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Violent Temporalities, the Colonial Museum and the Fantasy of Terra Nullius in Tara June Winch's 'The Yield'

Abstract: In 'The Yield' (2021), Wiradjuri writer Tara June Winch challenges and problematises the necrologies, i.e. the histories of loss, of Aboriginal dispossession that are created in and perpetuated by the colonial museum. Focusing simultaneously on the Wiradjuri family history of the Gondiwindis that has been violently extracted from their land, Prosperous, in the form of cultural materials kept in a museum's archive as well as the threat of losing the land itself, the novel puts the restitution of museum objects and the reclaiming of land rights into dialogue. Drawing on Dan Hicks' term 'necrology' to discuss how museums enact chronopolitical strategies to frame colonially oppressed peoples as non-coeval and 'primitive', in this article, I expand his notion of museums as colonial weapons of time by integrating Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson's theorisation of the 'white possessive'. In doing so, I situate the discourse in the settler colonial context of Australia, which allows me to read the museum as a site of knowledge production that is complicit in upholding the myth of 'terra nullius' and thus Aboriginal dispossession of country. I demonstrate that reclaiming the material and immaterial Gondiwindi family history in the forms of Ancestral Remains, cultural materials and a Wiradjuri dictionary signifies the rewriting of an othered history and hence a reclaiming of sovereignty over country.

Introduction
Museums and Power

Museums have a complex relationship with power and time. As one particular form of archive, museums are located at the power nexus of cultural and national collective memories, and hence identity formation.[1] This often clashes wildly with the general public's perception of museums, and even with the self-perception of museum directories and staff, as performing neutral, objective and impartial science.[2] Yet, it has been abundantly theorised that there is power in recording events, in naming, in labelling, in preserving memory and writing history,[3] which are all acts that are performed in the museum. A defensive attitude of supposed objectivity is also evident in Australia's museum context. Scientists speaking out against the restitution and repatriation of artefacts and bodily remains that were violently extracted from Aboriginal communities delegitimised such efforts that were gaining visibility and urgency in the 1990s. For instance, a well-known Australian prehistorian, referred to Aboriginal leaders of restitution and repatriation movements as 'radical' and convincedly stated that favouring

1 Cf. Joan M. Schwartz, Terry Cook: Archives, Records, and Power, p. 2.
2 Cf. ibid., p. 1. In 2002, eighteen museum directories worldwide signed 'The Declaration of the Importance and Value of Universal Museums'. The declaration itself supported the myth of museums as sites of objective knowledge production for the greater good, warding off a supposed loss of knowledge through, for instance, restitution of cultural materials, cf. Dan Hicks: The Brutish Museums, pp. 195-198, 202 f.
3 Cf. Joan M. Schwartz, Terry Cook: Archives, Records, and Power, p. 5.

the claims for the return of Ancestral Remains risks to replace the colonial past with a supposed "black intellectual totalitarianism".[4] Other scientists referred to the growing public demands by Aboriginal communities as "current political fashion" that are intended to destroy a preserved settler past.[5] At its core these statements reveal the anxious fragility of whiteness triggered by these efforts. Although there is a growing awareness of ethical quandaries to hold on to Aboriginal Ancestral Remains and sacred objects which has led to certain changes, – the Australian government issued official statements in support of repatriation of Ancestral Remains, museums have developed handbooks on repatriation or work closely together with Aboriginal curators to display Australia's 'hidden history'[6] – similar problematic sentiments persist among museum researchers and scientists until today.[7] Overall, these statements continue to defame Aboriginal peoples' restitution and repatriation demands as transient, suggest that Aboriginal peoples cannot take care of their own cultures and also expose a continued belief that Aboriginal peoples were/are on the brink of extinction.[8] Paul Turnbull identifies the underlying notorious argument to be an argument of temporality: that the manner of acquisition has no relevance to the question of restitution or repatriation, "in short, that the past has no relevance to the present".[9] Yet, time is central to the case of Australia and its discourse of 'white possession', because it has great impact on Aboriginal identity construction and processes of legitimising Aboriginal ownership of land under settler colonial law.

Dan Hicks, who is a curator at one such colonial institution, the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, investigates the colonial legacies of ethnographic museums and their related temporalities in his thought-provoking monograph 'The Brutish Museums'. Hicks postulates that the narrative framing of cultural materials from colonially oppressed peoples exhibited in ethnographic museums establishes the related culture as non-coeval with the present, pushing them into a primitive past.[10] Similarly, the history of the Gondiwindi family in Wiradjuri writer Tara June Winch's novel 'The Yield' (2021) has been violently extracted from their land, Prosperous, in the form of cultural materials that are kept in a museum's archive and would otherwise allow them to claim Native Title. Threatened by eviction

