to the intersecting oppressions and discursive relations, and complicated further by respective cultural differences and resistance as Indigenous sovereign woman subjects (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 331-347). The intersections in the resistance against colonial power structures depicted in the poems can be understood as for example navigating in and between white settler and Indigenous heritage (e. g. *Yúya Karrabúrra [Fire is Burning]*), the roles, responsibilities, resistance and agency as a Black Indigenous woman (e. g. *Black Woman, Custodial Seeds*), vocalizing domestic abuse in 'interracial' queer relationship (e. g. *Expert*), polysemic meanings of one's name and resistance against whitewashing it (e. g. *Say My Name*) and navigating through anger and sadness connecting to experiences of colonization as an Indigenous woman (e. g. *I Run…*).

The Fire Front as deconstruction and reconstruction spread around also as reconnecting with oneself, community, ancestors and land. This can mean for the reader, that they depict *liberation*, *healing* as well as *belonging*. The poems reminisce the devastating events of settler colonialism and its violence, and by providing the reader reflexive agency when interacting with these stories, they provide with a reciprocal and transactive medicine in the form of poetry (e. g. Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today, ed. Whittaker, 2020, p. 144). This medicine acts also as freedom, while articulating a lifetime of feeling and

emphasizing Dreamings. I see that writing poetry could be a way of dreaming, reimagining a world that is only a dream away, connecting to one's own experience.

The healing is also about acknowledging loss and longing: Steven Oliver points out in the book (ed. Whittaker, 2020, p. 113), of feelings of aching yearning 'for what once was but is simply now a sad memory … the water, the memories, the emotion, the longing, the hurt – as if they were a sponge now made heavy by it all'. The healing prospects of the poems involve the sense and understanding of liberation: they are depicting freeing oneself from the coloniality of power and oppressive organization of life, re-emerging a collective identity healing the colonial wounds and by emphasizing the strong connection to spirit, kin and land. In general, I note throughout wayreading of Indigenous healing and liberation in the context of this thesis, that they are closely linked with and rooted in land and Country. Already when wayreading in *Yúya Karrabúrra (Fire is Burning)*, the element of healing can be felt through the beautiful language of 'not pointing a finger' and actively working for collaboration and respectful interaction, to conserve Indigenous cultural diversity. Healing and liberation throughout the material can be considered to show as vocalizing the love, hurt and connecting to kin (e. g. *Black Woman*), envisioning and re-imagining other-worlds and active Indigenous agencies (e. g. *Many Girls White Linen*), reaching justice in the face of abuse (e. g. *Expert*), and verbalizing strong survivance and resilience of Indigenous Peoples and strongly connecting to one's name and kin (e. g. *Say My Name*). In addition, healing and liberation in the poems may be represented through depicting processing intergenerational trauma through cultural birthing (e. g. *Custodial Seeds*) and running from and toward anger and sadness to heal, while reconnecting with oneself, kin and land (e. g. *I Run…*).

In addition and connecting to the former main contents in the language of the poems, fighting for *self-determination and sovereignty, the right to govern their people and lands,* are continuous themes throughout the anthology. These consider the formations and place-based identities and cultures, and their right and abilities to practice self-determination. Interrogation of settler colonialism as a decolonizing effort enables a road back to self-governance. As Steven Oliver states in the anthology (ed. Whittaker, 2020, p. 112): 'my connection to, and value in, being Aboriginal will never be moved'. The self-determining moulds of existence can be understood to be created by the collective political agency constructed through 'grief and pain, but also hope and possibility' (Keddie, 2012). The

dreaming and planning of practices of decolonization may become the 'ropes of resistance for unborn generations' (Marshall, 2011).

Considering the ethical perspective in this thesis, I want to acknowledge how this work relates to the guidelines of Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities (2018). The six core values in this type of research are spirit and integrity, cultural continuity, equity, reciprocity, respect and responsibility (Appendix 1). The first value is reflected through respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' cultural inheritance of past, current and future generations, and the links which bind the generations together. It is also reflected through credibility of intent in the process of negotiations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as demonstrated by researchers' adherence to the Guidelines and the behaviour and perceived integrity of the researchers and other stakeholders. This core value is reflected generally through commitment to the other five core values (Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities, 2018, p. 4). Cultural continuity as a core value is reflected through understanding the exploitative exercise that former (and possibly current) research has had, recognizing the Indigenous personal and collective bonds, engaging with Indigenous people and communities and demonstrating respect for identity of Indigenous Peoples. I have put effort into implementing an approach that balance between collective and individual identity and use Indigenous standpoints as well as methodologies when developing research proposal. I did not write my thesis in an empirical field on the lands of the Peoples, and because of the literary nature of the work, I was not part of real-life social negotiations considering the execution of this thesis. I did consult Yuwaalaraay author Nardi Simpson remotely, who provided me with a valuable source for ethical consideration and positioning myself around the topic.

