

Connection to Country –
Indigenous Empowerment in Townsville,
Australia

Traditional and Contemporary – Indigeneity in a
Settler Colonial State

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Connection to Country – **Indigenous Empowerment in** **Townsville**



A fusion of traditional and contemporary: William Mabo performing with didjeridoo and clapsticks, in traditional gear, at an "Open Mic" event. Old courthouse in Townsville, Oct 28th 2017.

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Abstract

Indigenous Australians have been living as a dispossessed, colonised people in their own homeland for well over two centuries. 2017 marks the year of the 50th anniversary of the 1967 citizenship referendum, after which the Australian Constitution was changed to include Indigenous Australians in the national census; and the 25th anniversary of the Mabo case of 1992, which provided the legal framework for land rights, acknowledging and confirming native title. Nearly a decade has passed since the Apology of 2008, when the federal government “apologised for (though did not remedy) the theft of Indigenous children” in what is known as the Stolen Generations (Collis&Webb 2014: 497).

In November 2016, Alfred Smallwood, an Aboriginal Bindal Elder, was honoured with a place on the list of the 50 most influential people in Townsville: for being a respected Elder in his community and playing an important role in “shaping Townsville and its future” (Townsville Bulletin 2016). Earlier that year, I got to know him as Uncle Alfred, an Elder who deals with the root causes of youth crime, by working to keep the Indigenous culture strong, now and in the future.

This thesis demonstrates how the Indigenous Empowerment movement in Townsville is anchored in the Indigenous concept of *Connection to Country*. This empowerment seeks to better the present and future condition for Indigenous people, by way of empowering the structures of Indigeneity itself. These structures are vocalized in Welcome to Country performances, experienced in Smoking Ceremony rituals, and relied upon in the healing of historical trauma. These are the traditional structures that connect Indigenous people to their ancestral past, as well as create an empowered now and future in the contemporary setting of living in a settler colonial state.

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1 Introduction – Power of Relating

A thesis and a story; a prologue

Standing at the Strand in Townsville, the pale brown sand at your feet and the sun striking its rays from straight above, you have a wide vista of bright blue and green twinkling sea in front you. The horizon would be open and eternal if it were not for the green lush shape of Magnetic Island floating in the middle of the wide bay. Looking out this way, even with the promenade busting with tourists and locals behind, it is not so difficult to imagine a ship like the *Endeavor* sailing up this serene coast in 1770. What is difficult to fully comprehend however is the consequent invasion and colonisation that was to follow. This is because one cannot easily imagine the dangers and the chaos that was suffered by the original inhabitants of this land, and because this side of the history has been widely silenced by the Australian state (Stanner 1968) and until recently completely left out of the national narrative (McAuley 2009; Reynolds 1993a, 1999).

During my time in Townsville, the term "settlement" was not used by the Indigenous¹ people I met. Instead - invasion, colonisation, landstealing and war. "Australia Day" was referred to as "Survival Day". Theirs was a history other than the national narrative, theirs was a perspective having been silenced for most of the 200 years of Australian national history (McAuley 2009: 57-60). Still, they affirm "we survived – we are still here". The aspects of empowering Indigenous identity that I witnessed in Townsville have its roots in the traditional past, and reach towards the future.

¹ Note on terminology. The terms Indigenous, Indigenous Australian, First People, First Nations, embrace both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples. Aboriginal people or Aborigine is used to distinguish people of the mainland from the people of the Torres Strait Islands. I use all these terms capitalised, except when they are in a citation where capitalisation is not used. To refer to the people of Australia who are not Indigenous, the term non-indigenous is used, or mainstream in reference to the non-indigenous society as a whole. Also the terms black and white are sometimes used to distinguish between Indigenous and non-indigenous. I will use these terms interchangeably, as they were by informants in Townsville.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures have roots going back since time immemorial, according to present day science well over 60 millenia, and according to the Indigenous people's own stories and Law: since Creation. The national narrative of the Australian state is by comparison just over two centuries. For the Indigenous peoples on this continent, the last two centuries is a story of experiencing dispossession, discrimination, loss of access to homeland, loss of freely performing cultural practices, loss of traditional family ties and for many also losing their native language – it is a story of violence, war, genocide and restrictions made by continuing structures of colonialism and survival despite all this.

The present story of Indigenous empowerment in Townsville is moving beyond mere survival and suffering, now being concerned with preserving traditional morality whilst creating a viable future for the Indigenous identity. This future is being constructed based on knowledge about who and what the Indigenous population was before invasion, and knowledge of the consequent epochs of white domination and policies affecting Indigenous experience from invasion until today, in order to take control over the continuing process of future Indigeneity.

The future is envisioned as reviving the Indigenous identity into being a strength for the individual and the community, embodying respect for one's self and possessing knowledge of one's history, connection to land and ceremonies, with eyes forward towards a stronger and better future. Finding peace in one's self, standing strong and moving forward, all the while looking back as the point of reference. As much as the future must hold the truth about colonisation, structures from the traditional past must also live on strong in memory and practices to form the basis for an authentic contemporary Indigeneity, which is the focus of this thesis.

In order to understand Australian Indigenous identity today, we need to go back in history to get an image of what has been affecting this identity the last two centuries. By seeing this history in light of invasion and not through the ethnocentric lens of discovery, and by using our empathetic imagination (Wikan 1992), we can come closer to relating to the experiences of the Indigenous peoples. We need to remember what kind of sovereign people the First Peoples of Australia were before invasion. In the words of Josephine Flood: "the resilience of Aboriginal people is one of the great human stories of all time" (2006: x).

Traditional life prior to invasion

”The assumption that the Aborigines could not be regarded as owners in Australian law”, was based on how the traditional lifestyles of the Aborigines were ”nomadic, had no permanent settlement and did not work the land” (Reynolds 1999: 189). This perception on traditional Aboriginal life has later been contested by Pascoe (2014), who can show to ”a much more complicated Aboriginal economy than the primitive hunter-gatherer lifestyle we had been told was the simple lot of Australia’s First People” (2014: 11). Journals and diaries of explorers and colonists, Aboriginal oral history and archaeological records reveal that there is proof of Indigenous agriculture in large areas of Australia, shelters for harvested grains, permanent and periodical settlements, water irrigation, dam building, fisheries and fish trap systems. Among others, the explorer McKinley noted in 1861 of the New England region, ”the whole country looks as if it had been carefully ploughed, harrowed, and finally rolled” (Pascoe 2014: 33).



Aborigines using fire to hunt kangaroos by Joseph Lycett, approximately 1775-1828 in New South Wales. (Wilson 2014).