4 Dr. John Mulvaney in an interview with 'Newsweek', quoted in Paul Turnbull: Science, Museums and Collecting the Indigenous Dead in Colonial Australia, p. 6.
5 Robert Foley, the director of the Leverhulme Centre for Human Evolutionary Studies, in an interview with the 'Sydney Morning Herald', quoted in ibid., p. 6.
6 The Australian Office for the Arts has dedicated a campaign to inform about the government's policy on Aboriginal repatriation, cf. The Australian Office for the Arts: Indigenous Repatriation. The National Museum of Australia, for instance, recently published 'A Repatriation Handbook', cf. Michael Pickering: A Repatriation Handbook. The Australian Museum introduced its exhibition 'Unsettled' which also includes contemporary Aboriginal art that deals with various themes such as genocide and healing, cf. The Australian Museum's Unsettled Exhibition. More information on recent changes implemented by some Australian museums is traced by Michael Pickering and Phil Gordon, both advisors to museums or Aboriginal communities on museum related issues, cf. Michael Pickering, Phil Gordon: Repatriation.
7 Cf. Paul Turnbull: Science, Museums and Collecting the Indigenous Dead in Colonial Australia, pp. 329-355.
8 Cf. ibid. pp. 7, 18.
9 Ibid., p. 30.
10 Cf. Dan Hicks: The Brutish Museums, p. 185.

because a tin mining company was awarded the land rights by the Australian government, the protagonist August Gondiwindi's task to reclaim the artefacts, in Hick's terms, means rewriting the archival necrography of an othered history. The novel challenges and problematises the necrologies, i. e. the histories of loss, of Aboriginal dispossession that are created in and perpetuated by the colonial museum. Focusing simultaneously on the dispossession of the Gondiwindi's Wiradjuri family history as well as the threat of losing the land itself, the novel puts the restitution of cultural materials and the reclaiming of land rights into dialogue and exposes that both forms of Aboriginal dispossession are informed by the same settler colonial chronopolitics. In this article, I argue that settler museum practices of narrative framing and performance of Aboriginal cultural materials is a form of necrography that participates in the myth of 'terra nullius' and thus inscribes Aboriginal country as settler land.

In order to examine the narrativisation and representation of the Gondiwindi's violent necrology, I first introduce Hick's terminology of histories of loss and death as well as reflect on the applicability of Hick's findings to an Australian settler context specifically. This will be done by expanding the notion of necrology to include an investigation of the discourse of Aboriginal dispossession of country that Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson entitles 'the white possessive'. After interrogating how the necrology of the land Prosperous and simultaneously of the Gondiwindis is written by means of the disruptive extraction of cultural materials and their labelling and display in the museum's fictional Falstaff Collection, I survey the different ways of rewriting the colonial archive presented in the novel. For the latter, I mainly focus on the accumulation of immaterial family history by August's late grandfather Albert Gondiwindi in the form of a Wiradjuri dictionary. Ultimately, rewriting the archive means writing herself and her ancestors back into existence and regaining sovereignty over their land. In this way, the novel provides extensive commentary on ongoing discussions of Aboriginal land rights as well as restitution and repatriation. It is important to note that as a non-Indigenous researcher based in Germany, I, too, am implicated[11] in the neo-colonial power hierarchies that largely exclude Indigenous perspectives, lived experiences and scholarship in academia to this day. As an outsider to Aboriginal cultures and communities, this perspective impacts my reading of the text.

Time and the Settler Colonial Museum

Hicks asserts that power over time lies at the core of the colonial violence inflicted by ethnographic museums.[12] Although he deals specifically with the British Empire and the theft of cultural materials from the kingdom of Benin,

11 I base my understanding of implication on Michael Rothberg's concept of the implicated subject. Implicated subjects are not necessarily "direct agents of harm" but "they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination", cf. Michael Rothberg: The Implicated Subject, p. 1.

12 Cf. Dan Hicks: The Brutish Museums.

his insights are useful in other contexts as well. After all, colonial infrastructures travel across and beyond the empire. Hick's insights are built on Achille Mbembe's understanding of the museum. Mbembe, who is, amongst others, a prominent scholar and figure of decolonisation movements, presents the museum as a tool that actively creates and naturalises the alterity it desires in his ground-breaking monograph 'Necropolitics'. He writes,

> the museum has been a powerful device of separation. The exhibiting of subjugated or humiliated humanities has always adhered to certain elementary rules of injury and violation. And, for starters, these humanities have never had the right in the museum to the same treatment, status or dignity as the conquering humanities. They have always been subjected to other rules of classification and other logics of presentation.[13]

Including this observation in his work on necropolitics is a powerful acknowledgement of that fact that museums are complicit in creating a people that are disposable and can be killed. In other words, ethnographic museums are a colonial tool to transform certain peoples into a living dead people.[14] According to Hicks, this is mainly achieved due to a "weaponization of time".[15] Combining Mbembe's observations about museal alterity with his notion of 'necropolitics', Hicks develops two terms that are central to the analysis at hand. Utilising the terms 'necrology', i. e. histories of loss, and 'necrography', i. e. the writing of these histories,[16] he discusses how museums create a space for othering the past through their desire to immobilise the passage of time.