Equity as a research core value is reflected through recognizing and valuing Indigenous knowledge and wisdom and ensuring the fair and reasonable distribution of benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to achieve equity in economic, legal, social and health status (Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities, 2018, p. 6). I have actively aimed to engage with as many voices as possible in research material, and valued poets' depicted languages. The value of reciprocity is reflected through respectful engagement and inclusion as well as that the communities have the right to define benefits according to their values (Ethical

conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities, 2018, p. 7). This thesis would have benefitted from discussions with Indigenous Peoples during the process, but because of the lack of resources and my geographic location, I was not able to implement this fully in this literary analysis. I have prioritized having reflexive discussion with the poets' work while connecting their and my interpretations to Indigenous research literature, as well as addressing the priorities and themes that the poets articulate. It is important to acknowledge that regarding the interpretative reflexive methodology, my reading relies also on my own positionality, understanding and incorporated research. The core value of respect on the other hand is reflected through supporting the rights of Indigenous people, self-awareness of one's own beliefs and attitudes, ensuring trust and openness, and awareness that research has consequences for those involved as well as mutual intent and agreement of the research (2018, p. 9). These are aspects that I have tried to incorporate to this work, with genuine intention and respectful dialogue with the material and research. Finally, responsibility as another value in research is similar, but more specifically relates to not inflicting harm and ensuring researchers' accountability (2018, p. 11) – I have aimed to verbalize the goals of this thesis, ultimately taking steps toward Indigenous self-determination, throughout my writing. I am aware of my position as a white non-Indigenous student in Western academia, that inherently has effects on how widely and diversely I am able to discuss the contents of this thesis. Should the reader be part of Indigenous group(s), only to assume, it would transform the effects and responses in reading these poems – this reading position might create emotional affections about the sense of belonging or resistance within certain kin, while for another reader, empower in other ways supporting equality and equity.

In addition, I want to acknowledge the risks of implementing the methodology of wayreading in this work considering Indigenous Peoples' literary art as poetry in another context, further from CHamoru People of Guåhan. I have taken this risk, and as Pereira (2019, p. 406) discusses the moving of decolonial queer theory: 'Like bodies, theories also travel, and the transpositions that play out in unheard of paths and encounters transform these theories into processes of dislocation, movement, and multiplicity. These transpositions, encounters, and voyages lead us on our search … for interweaving theories.'. This is why further research may consider further, what potentiality but risks the implementation of wayreading to another context possesses. Like in the Indigenous CHamoru origin of the method of wayreading, Perez (2022) forms an understanding of how

CHamoru literature is alive and thriving while shaped by the surrounding contextual social and cultural pressures – their work is a crucial and continuous part of CHamoru past, present and future. I believe the same for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander poetry, that can assemble collective healing, liberation and power, and this way, possibilities of decolonial queer literary activism.

As discussed above, colonialism and the coloniality of power have ongoing effects on not only discourses but lived experiences in daily life. Writing this thesis reminded of the global context of neocolonial projects and discourses, that are still dispossessing and damaging Indigenous custodians of different lands: whether it be for example Sámi, Native Americans or Palestinians, people in different colonial and/or apartheid states, who are resisting the imposition of colonialism between all intersectional pressures. Here we can also acknowledge, how the on-going colonial discourses are taking part in on-going genocides of Indigenous Peoples. For example, Alqaisiya's (2018, p. 29) writing considers how a Palestinian countering discourse to Israeli pinkwashing deconstructs pinkwashing narratives, rejects myths of a colonial savior and unveils how discourses of 'sexual progress' reproduce Zionist colonialism. Like the Indigenous poetry in this thesis, these countering discourses can be seen as practicing decolonization.