Nets and poles were used for hunting game, like kangaroos (Pascoe 2014: 42). Hunting game was also one of the purposes of Aboriginal fire stick farming, as was the cultivation of food plants. Burning certain areas of the bush at certain times, would fertilise the soil which lead to the regeneration of *bush tucker* (food plants) like yams. This process would also open up the landscape, attract animals and assist in game hunting (Pascoe 2014: 42-49). Prehistorical changes in landscape and vegetation caused by annual burning suggest human occupation on the continent as far back as 140,000 years (Pascoe 2014: 49). Grind stones found in New South Wales, dating back more than 30,000 years, places the Aboriginal Australians as perhaps the world's first bakers. The until now oldest modern human remains found in Australia, the 40,000 years old Mungo Man, speaks of the antiquity of the First Peoples, and the red ochre found on the body indicates elaborate burial rituals similar to the rituals of today (Daley 2017c). Excavations in Northern Territory show that humans were already living here 65,000 years ago, using axes, grindstones, flint and ochre (Weule 2017). As many authors have proclaimed: Australian Aboriginal culture is the longest continuing culture of the world.

The Aboriginal peoples lived in groups of extended families, defined by Flood as bands. "Bands were land-using 'residence groups', whereas 'clans' were 'country groups' with a common identity, often based on claimed descent from a single Ancestral Being. Each clan held a defined 'estate', generally identified by a focal point" in the landscape, such as a waterhole, a mountain or river system (Flood 2006: 17). Further there are direct links between tracts of country and particular languages "planted in the landscape by Ancestral Beings" (Flood 2006: 17). A set of people belonging to the same language group and area of the land, has been called a tribe. Upon colonisation there was about 600 tribes in Aboriginal Australia. "Some anthropologists now argue that the term 'tribe' is inadequate to express the complexity and diversity of Aboriginal social organization", however for many Indigenous people belonging to a particular tribe, nation or clan is central to their identity and "use the term proudly to indicate their origins and ancestral territory or 'country'" (Flood 2006: 17).

Stories of Ancestral Beings creating the land and everything in it, as well as people and their languages, ceremonies, art and manners of social organisation, make up the Dreaming. Stanner call the Dreaming "a poetic key to Reality" (1953: 29): "The tales are a kind of commentary, or statement, on what is thought to be permanent and ordained at the very basis of the world and life. They are a way of stating the principle which animates things". What

differentiates the Dreaming from Western religions, is that there is "a continuous between the Dreaming and the Here-and-Now (Stanner 1953: 27), indeed it is still a part of the present and one cannot fix the Dreaming in time: "it was, and is, everywhen" (Stanner 1953: 24). The Dreaming stories are intrinsically a part of Country, as the knowledge are recorded in the land as Songlines (Daley 2017b). Radcliffe-Brown called religion "the larger structure in which society and external nature are brought together and a system of organised relations established, in myth and ritual, between human beings and natural species or phenomena" (in Stanner 1962: 125). In the Aboriginal Dreaming, the "first principle is the preservation of balance" (Stanner 1953:40) and the "corporeal connection between man, totem and spirit-home" (Stanner 1962: 135). The Dreaming stories was a complete system which included ecological and astrological knowledge (see Norris 2009), prehistoric memory of extinct species like the megafauna (see Westaway, Olley & Grun 2017), knowledge of neighbouring peoples, the complete lawsystem, origins, customs, maps, rituals, guidelines for living, encouragement and entertainment – the focal point always being community (Turnbridge 1988). "Prayer and worship, priests and altars, evidently did not exist in their rites (Stanner 1962: 107), and this fundamental difference from the European known world at the time, made early writers "genuinely unable to see, let alone credit, the facts that have convinced modern anthropologists that the Aborigines are a deeply religious people. [...] It profoundly affected European conduct toward the Aborigines" (Stanner 1962: 108). This might ring true still today, because then as now, "at the very heart of the black-white conflict" are "two connected matters – religion and land" (Stanner 1978: vii-viii).

European arrival to the Australian Continent

Going back to the European beginning of time on this continent, we see Captain James Cook on the ship *Endeavor* sailing north along the east coast of Australia in 1770. His first order on this voyage had been scientific: astrological observations in Tahiti. His second, secret order, was to locate the legendary southern continent and the order read in part: "You are ... with the Consent of the Natives to take Possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the Name of the King of Great Britain: Or: if you find the Country uninhabited take Possession for his Majesty by setting up Proper Marks and Inscriptions" (Daley 2017a). Many European adventurers had been looking for this mysterious landmass before this, even the ancient

Greeks had envisioned it, believing it was full of gold. The Portuguese reached Australia in 1516; Dutch merchants had encounters with the Indigenous populations of western and northern Australia, which they had named New Holland, in 1596, 1606 and 1623. The Dutch encounters included the first kidnappings of Indigenous people. The Spaniard Luis Vaes de Torres sailed through what is now called the Torres Strait in 1606, which took him weeks to navigate, and also he kidnapped Indigenous people. Abel Tasman, a Dutchman, arrived in Tasmania in 1642 searching for the still elusive southern continent. Englishman William Dampier continued the search in the northern and western regions of Australia in 1688 and 1699, still to no avail. James Cook had dismissed the existence of a southern continent after searching in the South Pacific and around New Zealand. The voyage of 1770, was merely meant to sail along the unexplored eastern coast of New Holland. Evidently, this was not the coast of New Holland, enabling Cook to comply with his second order and claim this land for the British King, and he named it New South Wales. The subsequent settlement of a British colony in the Sydney basin in 1788 enforced this claim (Flood 2006: 1-17). The British colonisation of the continent would catapult a series of dramatic changes for all the First Peoples.

The cataclysmic, and calculated, error made by Cook and his successors was to presume that the original peoples on this continent had no social system, religion, relationship to or any ownership over the land on which they lived (Reynolds 1999: 185-203). A way of life so different from their own systems proved impossible to understand or even see. Pascoe writes of the early explorers that "it is clear from their journals that few were here to marvel at a new civilisation; they were here to replace it" (Pascoe 2014: 13). Not only was this the case for the first European "explorers", it was a blindness even scientists and anthropologists suffered from hundred years later and more (Stanner 1968). This blindness was informed by scientific and political attitudes in Europe at the time, the legacy from the Enlightenment through to socialdarwinism that underpinned the notion of the European man at the top of "the gradual ascent from beast to man", forming an innate idea of superiority and "the prism through which their new world was seen" (Pascoe 2014: 12). This idea would also serve the empire economically, no doubt. And by their own system of law, the British would claim this land lawfully their own based on the doctrine of *terra nullius*, meaning they had "discovered unoccupied territory" (Reynolds 1999: 195). This doctrine would not be overturned until the Mabo judgement of 1992, which "changed the way the story of Australian colonisation must in future be told" (Reynolds 1999: 202).