This is, for instance, realised by forms of classification and of display. Hence, it is necessary to understand what a museum does on a more abstract level by classifying and labelling looted materials. This selective history writing – or necrography – is inherently mythical and unaware of its own subjective positionality. Using Claude Lévi-Strauss' definition of myth as an immobilisation of time, Hicks concludes that "myths are temporal devices".[17] It is crucial to apply this understanding to the museum archive and its related technologies such as the label. Museum studies scholar Susan Crane argues that "[c]lassification manages time"[18] and arrests the temporal alterity of individual objects, documents and remains inherently through identifying difference.[19] Cultural materials and remains are selected and ordered into a temporal sequence by the coloniser. These fragmenting technologies and methods reduce materials and bodily remains to a supposedly temporally fixed performance of history. The myth of the 'primitive' is created and time itself is turned into a weapon of colonial oppression.[20] Yet, ironically, as museum objects, thus, are performing a continuation of violence, they are not fixed in the past but are instead unfinished events imprinted by violence that constitute an uninterrupted process of taking life.[21]

13 Achille Mbembe: Necropolitics, p. 171.
14 Cf. ibid., p. 92.
15 Dan Hicks: The Brutish Museums, p. 7.
16 Cf. ibid., p. 153.
17 Ibid., p. 7.
18 Susan A. Crane: The Conundrum of Ephemerality, p. 101.
19 Cf. Hannah Turner: Cataloguing Culture, p. 10.
20 Cf. Dan Hicks: The Brutish Museums, p. 7.
21 Cf. ibid., pp. 153 f.

The way that cultural materials and remains are displayed alongside European colonial victory further consolidates 'the pastness' of 'the primitive'.[22] Essentially, this turns the materials and remains displayed into a necrology of extinction that provides the reason for looting them in the first place. More than that, the violent temporal fixation evident in the museum display dehumanises the cultures the materials and remains were forcefully extracted from. Since the nineteenth century, museums exhibit 'natural history' and 'human history' separately. Crane notes that "[m]useums of ethnography depicted 'primitive' (although contemporary) cultures as timeless entities, while museums of history established trajectories of modernization and industrialization that depicted the inevitable progress of Western civilization".[23] This reveals a clear divide between 'peoples with histories' and 'peoples without',[24] a divide between culture and nature. Thus "deprived of their breath and returned to the inertia of matter",[25] this form of 'mummification', 'statuefication' and 'fetishisation', in Mbembe's terms,[26] this 'non-coevalness', in Johannes Fabian's terms,[27] normalises the propaganda of race science, the material display of human culture and the violence of acquisition.[28] The colonial museum and each object therein become active agents in the chronopolitics of the empire.[29] The colonial museum is a tool for temporal alterity.[30]

What does it mean to understand the ethnographic museum in a necropolitical framework specifically in a settler colonial context such as contemporary Australia? Scholarly work has shown that the idea of Australian nationhood depended (and continues to depend) on "safeguarding the biological integrity of a supposedly evolutionarily advanced white social Australian body".[31] It follows that there are undesirable groups of people that 'need to be killed', in the terminology of necropolitics, in order to engender a white Australian nation: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-white migrants.[32] Moreton-Robinson argues that the white colonial project, Australia, is infused with a 'possessive logic' that presupposes the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples. This logic is concerned with "reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state's ownership, control, and domination"[33] and shapes a notion of belonging on the side of the colonisers with the "legal fiction of *terra nullius*"[34] at the core of this understanding of property. In order to affirm the colonial-national ownership of Australia, historically

22 Cf. ibid., p. 185.
23 Susan A. Crane: The Conundrum of Ephemerality, p. 101; cf. also Ivan Karp, Steven Lavine: Exhibiting Cultures.
24 Cf. Susan A. Crane: The Conundrum of Ephemerality, p. 101.
25 Achille Mbembe: Necropolitics, p. 171.
26 Cf. ibid., p. 171.
27 Cf. Johannes Fabian: Time and the Other.
28 Cf. Dan Hicks: The Brutish Museums, p. 180.
29 Cf. ibid., pp. 6, 180.
30 Cf. ibid., p. 4.
31 Paul Turnbull: Science, Museums and Collecting the Indigenous Dead in Colonial Australia, p. 13.
32 The Immigration Restriction Act 1901, which allowed only white migrants from Britain to settle in Australia, was a direct result of white possessive logic impacting Australia's immigration policy, cf. Aileen Moreton-Robinson: The White Possessive, p. xii.
33 Ibid., p. xii.
34 Ibid., p. 4.

a perception of ownership of any kind amongst Aboriginal peoples was simply erased[35] and a necropolitics of extinction was initiated. This involved, and to this day involves, the actual killing of Aboriginal peoples as well as what is sometimes referred to as 'cultural' genocide.

As previously detailed, ethnographic museums especially participated in the latter; that is the framing of Aboriginal peoples as extinct, turning them into living dead peoples. Viewing the history of 'Australia' which is grounded in a weaponisation of time through the lens of the 'white possessive' entails that the necrographies created, narrated and performed in ethnographic settler museums, too, are white property. Thus, museums are central to the discursive knowledge production of Aboriginal dispossession of both culture and land as part of the settler colonial project Australia. What ties in strongly with the settler logics of possession, property and Aboriginal extinction is, moreover, the consideration of the building of a settler museum. Who owns the land that the physical building is erected upon if Aboriginal peoples have been deemed extinct? The building of the museum itself becomes a symbol of 'white possession', suggesting that the land it stands upon uncontestably belongs to the Australian nation and government; as Moreton-Robinson emphasises, the land itself is marked by colonial violence.[36]

Walking through a Cemetery
Necrography and the Weaponisation of Time

'The Yield' is a novel that presents, investigates and challenges different strategies on how to write as well as untangle a history of loss through a focus attention on the literary representation and narrativisation of the museum and exhibited materials. In the following, I mostly focus on chapter 35, in which Aunt Missy and her niece August visit the fictive Museum Australia. Searching for the Falstaff Collection, which contains objects that could potentially help them assert their land rights under settler colonial law, Aunt Missy hears the voice of her deceased father Albert. He whispers in her ear: "They didn't just take our land with guns and bullets; there were other ways just as lethal – look Missy. Look harder".[37] As the novel reveals, one of these lethal genocidal weapons is the ethnographic museum.

