

“No choice but to fly inhumanly well” – The Future of Indigenous Mobilities in Claire G. Coleman’s Apocalyptic Narratives

Indigenous Australian mobilities have often either been “overlooked or understood only as a consequence of the oppressive expansion of European empires” (Carey and Lyndon 1) or they have been reduced to stereotypical depictions of “wandering nomads”; a people naturally oriented towards constant movement; a ‘walkabout race’” (Prout 177), which characterized indigenous mobilities as ‘primitive’ and akin to the mobility of prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies in order to justify white settlers’ colonialization of the land.

Such binary constructions of indigenous mobilities ignore “complex and dynamic Aboriginal spatialities” (Prout 177) and restrict such mobilities to a kind of movement that almost stationary in its adherence to perceived ‘traditional customs’.

Claire G. Coleman’s futuristic novels, *Terra Nullius* (2017) and *The Old Lie* (2019), present readers with indigenous characters that engage in various mobilities, thus subverting stereotypical preconceptions. *Terra Nullius* seems, at first glance, to be about indigenous characters fleeing from persecution, which would reduce their mobility to the aforementioned reaction to colonial forces. However, the novel’s twist reveals that the characters who correspond to today’s indigenous people, though few in numbers, have persisted the longest against the alien invaders by moving through the Australian interior. *The Old Lie* contains different forms of movement, from highly futuristic space flight to walking along ancient paths in Country.

In my talk, I argue that Coleman uses her science fiction novels to portray complex and multiple indigenous mobilities, which persist and adapt into a future despite various apocalyptic events. (241 words)

Biography

Bettina Charlotte Burger is a research assistant and lecturer at the Heinrich-Heine University of Dusseldorf in the field of English Studies. Their dissertation argues that fantasy literature ought to be considered as world literature in its scope and that world literary readings of individual examples of world fantasy are highly productive as well as necessary. They have co-edited a collection on *Nonhuman Agencies in The Twenty-First-Century Anglophone Novel* and have published several articles in the field of speculative fiction. Currently, they are working for a project that intends to establish an Australian Studies Online Masters Programme.