It is important to remember, that this is not only points on a time scale. Each of these events, and many others which are unaccounted for, stand for specific mindsets and attitudes of a time, which in turn shaped people's actions, as well as those of the state. Because, "policy cannot move far ahead of conviction, or of the level of knowledge on which policy must necessarily be based" (Stanner 1938: 4). This was an era of European expansion, imperialism and conquest. Stanner writes in the essay "The Aborigines" in 1938, that "most of the conquest of Australia, and thus most of the obliteration of the tribes, took place between 1830 and 1890, the period in which economic expansionism, land hunger and pioneering were at their strongest" (1938: 2). The colonial frontier moved forcibly and fast. In the 1830's in New South Wales, every year an area the size of Ireland would be taken over by pastoralist (Flood 2006: 103). The colonisers brought with them new diseases that took its toll on the original populations. Syphilis spread rapidly, and in some regions of Queensland half of the Aborigines were in some regions affected by 1890 (Flood 2006: 129). Starvation and violent hostilities caused by dispossession from tribal lands also took many lives. For many, retreating into neighbouring tribes' areas were not an option, and so they stayed on their ancestral land even if it meant working for free in return for rations of food, tobacco and alcohol on cattle stations (Strang 1997) or living in degraded camps on the fringes of towns (Highland 1993; Reynolds 1993c). Although the numbers can not be precisely known, it is estimated that in the years between 1788 and 1928, in Australia as a whole, more than 20 000 Indigenous people were killed in frontier conflicts, which is a ratio of black to white deaths of 10 to 1 (Flood 2006: 105). "Self-governing colonies came into being one by one – South Australia and Western Australia in 1836, Victoria in 1851, Tasmania and Queensland in 1859" (Flood 2006: 105). In Queensland the frontier war was most intense in the 1860's and 1870's. The invaders had by then acquired more powerful firearms, meaning that the amount of violence and Aboriginal casualties were much higher in Queensland than elsewhere (Flood 2006: 105). Firearms were not all they had acquired, also the rumours of blacks fighting back meant that "the earliest squatters came north from New South Wales heavily armed, expecting trouble, ready in many cases to shoot on sight in order to "keep the blacks out"" (Reynolds 1993b: 52).

Colonisation in Queensland

The first European contact in the Townsville area was made by James Morill, "an Essex seaman who was shipwrecked on the Great Barrier Reef in 1846 and washed ashore at Cape Cleveland" (Loos 1993: 7). Morill and three others were accepted by the local Aboriginal group as deceased relatives, and Morill ended up living with them for thirteen years. In 1860, when a government ship was anchored at Cape Cleveland, a group of Bindal Aborigines approached the crew to tell them of Morill's presence, to which "the Europeans grew alarmed and fired upon the apparently menacing 'savages', killing one of Morill's friends and wounding another" (Loos 1993: 13). Over the next months 30 more of this group would be shot dead on sight, the outcome of the "keep the blacks out" mentality that pervaded colonisation in this area (Loos 1993). In North-Queensland, the settlers encroached on four fronts in the quest of exploiting natural resources: the pastoral frontier, the mining frontier, the rainforest frontier and the sea frontier. "The wealth of North Queensland grasslands, minerals, fisheries, and rainforests produced four frontiers of racial contact [...] Inevitably, the pastoral industry provided the Aborigines with their greatest challenges and wreaked havoc upon the largest number of tribes" (Loos 1993: 11). This did not mean that tribes would not fight back or resist. The Commissioner of Police, after a tour of inspection in 1868, reported that "the coast all along from Townsville to Mackay is inhabited by blacks of the most hostile character. On some of the stations north of Bowen [...] it is almost impossible to keep any cattle on the runs; and south of Bowen some stations are or were about to be abandoned in consequence of the destruction of property by the blacks" (Moore 1993: 97). The Aboriginal resistance would hunt and stampede the cattle, making the cattle uncontrollable and scattered, and when pursued the Aborigines would disappear in the bush (Moore 1993: 96). Punitive expeditions and hunting parties often followed the Aboriginal resistance, resulting in violent clashes and massacres (Moore 1993: 97), proving that "Aboriginal resistance did not heighten the respect of the white man; it deepened his hatred and contempt (Reynolds 1993b: 62). Fear of Aborigines haunted the British colonisers, and both men and women carried guns at all times, even on "peaceful" stations (Reynolds 1993b: 52-53). The fact that "colonial Queensland bristled with guns" (Reynolds 1993b: 52), would eventually violently break the Aboriginal open resistance.

By the late 1880's, Townsville had become the principal city of North Queensland and had a European population of about 12,000, whilst the Wulgurukaba people "had been adapting to a post-frontier society" and was "let in to the settlement in 1870" (Highland 1993: 160). By 1889, a population of about 500 Wulgurukaba lived in two fringe dwelling camps on the edges of Townville in shelters constructed of material from the settlement but according to traditional specifications, and their methods of fishing were also still traditional (Highland 1993: 160-161). Some of the Aborigines in Townsville would be employed to work odd jobs unwanted by the whites, mostly cutting and collecting firewood (Highland 1993: 162-163). In the 1890's about 500 Aborigines were employed in the northern fisheries, to which "laborers were recruited initially either by deceit or outright kidnapping but subsequently a regular labour trade developed", with the pay being in the form of "a minimal supply of food, tobacco, clothing and blankets" (Loos 1993: 18). Europeans were not likely to offer money as pay to Aborigines, and even though it was illegal, they were more likely to pay in alcohol, as was reported by Townsville newspapers (Highland 1993: 163).

Race confrontations in Queensland has an extensive history, which from hereon in the thesis will come up through the context of interacting with my informants.