The novel emphasises the intricate connections between 'terra nullius' and the necropolitics performed in the museum. August only learns that the Museum Australia, which in name bears close resemblance to existing museums,[38] holds a key to saving her family's land through their white neighbour Eddie, who already accepted the compensation for his part of the land by the tin mining company. This course of events mirrors closely the Mabo decision from 1992,

35 Cf. ibid., pp. 112 f.
36 Cf. ibid., p. xiii.
37 Tara June Winch: The Yield, p. 255.
38 Two museums come to mind, the National Museum of Australia in Canberra and the Australian Museum in Sydney.

which recognised proprietary Indigenous land rights. Mining companies felt heavily threatened by the fact that there could be potential legal insecurities about land rights in Australia, especially since the Mabo decision resulted in the Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993, which granted some concessions to native titleholders. However, even that Act framed Indigenous peoples as trespassers until they can prove their native title. The burden evidencing a claim to the land thus is pushed onto the shoulders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[39] It is clear that the tin mining company in the novel operates on the same assumptions of 'terra nullius' and Aboriginal trespassing.

In a cruel streak of anger, Eddie presents August with submission cards he found amongst his father's documents. Acting as proxy for the museum, one of these cards is of special interest here: "'*Submission*: Wooden shovel, intricately carved with brolgas, used for digging earth mounds. Number, 1. Dated 7000 years. Milling grinding stones, approximate number, 35; Anvil stones, 7; Fire stones, 30. Evidence of agricultural activity dated: circa, 10000 years'".[40] The submission card points to the extractivist, fragmentary and disruptive nature of necrography processes at the museum; ties to the creators as well as the histories of the objects themselves prior to white 'ownership' are severed. Eddie prefaces reading this specific card with the information that his own father donated the objects in 1980, "'just before we were born! […]'".[41] The submission date indicates that the process of colonial writing of the necrographies of Aboriginal peoples is a continued process in the narrated present. Furthermore, as Hannah Turner notes, such cataloguing systems represent practices "for sorting, classifying, and organizing people, their belongings, and their ancestors".[42] In this case, since the dates attributed to the objects seem to bear special significance by their position at the very end of the entries, the chronological nature of the sorting hints at the necro-chronopolitics of the museum. Simultaneously, the submission cards also provide the Gondiwindis with some hope because they, the necro-chronopolitical tools of the coloniser, provide written evidence to agricultural use of the land dating back to pre-colonial times, which is specifically required to contest the legal fiction of 'terra nullius' and acquire Native Title, as will be detailed further below.

These first disruptive impressions of Aboriginal dispossession are followed by another reading. This time, Aunt Missy starts reading the webpage of the Museum Australia to August prior to their visit:

> There are roughly 17000 collections, some consisting of only a single object, and largely the results of the pioneers of Australian archaeology; usually untrained, curious but dedicated people keen to understand Aboriginal prehistory and salvage material evidence of the past. The first artifact […] was […] donated to the Museum in 1896 and [is] held in the Falstaff Permanent Collection. Some of these collections – [43]

39 Cf. Aileen Moreton-Robinson: The White Possessive, pp. 68 f.
40 Tara June Winch: The Yield, p. 211.
41 Ibid., p. 211.
42 Hannah Turner: Cataloguing Culture, p. 88.
43 Tara June Winch: The Yield, p. 224, original emphasis removed.

This passage merits extensive attention. Firstly, the wording is strikingly similar to that used on the actual existing webpage of the Australian Museum in Sydney, thereby commenting on contemporary museum practices.[44] Secondly, the rupture in the reading flow by Aunt Missy implies the rupture, the loss and death of objects and people, that has been created by the narration and performance of such museum collections as past and 'primitive'. Further, the fact that it is not exactly clear how many collections there are and that the collectors were untrained and hence lacking cultural knowledge, demonstrates that museal necrographies consciously operate on the basis of a loss of knowledge. This links back to the disruptive nature of the submission cards, which obscure any knowledge about the objects prior to acquisition, and further establishes a close link to Eddie's family history through the word 'salvage'. With its primary association 'to save', the word hints at the previously mentioned racist argument that is still made by contemporary museum directories,[45] namely that they are protecting objects and remains from destruction.

Taking a closer look at Eddie's family history unveils further ties to museal necrologies and the Gondiwindis. The narrative present is interspersed with a second epistolary narrative that is set in the early twentieth century. This is written by Ferdinand Greenleaf, a German migrant to Australia, who turns out to be Eddie's grandfather.[46] Reverend Greenleaf himself had started the 'family tradition' of sending materials of Aboriginal origin to museums in an effort to 'protect' them.[47] When viewed in light of his motivation to save "these perishing Aborigines",[48] as he himself writes in his letter, the preservation argument is paired with the extinction myth and ironically puts museums into the role of protectors of a past that would otherwise be lost. The white saviour is alive and kicking, and museums wallow in his shadow. This epistolary narrative of the past permeates the present and disrupts the linear temporality of narrated time. In other words, the colonial museum and its archive are piercing the present lives of the Gondiwindi family.