Further research specifically on decolonial queer literary activism, Indigenous resistance and political agency in decolonizing knowledge and history in storytelling is crucial for creating paths toward social, economic and ecologic change. I agree with Bakshi (2020, p. 536), that for example critical reflections on decolonial readings of queerness are necessary, since heteronormativity is often sustained upon intersecting categories, such as race and gender. Relating to this, future research could also continue to center gender non-conforming and queer Indigenous voices. The formulation of normativities continues throughout the time, they reshape and transform. Conversation and reflexivity are needed to account for a respectful dialogue, as well as the awareness of one's position: critical self-reflexivity is needed, when writing Indigenous voices on paper. It is a process that can have continuous effects for people in the future. Queering and decolonizing cisheteropatriarchal and Eurocentric knowledges in reciprocal collaborations in future research could open the way to understand the world as pluriversal, and emphasize the nature of knowledge being complex, diverse and in place-based way, unique. Research concentrating more specifically on art as a form of resistance and influencing specific oppressive politics in different contexts

is in my opinion necessary in today's world, where the colonial histories still echo in power structures. I believe that the future research centering healing and reconnection is able to form a pathway for cultural and social reimagination, that further creates inclusivity and transformativity. Centering the lived experiences and voices of marginalized communities, such as Indigenous Peoples around the world, according to the ethical conducts in question, can create another step toward the important and necessary self-determination and sovereignty of the Peoples.

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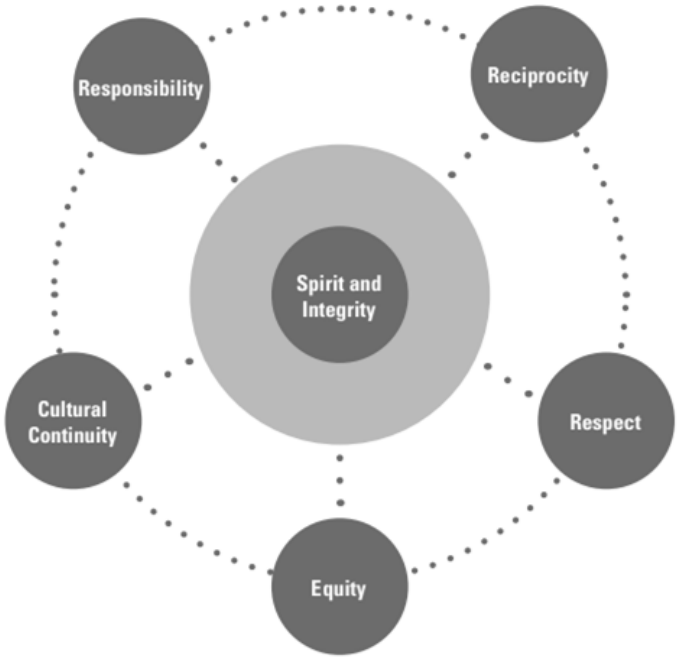
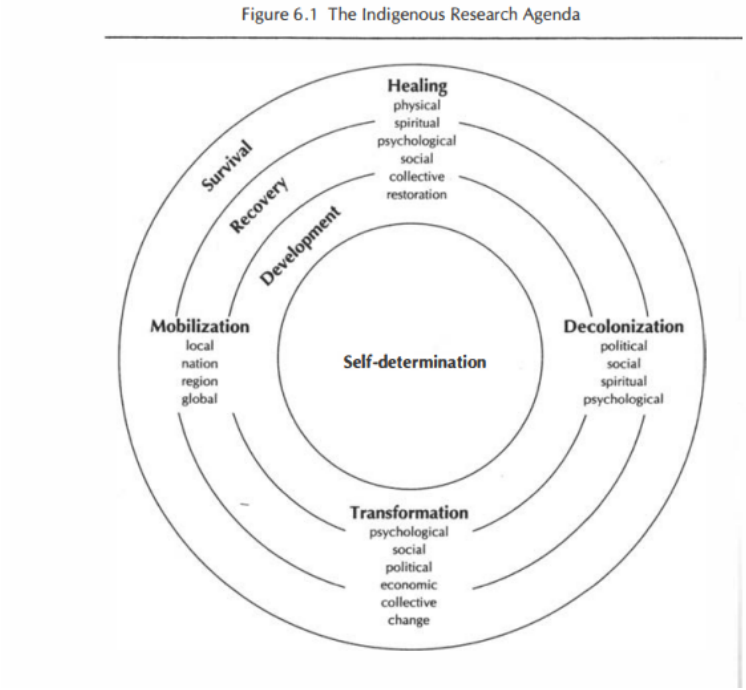
Appendices



Appendix 1. The six core values in ethical research with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities. In: Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders (2018, p. 3).



Appendix 2. The Indigenous Research Agenda. In 'Decolonizing Research Methodologies' (Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 117).