Contextual literature and research question

"In the past, the Australian Aborigines triumphed over demanding physical environments. They also survived the advent of Europeans, although they were drastically reduced in number. They now face the most demanding challenge of all, alcohol" (McKnight 2002: 1). McKnight write of the social consequences of alcohol in a historical perspective. The effects are changing the relationships between generations and being destructive of the community and the self. The dehumanizing effects and moral breakdown lead to many other problems, like the elevated suicide rate on Mornington Island, North Queensland, being 34 times greater than that of Queensland (McKnight 2002: 126). The personal tragedies is overlapped with "the weight of what has happened and is happening to the community as a whole" (McKnight 2002: 127). Alcoholism has a "detrimental affect on all social phenomena", like the school, welfare, health, marriage, and child-rearing practices. The negative circle is one of violence, suicide or homicide, domestic violence, abuse, crime and the social death of going to prison

(McKnight 2002: 212-214). Cox (2010) has looked into social and moral values in a rural town in Queensland, where life is shaped by heavily drinking, suicides and social suffering. She finds that tragedies like suicides evokes connectivity instead of anomie, that it "cannot be understood merely as an individualistic act or evidence of individual pathology. Rather it is about transformation and crossing a threshold to join an enduring domain of Aboriginality" (Cox 2010: 241). Further, "where family is the highest social value and where a relational view of persons holds sway, the individualistic practice of psychiatric and other helping professions is a considerable problem" (Cox 2010: 241).

My planned project in Townsville was supposed to be about dance in connection to understandings of traditional stories and the Dreaming. By failing to establish contact with the dance groups Rosita Henry at James Cook University had told me about, the project practically took another turn and became a journey on an unforeseen path. This explains why I did not always get answers to important questions at the time. I had been adamant about not focusing on social suffering, and was instead searching for positive aspects of Indigenous life and culture today. This I did find as a relationship with the guys in a ceremony group was established, and learning about their project became mine. The ceremony group, lead by Uncle Alfred and Pastor Brad, are men involved with breaking ground for the collective catharsis from the trauma, as described by the literature on social suffering. The way through this trauma is a path of empowerment and regeneration of culture and identity. My research question was open, seeking for an understanding of what is important for Indigenous people in connection with identity and culture today, in an urban area such as Townsville.

Theoretical framework

The peoplehood matrix, as defined by Holm et al. (2003) is a functional theoretical layout that fits well for this thesis. Peoplehood is a concept that encompasses a view of group identity that goes beyond the notions of grouping humans into classes, races, politics or religious groups, and as a perspective of group identity it transcends notions of statehood, nationalism, gender and ethnicity (Holm et al. 2003: 11).

In this matrix there are four interwoven and interdependent factors that make up the sovereignty of a people: land, language, religion, and sacred history (Holm et al. 2013: 12). These factors coincide with how I have structured this thesis in the four following chapters, or "powers": of place, word, ritual and history. I have used the word "power" as it conveys a dynamic and pulsating character, and hints at the way each of these factors radiates into and strengthens each of the others.

This concept of peoplehood has to be seen in relation to settler colonialism, since Australian Aboriginal people has persisted as colonised peoples in a land where colonising settlers has "established a new society that replicates the original one [Britain]", "premised on the possibility of controlling and dominating indigenous peoples", and where the colonisers have "come to stay" (Veracini 2013: 313-314).

A resurgent Indigenous movement against contemporary colonialism, as conceptualized by Alfred & Cornthassel (2005), is founded on the regeneration of persons and communities – of peoplehood. The four "mantras" they propose to be put into action according to each people's context, will mean "thinking, speaking and acting with the conscious intent of regenerating one's indigeneity", and truly "*being Indigenous*" (2005: 614, their italics). "*Land is Life*" is the first "mantra": "people must reconnect with their the terrain and geography of their Indigenous heritage if they are to comprehend the teachings and values of the ancestors, and if they are to draw strength and sustenance that is independent of colonial power, and which is generative of an authentic, autonomous, Indigenous existence". The second mantra, "*Language is Power*" – "people must recover ways of knowing and relating from outside the mental and ideational framework of colonialism by regenerating themselves in a conceptual universe formed through Indigenous languages". "*Freedom is the Other Side of Fear*" – the third – "people must transcend the controlling power of the many varied fears that colonial powers use to dominate and manipulate us into complacency. The way to do this" is through a "spiritually grounded action". Finally, "*Change Happens one Warrior at a Time*" – "people must reconstitute the mentoring and learning-teaching relationships that foster real and meaningful human development and community solidarity. The movement toward decolonization and regeneration will emanate from transformations achieved by direct-guided experience in small, personal, groups and one-on-one mentoring towards a new path" (Alfred & Cornthassel 2005: 613, their italics). As will be shown, this conceptualization is directly relatable to what is happening in Indigenous Townsville today.

Townsville - a regional capital

Townsville is the regional capital city of North Queensland, and "Australia's largest tropical city with a population of around 190,000. It's a thriving coastal city and port, and a stepping-off point for visiting the Great Barrier Reef" (JCU Australia, "Townsville"). During the World War 2, Townsville played an important role and became a major military base, "accommodating up to 90,000 Australian, American and other allied service personnel" (Townsville City Council, "Townsville 1901-2003"). Today, the "Lavarack Barracks in Townsville is the largest Australian Army base" (Queensland Government, "Queensland defence bases and facilities"). As a garrison city Townsville is strategically located as "the most important army base in the country", and with a \$200 billion acquisition program over the next 10 years it will continue to grow as a key defence site (Kellner 2016).

Townsville has also grown as a university city. University College of Townsville opened in 1961 with 105 students. Since 1970 the university is officially known as James Cook University (Townsville City Council, "Townsville 1901-2003"). Today, "around 11,500 students study at JCU Townsville, including over 1,500 international students" (JCU Australia, "Townsville"). Townsville is not only a key defence site and a university city, it is also the site of an important history of Indigenous empowerment. "In 1981, Edward Mabo, a Townsville resident, and a number of other local Aboriginal leaders held a conference at James Cook University and decided to pursue a native land title claim for the people of the Murray Islands in the High Court of Australia. The 'Mabo' land rights campaign was successful and the High Court of Australia gave recognition of indigenous land ownership in 1992." (Townsville City Council, "Townsville 1901-2003").

2016 marked the year when Townsville celebrated 150 years since being declared a municipality (Townsville City Council, "Townsville 150 Celebrations").

Now, walking along the Strand in Townsville, the beach promenade reaching almost 2 kilometres, it is difficult to fathom a history of colonisation, squatters and pastoralist with guns and lethal race confrontations. That is a part of the past, all but invisible now. The

people walking, jogging, enjoying the beach or lunchtime in one of the many cafeterias, seem utterly laid back as if they are on an eternal vacation and their only concern would visibly be the tropical heat. Racially, you see a mix of people, although they all seem Western when it comes to clothing and language spoken: English. The look of the roads and buildings, cars and buses, the types of shops and restaurants you find here could have been found anywhere in "the West", apart from historical colonial buildings. If not the tropical weather and seasons make you aware of it, then maybe the sight of a possum trying to snatch your food as you enjoy a barbeque in the park at night; clouds of huge fruit bats flying over your head at dusk; the ruckus made by green parakeets or wild cockatoos atop coconut trees; the road signs making you aware of the possible kangaroo crossing; colonies of small sugar ants invading your breakfast cereal; warnings of lethal jelly fish, sharks and crocodiles in the sea - will naturally locate you in quite a unique part of the Western world. For me it was strangely familiar and exotic, all at once.