While in the museum, August and Aunt Missy search for any label mentioning the Falstaff Collection, thus granting a detailed look at the exhibits and making the reader complicit to a certain degree in reproducing colonial violence. The following trigger warning is installed at the entrance to an exhibition room: "Warning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait visitors: This room contains images of deceased persons", demonstrating the literal level a manifestation of a history of death can have. Aunt Missy and August shiver and dare only a peek. This is sharply contrasted with a group of school children who "hustled past them into the room without glancing at the notice".[49] This indifference implies that, for them, the images of Aboriginal Ancestral Remains do not so much display deceased persons but are dehumanised, objectified relics of the past that mean

44 Cf. Australian Museum Collections.
45 Cf. Dan Hicks: The Brutish Museums, p. 142.
46 Cf. Tara June Winch: The Yield, p. 47.
47 Cf. ibid., p. 189.
48 Ibid., p. 71.
49 Ibid., p. 252 ('warning' – original emphasis removed, 'hustled').

nothing in the now, harking back to Mbembe's mummification. This is further intensified by the fact that the exhibits are images rather than physical remains. Hicks writes on colonial photography that taking pictures of loot or colonially oppressed peoples, whether alive or dead, is a form of taking life, which, too, extends colonial violence and thus is a form of necrography in this context. The option of creating an infinite number of copies of photographs makes them, similar to materials and remains, not stills but "unresolved exposures of dispossession".[50] More than that, Aboriginal campaigns for restitution and repatriation such as those initiated by the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA) argue that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Ancestral Remains were taken in order to pseudo-scientifically examine them and propose a racial inferiority that could then justify the 'righteous' conquest of their lands.[51] It is valid to argue that the same can be said about images of the deceased, since colonial photography also sought to document and thus temporally 'fix' a people presumed to become extinct.[52] This process of dehumanisation fuelled by the extinction myth is tightly entwined with the concept of 'terra nullius' and Australia's white possessive.

A similar understanding of supposed non-coevalness of Aboriginal culture and life with the present is taking place in August herself. When August watches a video on display produced in the 1960s of a group of Aboriginal women, she experiences a cultural and temporal disassociation as if these images of Aboriginal women do not belong to her identity, or shape her history: "These were *real* Aborigines – not like Aunty and her".[53] This initial reaction by August opens up the space for problematic issues of knowledge production among disciplines such as anthropology that feed into the violent narratives of the museum. Munanjahli and South Sea Islander researcher Chelsea Watego in her notable work 'Another Day in the Colony' points out that imagined forms of 'pure' Aboriginality are "reference point[s] for knowing and erasing"[54] Aboriginal peoples, which is paramount to the pitfalls of discussions about supposed authenticity that, amongst others, also Kwame Appiah discusses specifically in a restitution context.[55] Any supposed 'authenticity' is further questionable due to the fact that images and recordings of Aboriginal people were sometimes staged "according to settlers' imaginative desires"[56] as 'primitive' to acquire the degree of 'authenticity' sought by settler photographers. In this moment, the necrology at work in the museum is successful in writing the history of Aboriginal culture and

50 Dan Hicks: The Brutish Museums, p. 13.

51 Cf. Paul Turnbull: Science, Museums and Collecting the Indigenous Dead in Colonial Australia, p. 5.

52 Cf. Jane Lydon: Introduction, p. 3. Despite documenting a history of loss and fuelling necrologies of colonialism, photography also connects families and helps to counter colonial amnesia, cf. Ibid., p. 10. Celeste Pedri-Spade (Ojibwe) brings forward an important reminder that limiting Indigenous peoples to being solely the object of the lens, discounts the appropriative practices of Indigenous artists, cf. Celeste Pedri-Spade: But They Were Never Only the Master's Tools.

53 Tara June Winch: The Yield, p. 252.

54 Chelsea Watego: Another Day in the Colony, p. 32.

55 Cf. Kwame Anthony Appiah: Whose Culture Is It, Anyway, pp. 210 f.

56 Jane Lydon: Introduction, p. 3.

life as one that is past and incongruous with present modern life; only the past is authentically Aboriginal, while modernity cannot coexist with Aboriginality. However, August's awareness for the museum's necro-chronopolitics is growing. She walks through the museum

> as if she were walking through a cemetery, tombstones jutted. She'd realized then the purpose of […] the museum, how it felt like a nod – polite and reverent and doused in guilty wonder – of a time that had now passed. *Past* or *passed* she thought as she followed the arrow to the archaeology collections.[57]

The motif of the cemetery is an important sign for Aboriginal dispossession signifying a dead, uninhabited and most importantly unowned land. The walk through the museum, for August, becomes a first step towards the process of untangling the necrography of colonial Australia and understanding herself and her family not as a living dead people but as the contrary that even the colonial chronopolitical linearity narrated in the museum, symbolised by the arrow, cannot prevent.

