

**WATER AND (IM-)MOBILITIES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS NARRATIVES:
A JOINT PANEL BY VICTORIA HERCHE, DAVID KERN,
RITA MARICOCCHI AND PERI SIPAHI**

Given both its peculiar geographical location as well as its unique biodiversity increasingly under threat by expansive extractive capitalism, it seems impossible to think about Australia without simultaneously thinking about water as a highly political frame of reference in a context of ongoing settler colonialism. This joint panel examines how contemporary Indigenous narratives configure water and its links to issues of (im-)mobility in the context of Australian hydro-colonialism, or what Virginia Marshall (2017) has referred to as Australia's regime of *Aqua Nullius*. We suggest that if mobilities in cultural productions "serve to map out the nation," if "they examine questions about who belongs to the nation and who has the right to travel in and through it, and how" (Aguiar et al. 2019, 11-12), then a hydro-colonial approach can inform innovative and granular analyses of the role of literary and cultural production "in contesting the ideal projection of the nation as a seamlessly and democratically connected space" (ibid., 12).

As Kerry Bystrom and Isabel Hofmeyr (2017, 3) have argued, hydro-colonialism can, among other things, include "(1) colonization *by means of water* (various forms of maritime imperialism); (2) colonization *of water* (occupation of land with water resources, the declaration of territorial waters, the militarization and geopoliticization of oceans); and (3) a colony on water (the ship as a miniature colony or a penal island)." At the core of this argument is water's ambivalent and complex relationship to (ongoing) invasion, settlement, and colonization. However, picking up on recent scholarly impulses to "(re-)read for water" (Hofmeyr et al. 2022, 318), we also note water's important role as a cipher for and (cultural as well as material) space of *resistance*.

Connecting the conference's focus on mobilities to water as a setting, motif, theme and political relation in contemporary Indigenous narratives, the papers of this panel analyze the various ways in which Indigenous writers and cultural producers (re-)imagine water's political entanglements, negotiate its ambivalent meanings, and trace its multiple significations across a variety of literary genres, forms and, importantly, a variety of media.

Bodies of Water: Embodied Sites of Hydro-Colonialism and Indigenous/Aboriginal Displacement in "Water" by Ellen van Neerven

Rita Maricocchi and Peri Sipahi, University of Münster

In Ellen van Neerven's vision of the near future, the short story "Water" (2014), Indigenous displacement by the settler colonial state of Australia is repeating itself. The islands and bodies of water surrounding them are re-colonized for the government project "Australia2" (70), which aims to create a place via sea mining or "islandising" (76) where Indigenous peoples can be resettled. This is, ironically, declared an act of reparation for the violent displacement of people during settler colonialism. In the narrative, water features as both a place of mobility which the protagonist, Kaden, traverses daily in her job as "Cultural Liaison Officer" (74) as well as an element which constitutes the bodies of the so-called "plantpeople" (75), a human-like though not-quite-human species living on the islands surrounding Russell Island. The employees at Russell Island prepare to displace, and if necessary, eradicate, the plantpeople who have "rooted" (76) on smaller islands in the area, and thus the narrative reveals the intersections of Indigenous mobility justice and hydro-colonialism. This paper explores the shift in the narrative from water as a site of colonization and Indigenous displacement to water as a site of

Indigenous knowledge and resistance. As Kaden reconnects with her Aboriginal family members and spends time on the water and with Larapinta, a leader of the plantpeople, she becomes increasingly critical of the Australian government's policies. Commenting in this manner on issues of mobility justice by depicting watery relationships of knowledge-making, the short story contests the notion of water as *aqua nullius*, and we examine how the multiple encounters between Kaden and the bodies of water populating the text ultimately become sites of resistance.