Method of Study

In an anthropological study, the anthropologist is itself both the toolkit and vehicle in the acquiring of new knowledge (Madden 2010; Okely 2012). In the following I will reflect on how I related to this experience.

Navigating and relating to a place through people

Getting to know people became what consumed my time in Townsville. Moving along the lines of new relationships provided me with dialogue partners as well as a context through which to understand the society I now found myself in. Gordillo writes of his fieldwork experience in Argentina as a "demanding, often unsettling, always surprising journey", that took him to a "wide array of places located in different geographies" (Gordillo 2014: 11). He describes in the introduction of his book how he felt disoriented when he first arrived in Salta, and he shows the reader how his own experiences of orientation in unfamiliar geographical terrains provide a "general mapping" of what is later to be explored in the book (Gordillo 2014: 11-12). In much the same way, by interacting with a wide array of people I

was introduced to the Australian society in Townsville. This interaction revealed a terrain of differing mindsets, opinions, perceptions and prejudices that are present here; a social terrain with scattered pieces of "imperial debris" (Stoler 2013) that is very much a part of this place even though it is not always visible or audible. In my case I was trying to look past this social terrain, on my way of navigating towards the Indigenous terrain, which at first sight this place seemed devoid of any outstanding trace of. Being aware that "the debris of older histories would be overgrown and out of sight", as the colonial ruins Gordillo was looking for (2014: 13), the experience of this social navigation was indeed demanding. I will use some details from my own experiences of orienting this social terrain as an example of how the Australian society can overshadow the Indigenous one.

During the first few weeks in Townsville, I became part of an international crowd that also included quite a few Australians. Whenever I introduced the nature of my studies and why I was here, I was met with positive attitudes and curiosity, often receiving tips on where I should go to experience Indigenous culture (museums, other places in Australia). Often, my non-Australian friends wanted to know more about anthropology or share with me their own anecdotes of experiences with Indigenous people, always positive. An Australian friend of mine, Nigel, had been living in an Aboriginal community on an island near Broome, in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. He was always eager to talk about his experiences and share what he knew of that Aboriginal culture. When my studies were not the focus of conversation however, or I met with Australians I did not know very well, I did hear comments like "they should get over it" and "we can't change the past", in condescending tones, almost passive-aggressively so. On one evening, an international group of friends had just finished a barbeque on a balcony overlooking a park area near the river, when one of the Australian guys started pointing and laughing: "I just love seeing drunk *abos* fight and get scared off by police, and the next night they are right back doing it all again!". This last comment were made by "Steve" who was aware of my studies, but nonetheless careless in his display of racist attitudes towards Aboriginal people. It is noteworthy how some people would freely come with racist remarks of this kind, while also identifying as a non-racist. When Reynolds moved to Townsville in 1965, he noted how "the parkies were always a cause for controversy, a focal point for anti-Aboriginal rhetoric, an ever-present means to condemn the whole indigenous community" (Reynolds 1999: 58). Maybe these examples illustrates how Australian racism towards Indigenous people operates in general, in the way racist attitudes are wrapped up in casual conversation or disguised as a joke. The telling of

racist jokes to provoke new-comers was popular also when Reynolds first arrived in Townsville, and it existed an urban folklore about Aboriginal privileges or delinquencies. Reynolds says of that time, that "in Queensland, attitudes shaped in the colonial period lived on into the present (Reynolds 1999: 48). An example of this I experienced while fishing from the pier with Nigel. An elderly man used to come to the pier and overlook the fishing. He never did any fishing himself, but always had an opinion on every topic of discussion. When he heard I was in Townsville to get to know Aboriginal people and learn about their culture, he shocked me with the suggestion of blowing up the whole of Uluru, give each Aboriginal person a piece of "that so-called sacred stone" in the hope of "shutting them up". These examples serve as an illustration of the unsettling aspects of Australian society, and it shows how disorientating the initial time of fieldwork can be.

Navigating and relating to people through place

There is something about places and the stories they tell (Basso 1996). Most of my time in Townsville was spent outdoors, both before getting to know Indigenous persons and also after. I know from my own hometown that a mountain or a hill or places in the forest, on islands, along the sea shore or at the bewildering sea itself – that all places have stories. Stories about particular people, something that happened recently or long ago, maybe something now a part of the history of a family, a village, or whole regions – something maybe no one can remember through their own life experience but through a collective memory. As I was physically navigating this new place, I wondered about the river splitting the city in two, the glossy look of the beach promenade (The Strand), Castle Hill looming over me wherever I went – what are the stories that I do not know, but still know is here? Experiencing Townsville as a *tabula rasa*², these wonderings became my own stories, and as I got to know the people who have lived their lives in this place I got to know some of their stories as well. Cultivating a sense of place is an important link between method and theory in this thesis: indeed it connects the experiential and the conceptual. Tilley described this movement through space as what constructs "spatial stories" and "forms of narrative understanding" (Tilley 1994: 28).

² Latin, meaning "blank slate".

Fieldwork as an experience

”The experience of being ethnographic can variously confirm, challenge and complicate the thoughts and expectations an ethnographer has developed before entering the field” (Madden 2010: 147). In my case, the challenge I met during the first couple of months of fieldwork, was to meet someone interested in my project who would help me along, introduce me to the right people and organize the chance for me to start creating relationships with potential research participants. I would have to be patient for weeks on end. When these things fell into place, what was confirmed to me was that Aboriginal people, even in an urban area such as Townsville, do maintain a distinct identity as Indigenous.

If I were to do this project again, I would have changed my tactics in how to record data, and taken the chance to ask for audio-recorded interviews to secure spoken information more thoroughly. My reason for not doing this, was the fear of breaking unspoken rules and be seen as acting disrespectfully, and more importantly the fact that I did not know where the research was going until I was leaving - What would I ask? In retrospect it is of course easy to see what could have been done differently and more effective in regards to data. Madden says of fieldwork that ”one of the most important aspects of all ethnographic settings is that they are particular and experimental, and as such ethnography can be guaranteed in some way to challenge expectations” (Madden 2010: 147). The fieldwork experience definitely challenged my own expectations, and I relied heavily on experimentation, improvisation and serendipity – finding that ”knowledge is, at crucial stages, acquired through accident” and that ”anthropological practice includes moments of nondirective discovery” (Okely 2012: 23). By having the time to let relationships naturally form and being open to people’s own interests and concerns (Okely 2012: 4), effectively informed this thesis.