Another important aspect that 'The Yield' discusses is the power over access[58] that bears further disturbing associations of white ownership. As I have previously detailed, the ethnographic museum under settler colonial law and the violent knowledge formation taking place therein are owned and perpetuate ownership by the colonial nation. The pictures of the deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people mentioned above and by abstraction also the cultures they belong to, are claimed as property by the Australian nation via the institutional means of the museum. August is not allowed to take a picture of a painting, although Aunt Missy tries to fight that by "giving her cultural permission to take a photo" in her position as an elder.[59] This form of accessing and claiming culture is presented as futile in the colony. When August shows the submission cards to the researchers at the museum, she is provided with papers to book a viewing of the items. This issue of access directly leads back to the problematics of display. August and Aunt Missy only have to go through this grueling bureaucratic process because the Falstaff Collection is not on display. In her work 'Cataloguing Culture: Legacies of Colonialism in Museum Documentation', Turner notes that the submission cards themselves are a measuring tool to determine 'object-worthiness'.[60] A curator made the active decision to consider these objects worthy enough to be included in the archive but unworthy when it comes to display; even 'the primitive' is a hierarchical category. Effectively, the museum refuses to narrate the sovereignty of the Gondiwindi family and the sovereignty over their land and instead, it has to be assumed, narrates the myth of 'terra nullius'. This hinders, of course, all research efforts to claim Native Title for Prosperous.

In an effort to untangle herself from the necrography of the supposed past primitiveness of Aboriginal life, August inwardly fights against the colonial fixture and the history of loss enacted in the museum:

57 Tara June Winch: The Yield, p. 252.
58 Cf. Joan M. Schwartz, Terry Cook: Archives, Records, and Power, p. 5.
59 Tara June Winch: The Yield, p. 253.
60 Cf. Hannah Turner: Cataloguing Culture, p. 124.

> August wanted to hand the papers back and to tell them everything, draw them close and whisper that […] something was stolen from a place inland, from the five hundred acres where her people lived. She wanted to tell them […] that she wasn't extinct, that they didn't need the exhibition after all.[61]

In this passage, the focus on extinction shows August's struggle against the necropolitical framework of the museum and against the status of Aboriginal peoples as that of a living dead. Moreover, ending the visit at the museum with an emphasis to 'tell them everything' foregrounds again the issue of proof. The burden of that lies with August and her family, which is a core mechanism of 'white possession'. Moreton-Robinson writes on this issue: "Since courts regard the written word as more reliable than oral testimonies, all claimants must be able to substantiate their oral histories with documents written by white people, such as explorers, public servants, historians, lawyers, anthropologists, pastoralists, and police".[62] Keeping in mind that these documents are written by non-Indigenous people and the fact that all related knowledge acquisition operates on an intentional loss of knowledge, as previously detailed, makes claiming native title seem impossible. However, it is not surprising that "patriarchal whiteness sets the criteria for proof and the standards for credibility [because it] is a direct manifestation of the law's legitimation of whiteness as a form of property".[63] At this point it is clear that August's internal 'whisper' about the history of her people and her own existence in itself is not going to gain her sovereignty under settler colonial law.

Bloodshed – 1788 to Yesterday Stay Tuned! – Rewriting the Archive

August's silent untangling of necrographies is complemented by Aunt Missy's angry outburst about how a 'true' museum of colonial Australia should label and display the past and confront its own coloniality: "'They should work out how many of us they murdered and have a museum of tanks of blood. There'd be signs that said '*Bloodshed – 1788 to Yesterday – Stay Tuned*'! That's what a museum of 'Indigenous Australia' should look like […]'".[64] The imagined exhibition title's in-yer-face quality manifests the temporal continuum of colonial violence. At the same time, giving a new title to an exhibit marks the power of labelling and, simultaneously, the power that resides in relabelling and thus rewriting the archive. It can be also read as a form of Mbembe's expression of haunting presences in the museum:

> The slave must continue to haunt the museum such as it exists today but do so by its absence. It ought to be everywhere and nowhere, its apparitions always occurring in the mode of breaking and entering and never of the institution. This is how the slave's spectral dimension will be preserved.[65]

61 Tara June Winch: The Yield, pp. 256 f.
62 Aileen Moreton-Robinson: The White Possessive, p. 69.
63 Ibid., p. 69.
64 Tara June Winch: The Yield, p. 254.
65 Achille Mbembe: Necropolitics, p. 172.

Aunt Missy's vision of an exhibition in numbers and statistics and the visualisation of respective amounts of blood of murdered Aboriginal people are spectres of colonial violence in a 'true' museum of colonial Australia.

The title and its haunting qualities furthermore touch on what Narungga poet and scholar Natalie Harkin refers to as a 'spectropoetics of the archive'. She writes: "The State wounds and our records bleed".[66] Harkin employs the notion of 'blood memory'[67] so as to uncover the "ways in which the past still haunts […] and maintains its influence on the present".[68] The concept highlights the continuous presence of ancestral knowledge in descendants, signifying both loss and belonging, individual and collective memory. A spectropoetics allows to interrogate issues of, in this case, colonial knowledge production and historiography as well as the act of forgetting itself.[69] The "tanks of blood" that Aunt Missy invokes, challenge Australia's colonial amnesia and become not only commemorative testimony to Aboriginal dispossession and genocide, but also to the endurance of Aboriginal presence in the form of intergenerational memory. While the museum in the novel is unwilling to acknowledge the performed and narrated histories of loss, imagining a rewriting of the archive in blood simultaneously reveals and contests the necrography performed in the museum.