Water is Life: Mining, Water Flows and Indigenous (Im)Mobilities on Screen

Victoria Herche, University of Cologne

In places where environmental degradation is directly linked to colonialism and discrimination, Indigenous peoples are most profoundly affected by extractive industries. This observation was taken up by Rob Nixon in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), an extensive study on the interconnectedness of economic interest, political decision-making, and environmental degradation affecting the world's most marginalized peoples. The impacts of mining industries in Australia flow through the landscape and deep into communities, they have caused displacement and forced movement, and have made the communities' water unfit to drink, fish- or swim in. By discussing fictional films, e.g. *Satellite Boy* (Catriona McKenzie 2012) as well as documentaries – *Warburdar Bununu: Water Shield* (Jason De Santolo, 2019); *Water is Life* (Seed Mob, 2018) – about water scarcity and water contamination in Australia's Northern Territory, this paper engages with the question how extractive industries violently erode livelihoods and affect Indigenous (im)mobilities. At the same time, it will be discussed how water protection *mobilizes* people and becomes a key site of resistance. Further, the paper will explore the representation of water in these cultural texts focusing on its material presence and elemental agency: how is the texture and fluidity of water used as a vehicle to represent the unacknowledged "slow violence" of delayed destruction that, consequently, lacks instant sensational visibility?

Water Protectors, Land Defenders, and the Frame of Indigenous Crime Fiction: (Im-) Mobility and Resistance in Julie Janson's *Madukka the River Serpent*

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In light of exacerbated resource mining and extractive capitalism's assaults on Indigenous sovereignty, environmental disaster (such as Australia's bushfire season of 2019-2020 and subsequent flooding events) and other impacts of 'anthropogenic' climate change bear the imprints and power signatures of empire. As scholar, writer, and activist Tony Birch underlines, "the history of global colonial expansion, industrialisation and the increased reliance on fossil fuels" (2018, 139) makes it unmistakably clear that "climate change has a history," (145) – one that is steeped in "settler-colonialism's fixation with extraction as a nation-building project" (146). It is in imagining a Murray Darling River running out of water, that Julie Janson's work links environmental catastrophe to extractive-corporate crime. Focusing on water's ambivalent situatedness as both a corporate - read settler-colonial - crime scene and a site of grassroots *mobilization*, this paper analyzes Julie Janson's recent novel *Madukka the River Serpent*, and makes a case for contemporary Indigenous crime fiction as a space of anti- and decolonial investigation. I pursue this argument through a close-reading of Janson's peculiar (re-)

figuration of the (Indigenous) private investigator as a complex multiplicity of roles. A private investigator turned water protector and corporate enemy number one, a TAFE graduate become independent community service provider and land defender, a local resident turned community organizer and grassroots activist, Janson's protagonist aunty June foregrounds mobility as intervention at a time when "mining takes precedent over Indigenous property rights" (Birch 2016, 95) and within a settler-national economy built on Indigenous immobility and dispossession. How, I ask in this paper, does June's novel negotiate tensions between mobility and immobility in the context of decolonial struggle? And how does the frame of crime fiction (as an analytical lens or mode of investigation) enhance our understanding of water protection and land defense as decolonial engagement?

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David Kern is a PhD Student in English- and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Cologne, where he also teaches introductory courses on postcolonial theory and Indigenous literatures from Australia and Canada. In his PhD project, which looks at forms and modes of Indigenous literary activism in and against an Anthropocene defined by resource and fossil fuel extraction, David examines cross-genre representations of Water protectors and Land defenders to understand contemporary forms of resistance to imperial power. Among his other research interests are migration studies, speculative- and science fiction, as well as contemporary Muslim writing in English.

Rita Maricocchi is a researcher and lecturer at the Chair of English, Postcolonial and Media Studies at University of Münster, where she is completing a PhD thesis on reading and translating the postcolonial in contemporary anglophone and germanophone texts and spaces. Her research is broadly interested in disciplinary formations and exchanges across postcolonial studies, anglophone studies, German studies, and memory studies. She is currently co-organizing the 2023 GAPS Postcolonial Narrations postgraduate conference together with colleagues at the Universities of Münster and Bremen on the topic of "Queering Postcolonial Worlds."

Peri Sipahi currently occupies a position as research associate and lecturer at the English Department of the University of Münster, where she is also enrolled as a PhD student. Her PhD project is concerned with deconstructing the colonial discourses surrounding Anthropocene temporalities in anticolonial climate fiction. Consequently, her research interests lie in representations of time and temporalities, ecocriticism, Energy Humanities, Indigenous Studies and postcolonial theory. Since 2020, she holds an MA in English Literatures and Cultures from Bonn University, where she was also employed in various positions. Additionally, she completed a MSt in Modern Languages at the University of Oxford in 2018. Her work has been published in the *Zeitschrift für Australienstudien*. Peri Sipahi was a co-organiser of the 2022 Postcolonial Narrations Forum 'Postcolonial Matters of Life and Death' at Bonn University.