”A generalisation we can make about ethnographic data is that all good ethnographic projects start with a successful embodied experience in the field” (Madden 2010: 136), and it is indeed the embodied experience that is the primary source of ethnographic data in this thesis, and the type of data I rely on first and foremost. Although fieldnotes and footage from the field has been important and powerful sources of data, these, in the words of Madden, ”cannot compete with with the ability of the human mind to capture the nuance of

experience” (Madden 2010: 132). I would add that the human body is also instrumental to this ability. When going through fieldnotes and pictures I find that these has worked as mnemonic devices enabling me to revisit important moments of fieldwork experience, always alighting my remembrance to a fuller extent than the words alone convey.

Collecting data

It took some time before I found my informants - or maybe they found me - and the relationships between us had been soundly established. Australia in general has a laidback attitude, but I was careful not to impose myself on my informants. I did not want to come across as someone who seeks to invade their privacy or culture in any way, or expect more from them than they are willing to share. This means I was shy about using my phone both for taking pictures and audio, as I was concerned this would interrupt the natural flow of the meetings, and also interrupt the naturally forming friendships by the rude request of documenting out of place. My style of field research is familiar to how Rose describe hers in *Dingo Makes us Human*, as ”quite unassertive”, and her description: ”many of my days have been spent visiting and chatting, often without directing the conversation or taking extensive notes” (Rose 2000: 27) rings absolutely true in my case aswell.

That being said, I collected written data actively as well. A notebook was always with me, and I practiced what Hutchinson called ”open note taking” (1996:44). By its mere presence, the notebook sometimes influenced the conversation, although when it did the conversation was still directed by my informants. I was often told things with added encouragements like ”this is something for your notebook”, ”this is something for your thesis”, or ”you have to write this down”. Also, informants themselves used my notebook on occasion to explain something, use as a visual tool, get some key words or names down on paper, or simply to write something down. In most meetings I was instructed to write things down as we spoke, and I was given tips on which books to read in order to learn more about the true history of Aboriginal people in Australia. I experienced from them a will to help, to teach and guide me in the right direction so that I could be able to learn and understand more – this became our common goal.

Positionality

Reflecting on my position in the field, an anthropological term (Madden 2010; Okely 2012), is really turning the mirror around and considering how I was being related to by the people I met - "it is about the interaction between the anthropologist and others" (Okely 2012: 125).

An anthropologist uses her whole personality as she learns about someone else's culture, indeed "the specificity, positionality and personal history of the anthropologist are resources to be explored, not repressed" (Okely 2012: 125). Initially, I was met as in the role of a student, here to learn about the Indigenous situation by talking directly to people, and as a former school teacher who would later re-tell this story to future pupils, a story truly based on real people and not only on what books might say. The perspective of valuing real people's take on things over written information found in books, was easily accepted since the history of Indigenous peoples in Australia has been widely distorted and censored in the past and this is still a problem (Reynolds 1999). Prioritizing what people could tell me, spending time with them and getting to know them personally, distanced me from this past of silencing and devaluing, and effectively put me on their side.

I was met with a degree of surprise a few times, and possibly some disbelief or suspicion, as to why a young woman from Norway would travel alone all the way to Australia and seek out Aboriginal people. Who I am and why I am doing this, was something I either felt I had to explain, or was asked about directly after some time. The answer "I'm a student of social sciences/ anthropology" did not really explain anything fully or suffice as trustworthy enough; "But why? Why did you come here, of all places?". I would start by talking about the first time I saw an Aboriginal person in a primary school text book, as I learned there was a continent called Australia really far away, and English-speaking people lived there ("How did they get there?"). There was a picture of an Aboriginal man standing on one foot, holding a walking stick, in a desert ("Who is this, where did he come from and where did he go? Does he speak English? Why is he black?"). I can recall this moment in my life, all the questions racing through my young mind, and how it profoundly affected me. Ever since, I have always been drawn to the history and cultures of Indigenous people - globally.

Also, I was open about where my personal interest in Indigenous issues originated from, as it is actually intertwined with my own ancestors and personality. I grew up with a grandmother whose ancestry includes Indigenous Sami. This fact could explain my seeking attitude, and legitimate my innate interest, concern and empathy with Indigenous people also as far away from home as Australia. Upon hearing this, the response would be in the form of conscious nodding, or something along the line of "oh, it's in your blood". I would explain that my grandmother did not grow up with her parents or within her ancestral culture, and would never talk about her ancestry/ heritage openly, as far as I know. Within my family there are numerous anecdotes about her quite peculiar life story and somewhat unusual beliefs and actions, which can be explained both as the personality quirks of an excentric woman while at the same time seeming to be stemming from something different, something deeper. For example, appeasing the "little people" for helping around the house and garden, and the belief in forest spirits, was something my Aboriginal friends could recognise. Growing up outside of one's culture or with foster parents obviously resonates with the former child removal policies and Stolen Generations in Australia (see Murphy 2011) as well. The fact that my part Indigenous grandmother was born in an area called Bindal, as is the name of one of the Traditional Owner people of Townsville, proved to be a puzzling coincidence and a confirmation of a connection.

My reasons for doing this particular fieldwork is clearly based more on an emotional or personal pursuit than a strictly intellectual one, and I was under the impression that I was met with respect because of it. My personal reasons for this fieldwork also affected the nature of how it progressed and the type of method being used, enabling a mix of observant participation and resonance (Wikan 1992). To be able to relate to others and to "learn one's way into other peoplehoods" ("å lære seg inn i andre menneskeverdener", Barth 2005:10), can in my experience and point of view only begin with the forming of relationships. The understandings posed in this thesis can therefore be said to be a product of relating, which in my case grew forth through resonance first and foremost.

Reflections concerning gender

All the Welcome to Country speeches I witnessed were performed by three different women. In one case the woman did not wish to speak with me, in another case the woman in question gladly spoke to me on that occasion and accepted to receive my contact information. She also told me that she was quite busy with her family, we parted on friendly terms but I never heard from her again. The third woman politely declined to meet me for a chat, as she was simply swamped with work and family responsibilities. In all these occasions, I was made aware that there had recently been a passing of a family or community member, which understandingly was more important to attend to than talking with a foreign student. One of the Elder women poignantly remarked that there was at least one funeral a week in her community (see Cox 2010 on suffering and funerals).