Just as Eddie's family has the tradition of fuelling the necrographies of the Museum Australia, the Gondiwindis, too, follow a 'family tradition' of archiving. Not only are Aunty Missy and August beginning to excavate the histories of loss and death but their father or grandfather respectively, Albert, was creating his own family archive. He researched the archive of the Aboriginal Mission at the Murrumby River and the local library.[70] Although he tried his best to locate the missing cultural materials, his main focus for rewriting the archive was very literal and tries to record immaterial knowledge. The book that Albert was most interested in is titled 'The First Australian's Dictionary' which he used as the basis for his own dictionary of Wiradjuri.[71] This indicates that rewriting the archive requires having the language to do so, which not only correlates with the issue of labelling in the museum but also harks back to the issue of written testimony and white ownership. Alfred's project sets up the colonial ethnographic museum as arbiter of supposedly universal and objective knowledge against a more local and, at least according to Western epistemologies, more subjective form of archive, the family history and intergenerational memory.

Although 'The First Australian Dictionary' is not excerpted in the novel – which to the reader may exemplify the problematics of access again –, August finds out that it, too, was written by Reverend Greenleaf.[72] Via this connecting tissue, Greenleaf's dictionary is laden with the same uncomfortable associations of the white saviour trope that arise in his letter in combination with the word 'salvage' on the museum website. After all, during the instance where Eddie

66 Natalie Harkin: The Poetics of (Re)Mapping Archives, p. 4.
67 The term was first coined by Kiowa-Comanche author Scott Momaday, cf. ibid., p. 6.
68 Ibid., p. 5.
69 Cf. ibid., pp. 5-8.
70 Cf. Tara June Winch: The Yield, p. 225.
71 Cf. ibid., p. 226.
72 Cf. ibid.

aggressively presents August with his family's submission cards, he yells at her: "'[…] *We* saved you! […]'"[73] In this context, 'The First Australian Dictionary' becomes an example of salvage linguistics, preserving the language of a people believed to be on the brink of extinction and working with the same set of tools and mechanisms central to the white possessive and the colonial museum. Yet, Albert uses it as a legitimate basis for his own dictionary, and he moulds his oral transmissions to the forms of a colonial tool, which could be interpreted as a submission of his words and his culture to white ownership.

This impression is, however, subverted at the beginning of the novel. There, Albert already points out the colonial tool of developing a linear chronology in direct relation to a dictionary:

> You could keep reading the dictionary that way – front to back, straight as a dart – or you can get to *aardvark* and then skip to *Africa*, then skip to *continent*, then skip to *nations*, then skip to *colonialism*, then skip over to *empire*, then skip back to *apartheid* in the A section […].[74]

This passage suggests that the order the entries are read in changes the (hi)story of events. Consequently, and most importantly, Albert reappropriates the dictionary in its form. He does not start his entries with the letter 'A' but he starts backwards with the letter 'Y'.[75] Fittingly, the first entry is 'yuyung' which translates as 'backward'.[76] In the context of the novel, his appended Wiradjuri dictionary can be read as yet another comment on the fixture of chronology established in the ethnographic museum. It disrupts the linearity presupposing a 'pastness' of Aboriginal existence and thus echoes August's identity crisis of coming to terms with herself as an Aboriginal person in the present.

Paralleling the disruption of the narrative by Reverend Greenleaf's letter, Albert's dictionary entries also disrupt the story at various intervals. Contrary to the letters, however, which perpetuate the myth of vanishing Aboriginal peoples, Albert's entries are proof that Aboriginal existence and life continues. This is evident when he firmly differentiates between 'church time' and 'deep time'. He writes:

> The story goes that the church brought time to us, and the church, if you let it, will take it away. I'm writing about the other time, though, deep time. This is a big, big story. The big stuff goes forever, time ropes and loops and is never straight, that's the real story of time.[77]

When applied to the museum space, this challenges the fantasy of eternal preservation and fixture of materials and remains in the past and instead reveals that their histories are continually unstable and changing. The fact that Albert's efforts ultimately lead to Wiradjuri being recognised "as a resurrected language, brought back from extinction",[78] renders visible the continued existence of Aboriginal lives in the present and simultaneously the rupture engendered by colonialism. Additionally, the entry links family history with 'deep time' – something

73 Ibid., p. 210.
74 Ibid., p. 11.
75 Wiradjuri does not make use of the letter 'Z', cf. ibid., p. 12.
76 Cf. ibid., p. 307.
77 Ibid., pp. 2 f.
78 Ibid., p. 301.

that even the museum is barely able to do – and hence breaks with the superficial spatio-temporal binary stereotypically attached to museums as narrating the history of the world (geographically and temporally) and family archives being limited in their spatio-temporal dimensions. Yet, both the Falstaff Collection and Albert's dictionary are ultimately necessary to claiming land rights and also rewriting the archive from one of loss and death to one of life.