'Figure 6.1 is a simple representation of an indigenous research agenda. The chart uses the metaphor of ocean tides. From a Pacific peoples' perspective the sea is a giver of life, it sets time and conveys movement. Within the' greater ebb and flow of the ocean are smaller localised environments which have enabled Pacific peoples to develop enduring relationships to the sea. For Polynesian peoples the significant deity of the sea is Tangaroa. Although there are many directions that can be named, the chart takes the Māori equivalent of the four directions: the northern, the eastern, the southern and the western. The tides represent movement, change, process, life, inward and outward flows of ideas, reflections and actions. The four directions named here - decolonization, healing, transformation and mobilization - represent processes. They are not goals or ends in themselves. They are processes which connect, inform and clarify the tensions between the local, the regional and the global. They are processes which can be incorporated into practices and methodologies. Four major tides are represented in the chart as: survival, recovery, development, self-determination. They are the conditions and states of being through which indigenous communities are moving.' (Smith, 1999, p. 116).

Appendix 3. Yúya Karrabúrra (Fire is Burning) by Alice Eather

I'm standing by this fire
The embers smoking
The ashes glowing
The coals weighing us down
The youth are buried in the rubble
My eyes are burning
And through my nostrils
The smoke is stirring
I breathe it in

Yúya Karrabúrra

I wear a ship on my wrist
That shows my blood comes from convicts
On the Second Fleet
My father's forefathers came
Whipped beaten and bound in chains
The dark tone in my skin
The brown in my eyes
Sunset to sunrise
My Wúrnal mother's side
My Kíkka who grew up in a dugout canoe
In her womb is where my consciousness grew

Yúya Karrabúrra

I walk between these two worlds
A split life
Split skin
Split tongue
Split kin
Everyday these worlds collide

And I'm living and breathing
This story of black and white

Sitting in the middle of this collision
My mission is to bring
Two divided worlds to sit beside this fire
And listen
Through this skin I know where I belong
It is both my centre
And my division

Yúya Karrabúrra

My ancestors dance in the stars
And their tongues are in the flames
And they tell me:
You have to keep the fire alive
Between black and the white
There's a story waiting to be spoken

In every life
There's a spirit waiting to be woken
Now I'm looking at you
With stars in my eyes
And my tongue is burning flames
And I say

Yúya Karrabúrra

The sacred songs are still being sung
But the words are slowly fading
The distant cries I'm hearing
Are the mothers burying their babies
The Elders are standing strong

But the ground beneath them is breaking

Yúya Karrabúrra

Now I welcome you to sit beside my fire
I'm allowing you to digest my confusion
I will not point my finger and blame
Cause when we start blaming each other
We make no room for changing each other

We've got to keep this fire burning
With ash on our feet and coal in our hands
Teach Barra-rodjibba
All them young ones how to live side by side
Cause tomorrow when the sun rises
And our fires have gone quiet
They will be the ones to reignite it

Yúya Karrabúrra

These flames
Us
Will be their guidance

Appendix 4. Black Woman by Ruby Langlord Ginibi

I am every black woman who's ever been loved. I am every black woman who's been serenaded by a guitar on a starry night. I am every black woman who's ever been betrayed by a selfish lover. I am every black woman who's given birth to loved children. I am every black woman who's had to work on fence lines to raise them too! I am every black woman who's hungered after truth! I am every black woman who's ever-carted water buckets on yokes, to fill a forty-four gallon drum, for drinkin', washin', and cookin' purposes. I am every black woman, who's had a son, or husband jailed! I am every black woman who's had iron doors slammed shut, going to visit them too! I am every black woman who's struggled to raise a fine. I am every black woman who has survived this calamity called life, in this multicultural Australia.

Appendix 5. Many Girls White Linen by Alison Whittaker

no mist no mystery
no hanging rock only

many girls white linen
men with guns and
harsher things white women
amongst gums white linen
starch'er things later plaques
will mark this war
nails peeling back floor
scrubbing back blak chores
white luxe hangnails hanging

more than nails while
no palm glowing paler

later plaques will mark
this sick linen's rotten
cotton genes later plaques
will track the try
to bleed lineage dry

its banks now flood
a new ancestor, Ordeal,
plaits this our blood

if evil is banal
how more boring is
suffering evil two bloodlines
from it how more
raw rousing horrifying is
the plaque that marks
something else rolling on
from this place a
roll of white linen
dropped on slight incline
amongst gums collecting grit
where blak girls hang
nails hang out picking
them hangnails