All of my main research participants are male, and connected to a ceremony group. The men of the Smoking Ceremony group were either single or had grown children with families of their own. Their involvement in the ceremony group already meant spending time several days or afternoons a week on this responsibility. They simply had more time at their disposal, and I believe talking to me about culture and identity fell under their responsibility within the ceremony group. Talking to me was also in tune with the educational function of performing public display of culture at various events, for example on Global Village day at the university campus. Simply put, the men informing this thesis were more inclined, interested and available to talking and spending time with me.

Gender specific issues are of no further focus in the thesis, although it could have been. What is interesting to point out however, is that Aboriginal culture has a clear distinction between *men's business* and *women's business* and on that note it could be somewhat of a paradox that the main research participants are indeed male. That being said, I did not get included in regards to what *men's business* might entail – as that would have been out of place and a clear break of traditional rules - I was only invited to learn about public issues open to all.

Relating to the data

Madden says that "one of the first tasks that confronts you as an ethnographer after completing a preliminary analysis of your field data is to revisit what you thought you knew and see if you still know it" (Madden 2010: 147), something I experienced as a an emotional dissonance when I was returned home. This tension appeared as a result of having to relate to fieldnotes and no longer being able to interact directly with the people I had gotten to know and appreciate. Wikan describes resonance as a requirement to apply feelings as well as thought, and "indeed, feeling is the more essential, for without feeling we'll remain entangled in illusions" (Wikan 1992: 463). How can one not fear to become entangled in illusions as one spends more than a year thinking and writing? Will the written product reflect reality? In the end, what this text reflects is what I learned from my friends in Townsville, as opposed to their exact reality. This text is the product of following Uncle Alfred's advice of speaking from the heart, as well as the advice from several professors of writing a story that you care about telling. Doing and writing anthropology is really a vocation that demands using the full spectre of one's senses, as a craft it makes its demands on "hand, brain and heart" (Okely 2012: 78).

What I thought I knew before fieldwork, was that Indigenous Australians have a distinct identity based on their traditional culture first and foremost, and secondly as a result of settler colonial history and their experience within present day Australian society. This I found to be true, although in my first report after completing fieldwork I made it explicit that my data seemed to only scratch the surface. How to connect the dots of what my fieldwork data revealed, could quite possibly be done differently if I had more time to conduct fieldwork or if I had somehow been prepared for the unexpected change of focus. The notion of merely scratching the surface also persisted in the process of digging up relevant secondary data, and this notion, I believe, is the shadow of anyone in pursuit of establishing and affirming knowledge about something while simultaneously having to dig through a never-ending library. Having doubts about the depths of ones data is common among anthropologists, novices and experienced researchers alike.

I set out for fieldwork to figure out how the distinct Indigenous identity infuses dance and dancers in Indigenous dance groups. The focus changed as I came into contact with Uncle

Alfred who conducts Smoking Ceremonies and runs the Men's Group. I witnessed several Welcome to Country speeches, and spent time with the guys of the ceremony group. Albeit a change of focus for the thesis, the data is still infused with Indigenous identity issues, and actions I witnessed or was told about are fueled by identity. To refine my understanding of the data has been a long process of engaging with literature and revisiting notes and memories from fieldwork, as well as ongoing e-mail correspondence throughout the time of writing. Hopefully, this has enabled me to scratch beneath the surface of the data and get at the deeper truth of the situation in Townsville specifically and Indigenous Australia generally. The base of this quest is identity, and the operative word of interpretation is how: How is identity important? How does identity reveal itself, in subtle ways and explicit ways? How does identity matter? In this thesis, I set out to tell a story that can both describe and explain some of the meanings of Indigenous identity in Townsville, Australia today.

2 Country – Power of Place

In presenting this "storied reality" (Madden 2010), I will start on the ground, literally speaking. After structuring the data, revising it through thinking, reading and writing, I have come to conclude that by starting on the ground with a phenomenological place-making perspective, a key to understanding is found. "Understanding the relationships and patterns in 'what' people do leads to a position where we might be able to suggest 'why' they do it" (Madden 2010: 150), which means that looking into *how* place is the key can describe what people do, while looking into *why* place is the key can explain why people do it the way that they do. Place as the key is the means by which to unfold and open up to further understanding in this thesis. A phenomenological perspective of place can reveal what is distinct and important in Indigenous culture and identity in Australia.

This chapter will describe the significance of place and begin to explain the relationship between place and people in Townsville. The phenomenological perspective that explains this significance and relatedness requires "a continuous dialectic between ideas and empirical data" (Tilley 1994: 11), hence the dialectic structure of the chapter. In my ethnographic experience, place was talked about explicitly, and just as revealing was the manner in which it was taught to me in more subtle ways. This chapter speaks to this experience, as it tries to convey the meaning of place in both explicit and subtle form, moving between description and interpretation, embodied experience and textual representation. This chapter will answer the intertwined questions: how is place important? What is *Country*?³

I find that the meanings inscribed in place includes different types of activities: historical; mythical; intergenerational memory and practices; and personal narratives. As a conclusion in this chapter I will show how the concept of *Country* includes aspects of all these types of activities and how it generates a sense of belonging. First, a preliminary discussion on urban Indigenous identity is needed.

³ Note on terminology. I emphasize *Country* with italics and capitalisation when this word is used as an emic term. Country, capitalized, refer to the general term. In citations, the word stands as it does in the cited text.

Urban Indigenous identity

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008), Article 25, declares that “Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard”. Is relationship to land important also for Indigenous people living in an urban area such as Townsville, the regional capital of the “countryside” state of Queensland?

Living in Townsville is not a unique life style in the Indigenous context since 70 % of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now live in urban areas (Maddison 2013: 293). Earlier, it was thought that the growing number of Aboriginal “city dwellers”, in contrast to “bush people” and “outback people”, were people of “all stages towards, within, or beyond that rather indefinable state of life we describe as ‘assimilation’” (Stanner 1968: 240). However, we now see that living in an urban area, leading urbanized life styles, does not automatically mean that the unique Indigenous identity is lost and simply replaced by an Australian middle class life style (Maddison 2013). In New Zealand, urbanization has in fact “strengthened the resolve of Maori to cling to their unique identity, allowing them to foster a growing and spreading political influence” (Maddison 2013: 299). The same can be said about many cities in Australia, like Townsville. The focus of this chapter however, is not how urbanisation of Indigenous identity shape political influence, but that even in urban areas there is a continuation of an authentic Indigenous identity. It is noteworthy that being urban has been and still is debated as a contrast to being authentically Indigenous. “Urbanisation” was “once expected to be Aboriginality’s nemesis” (Rowse 2000: 185), seeing as the assimilation narrative meant it was “possible to extinguish Aboriginal heritage” (Rowse 2000: 184). But, “that urbanisation should be one of the historic conditions of Aboriginal ethnogenesis should not surprise us” (Rowse 2000: 184). Also, “one important strand of the ‘urban’ cultural adaption [...] is the hybridity and ‘pan-indigeneity’ of contemporary indigenous cultural expression. To be ‘urban’ is therefore to be cross-regional.” (Rowse 2000: 189).