Just as Winch presents the dictionary's ambiguity, she paints a more ambivalent picture of the museum. The novel problematises the simplified assumption that museum practices are nothing more than a time-centred necropolitics. Paul Sharrad points out that

> The plot turns on the fact that the station-owning family that had stripped people of their artefacts and exploited their labour had nonetheless kept the Gondiwindis in a house on country and had preserved those artefacts by sending them to a museum, thereby validating a land rights claim a century later.[79]

In the end, both the museum preserving the objects as well as Greenleaf's letter as testimony of the objects and Albert's dictionary give evidence for a Native Title that Prosperous so urgently needs for recognition in a settler colonial system of white ownership.[80] However, crucially, the eviction is neither prevented by the museum objects, nor by the written testimonies. Instead, during an early stage of digging by the mining company, bones resurface from the land; a scene highly reminiscent of the extractive practices of erasing culture from the land that are frequently implied in the novel. A cemetery is found and thus Prosperous is declared a sacred site.[81] This is an obvious allusion to August's recognition of the Museum Australia as a cemetery which, however, does not fixate on death but on the impact death has on life, the impact the past has on the present. In the eponymous dictionary entry of 'The Yield', Albert writes: "yield in English is the reaping, the things that man can take from the land, the thing he's waited for and gets to claim. A wheat yield", describing precisely the colonial extractivist process of looting materials and remains of the deceased and the resulting myth of 'terra nullius'. He translates this with the word 'baayanha', which is, amongst other things, associated with the bodies of the dead and with "the things you give to".[82] What ultimately stops the mine has never been extracted from land or community and is not unnaturally fixed in the past as the museum attempts with its exhibits. The bones were given to the earth and yielded themselves in the necessary moment in time. This interpretation, which also challenges the museum narrative of Aboriginal peoples as a living dead people, is strengthened by Albert's preface to his dictionary entries at the very beginning of the novel: "nothing ever really dies, instead it all goes beneath your feet, beside you, part of you".[83] In this instance, it becomes clear that the Gondiwindis never needed preservation in museum archives: the land itself is an archive.

79 Paul Sharrad: Indigenous Transnational, p. 12.
80 Cf. Tara June Winch: The Yield, p. 243.
81 Cf. ibid., p. 299.
82 Ibid., p. 25 ('yield', 'things').
83 Ibid., p. 1.

Conclusion

The 'white possessive' at the core of the Australian settler nation has formed a complex link between settler colonial necropolitics and the museum. The reading of Hick's theorisations of colonial violence in the museum through the settler colonial lens of 'white possession' suggested by Moreton-Robinson reveals the museum in 'The Yield' as a site that weaponises time through extractivist and fragmenting violent tools such as cataloguing procedures, public communication, colonial photography, display and access in order to legitimise the fiction of 'terra nullius'. These tools enable the museum to narrate and perform Aboriginal materials and remains as non-coeval and testimony of a living dead people. This rupture has, initially at least, successfully influenced the protagonist August's identity formation. Critically engaging with and deconstructing the rhetoric of colonial violence in the museum is achieved by the use of comparisons to a cemetery or symbolic breaks in reading museum texts. Establishing intricate connections between historical documents such as submission cards and official letters, on the one hand, demonstrates that the past of acquisition is crucial to current museum practices. Obvious references to existing contemporary museums and their websites intensify the notion that colonial violence is continued in the presented histories of loss and death. On the other hand, this reiterates Turnbull's argument referenced at the beginning of the article: that the past of museal acquisition is crucial to the now and the continued future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander existences. More than that, as it is specifically a tin mining company that threatens the ownership of land by the Gondiwindis, the novel additionally entangles environmental extractivism with Aboriginal dispossession and the process of extracting Aboriginal history from the land.

'The Yield' critically engages with the life and death of Aboriginal peoples. As Watego writes: "In the colony, Blackfullas are forced to embody an illusory double-consciousness between existing and non-existing, human and non-human, real and unreal, traditional and modern. […] But it is via Indigenous sovereignty that we contest this false consciousness, most notably in our stubborn claim of 'still here'".[84] In order to break with the illusion of Aboriginal peoples as a living dead people and to challenge this 'double consciousness', the novel powerfully demonstrates that, as Ho-Chunk Nation member Amy Lonetree suggests, "[o]bjects in museums are living entities",[85] they involve "life, ancestors, culture, […] continued existence, and future generations".[86] Moreover, by envisioning and approaching the museum through a spectropoetics, as Aunt Missy does, materials and remains in museums, even in their narration of loss, haunt the present and thus remember and commemorate endurance. As the novel suggests, untangling museal necrologies and thus affirming Aboriginal existence in the present requires re-labelling, re-classifying and access to museum objects. This is most strongly illustrated through the theme of resurrection in one of Albert's dream

84 Chelsea Watego: Another Day in the Colony, p. 46.
85 Amy Lonetree: Decolonizing Museums, p. xv.
86 Ibid., p. 27.

journeys. Reconnecting with his ancestors, he is told: "You are resurrected, a man brought back from extinction! […]".[87] The novel demonstrates that indeed colonial tools can be reappropriated to claim Native Title by enacting the necessary language to write an archive of life, in this case Wiradjuri, that rejects the myth of extinction. Most importantly, rewriting the archive means reclaiming sovereignty over the land. In this way, the inherent temporality of objects and people is restored as continuous and coeval with modernity. 'The Yield' also suggests that, despite their violence, museum spaces may indeed protect histories to some degree due to the fact that according to the logics of white possession and under settler colonial law, evidence, either material or written, must be given in order to secure Native Title. At the same time, however, the resurfacing bones on Prosperous persuasively challenge that idea and instead imply that the land has never ceased being its own sovereign and is a living bearer of and witness to Aboriginal past and present.

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87 Tara June Winch: The Yield, p. 248.

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