Appendix 5. Expert by Ellen van Neerven

Poor me
don't know how it happened
think I got
a non-Indigenous girlfriend
who thinks she's an expert
don't know how she's got her expertise
think I'm the first one she's met
yet
she tells me I'm closed to other sides of the debate
that she has the answers because she saw a television ad
for Recognition
and though most Indigenous Australians are opposed
she says it's for our good
talks about drunks and sexual abuse 'up north'
devalues my own knowledge (too urban)
and anything I get from black media
(not the whole truth
I wouldn't trust it)
she likes to argue when she's had a few
13 times more
her voice loud
(87%) of intimate partner homicides
fresh tears on my face
involving Indigenous people, are alcohol related
she's drunk, I tell the booliman
still shaking. Sitting on the steps.

no, I haven't had any

won't let her forget this statistic

tonight it's her

in the paddy wagon

Appendix 6. Say My Name by Meleika Gesa-Fatafehi

Thank you Dad, for my name.

Thank you Mum, for letting me keep it.

Thank you Sydney Nan, for saying my name lovingly every time.

Lastly, thank you Papa and Nan, and the rest of my ancestors,

I dedicate this all to you.

My name was my name before

I walked among the living

before I could breathe

before I had lungs to fill

before my great grandmother passed

and everyone was left to grieve

My name was birthed from a dream

a whisper from gods to a king

a shout into the stars that produced

another that shone as bright

They held me without being burnt, humming lullabies in pidgin

My name was passed down from my

ancestors
They acknowledged my roots grew in two
places
So, they ripped my name from the ocean
and mixed it into bloodlines of my totems

My name has survived the destruction of worlds
And the genocidal rebirthing of so-called ones
It's escaped the overwhelmed jaw of the death bringer
many a time
It has survived the conflicts that resulted in my gods,
from both lands, knowing me as kin,
But noticing that I am painfully unrecognisable and lost
They are incapable of understanding
the foreign tongue that was forced on me

My name has escaped cyclones and their daughters
It has been blessed by the dead
As they mixed dirt, salt and liquid red,
into my flesh
My name is the definition of resilience
It is a warrior that manifested because of warriors

So, excuse me as I roll my eyes or sigh as you
Mispronounce my name
over and over again
Or when you give me another

that dishonours my mothers and fathers
That doesn't acknowledge my lineage to my island home
Or the scents of rainforest and ocean foam
You will not stand here on stolen land
and whitewash my name
For it is two words intertwined
holding as much power as a hurricane
Say it right or don't say it at all
For I am Meleika
I will answer when you call

Appendix 7. Custodial Seeds by Yvette Holt

And so she followed the river
doing as she was told
a long wide shimmering snake
sparkling across the moonlit current
dividing neighbours between
economics and class.

Walking until she could walk no further
collapsing beside a retired rivergum tree
she leans against its weathered body
stretching limbs from a pillar of nature
resisting the push for life
tasting the sap from a torso of knowledge.

Lifting up her homemade dress
she squats above the earth
warm odourless liquid rushes between her
legs, cleansing the dirt

enriching the soil with a river of yolk.

Finally her night cries deliver
resonating tears before a disturbing sunrise
the rope of life now rests on her flowing breasts
and again the canine bastards cross the river
digging a bowl for their midnight desire.

Appendix 8. I Run… by Melanie Mununggurr-Williams

I like to call myself a runner
Cos that's what I do
When life attacks me from all angles like I'm a paper bag in a thunderstorm
I run
I run from all my problems, tune out all sounds of day and life
Until the only sound I'm left with is my feet hitting the tarmac, carrying me away
My heart thumping deep within the lonely, hollow, cavity of my chest I run
I do fun-runs and marathons to escape cyclonic turmoil, Run through rivers in the hope my scent will get lost in the currents
But like a black tracker, my problems find me
They chase me down the way white authorities chased down brown-skin babies
Hold me captive the way this country holds asylum seekers and taunt me the way my abuser does, despite me already leaving the scene of that crime
I run
I run through beautiful boundaries that segregate real from true
Run into a blur of horizons of sadness and the gravitational pull of a woman going mad
Nice girl to bitch, good guy to asshole, the cycle posing the same question as, 'What came first?
The chicken or the egg?'
And now I'm stuck with trying to run from her,
The beat down beauty
Suicidal psycho caught between the western white-man's world
and ancient Aboriginal antiquity

I run to the hills and sing my praises to my inner child cos she reminds
me of the beauty of a rainbow in the rain,
The excitement of mud between my toes,
The happiness of life's simplicities, she
Is the first pearl in my ocean
I run to the ocean where all my tears from years past have collected,
Knowing that if I blow it a kiss the least it will do is wave back, and if I'm lucky
My salty sweat from all that I have run from
Will one day
Bathe me clean