The controlling power of the settler state structures is seen in how Aboriginality was defined in terms of blood quantum, and now imposing conceptions of Indigenous identity through the "pressure on Aboriginal people to simultaneously defend their "authenticity" *and* assimilate into the 'mainstream'" (Maddison 2013: 299). This is illustrated by the powerful binary between 'City' and 'Bush' (Rowse 2000: 184), with notions of how the only true Aboriginal people should be living in remote areas, while simultaneously being seen as backward, contra urban Aboriginal people not being black or authentic enough - notions manifested in government policies and community attitudes. What research now needs to do, is "bring Aborigine's own cultural categories to the centre of analysis" (Rowse 2000: 172), and show how "urbanisation did not 'deplete' Aboriginality [...], but rather it facilitated new forms of cultural production combining the old and the new, the traditional and modern" (Maddison 2013: 300). "The logic of settler colonialism resists this understanding of identity", all the while this is a necessary step in the decolonising and reconciling process (Maddison 2013: 300). So is expanding the notion of what "traditional" culture is, in showing that this concept can no longer be treated as a narrow and static one, as it restricts Aboriginality into "exotic and static representations" of what Aboriginal culture is today (Hollinsworth 1992: 138).

Historical

I got to know Townsville as a place and a story through spending time, or should we say sharing place, with my research participants. Through going for walks, sitting down for a coffee or a snack, hanging out on lazy warm afternoons or going on roadtrips in and around Townsville, we got to know each other as they shared memories and knowledge while trying to give me an understanding of what this story is about, and how this story is connected to place.

A Sunday afternoon I meet Jai for a *yarn* (Australian vernacular for informal chat), after he has finished *busking* (street performing) at the Sunday market in Flinderst Street. As he says, "I carry the *didj* (didjeridoo), not the bottle", meaning he is a man of culture. We sit down at a bench by the river in downtown Townsville. First we discuss the sudden change in weather, how it had gone from hot and dry to hot and humid, *the wet*, so suddenly. Jai can inform me that he had been prepared for the seasonal changes by his Elders, and that he understands it

must be quite uncomfortable for me. Weather is not all we talk about. This is where Jai tells me the story of how Townsville got its name, thanks to Mr. Robert Towns. According to the Australian Dictionary of Biography (1976) Towns was a merchant and entrepreneur, and the Townsville City Council webpage has this information: "In 1866, Robert Towns, entrepreneur and businessman agreed to provide financial assistance to the new settlement [...], the settlement was named Townsville in his honour". Not only did Towns invest in the first settlement and stations here, Jai can tell me that he was also a slavetrader - a *blackbirder*. Blackbirding is a term that describes how labourers were kidnapped, forced or lured onto ships and taken to work in stations or on sugar plantations (Doherty 2017, 24.08). Townsville is still a big producer of sugar, and this industry has roots back to the beginning of the colony. However, most people today do not know that this industry and this city was built on the blackbirding labour trade, which took workers from the South Sea Islands, mostly the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu (Keesing 1992: 32-48). "Some 62,000 Pacific Islanders (principally Melanesians) were recruited to work under indentures in Queensland between 1863 and 1904" (Moore & Mercer 1993: 208). "Indenture is not slavery but neither is it free labour", the labourers lived in poor conditions on the fringes of sugar plantations and suffered from elevated death rates, diseases and discrimination" (Moore 1993b: 183). "Between 1863 and 1906 South Sea Islanders were the staple labour force for the Queensland sugar industry", "at the peak of the plantation era, almost half of the population of the sugar towns were islanders", and "without their contribution to the establishment of the sugar industry, the development of North Queensland would surely have proceeded at a far slower rate" (Moore & Mercer 1993: 210). This is all a part of the history of this place for the Indigenous people here, because as Jai explains me, all coloured workers were treated the same back then, and became a mixed group where many got absorbed into the Indigenous population (Moore & Mercer 1993: 210). As Jai is telling me about this we are actually sitting just metres away from a statue of Robert Towns. The statue commemorates Towns as a founding father, with no mention of the kind of business he organised.⁴ In 2013, South Sea Islander, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people gathered to protest the statue (Monument Australia, "Robert Towns"), and this year it reappeared in the public eye as a controversy following the removal of Confederate statues in the US (Madigan 2017, 22.08). While the descendants of South Sea

⁴ There is also an obelisk on top of Castle Hill, from 1949, in honour of Robert Towns as the city's founding father. The Townsville Centenary Monument on the Strand, commemorating the 100th anniversary of settlement, "honours the four whose exertions gave birth to this city", and cites Robert Towns as "the man of enterprise" (Monument Australia).

Islanders want monuments that tell the full truth and that put an end to the “whitewashing” of history, calling for mainstream Australia to listen (Haxton 2017, 24.08; Doherty 2017, 24.08), the mayor of Townsville, clearly illustrating how not to listen, replies that the Indigenous population in Townsville are more concerned with social issues such as jobs and alcohol abuse than what’s written on a statue (Killoran 2017, 31.08). This controversy is all but a part of a larger narrative, revolving around acknowledging the truth of what happened during the history of invasion and colonisation, and also being truthful of what is happening in the now as Indigenous people and South Sea Islanders in Australia fight to have their story recognised, validated and acknowledged by the state. Activist professor Gracelyn Smallwood spoke about human rights and the amnesia Australia is suffering from in regards to the history and recognition of a people in 2013: “they [the state] want reconciliation without the truth, and this will not work” (Smallwood 2013).



(<http://monumentaustralia.org.au/themes/people/industry/display/92821-robert-towns>)

The statue of Towns was erected in 2005, near the Ross Creek River and the Victoria Bridge walkway, which is part of the Townsville City Council's Pioneer Walk. On the other side of the river from the Towns statue, is where the memorial sculpture in honour of Eddie Mabo is located, on the lawn towards the river. This sculpture is in the shape of a big oval rock with inscriptions, placed on a foundation with lined markings. The first weeks of my time in Townsville, I passed this sculpture a few times without realising what it was, thinking it was a piece of urban art. It was not until I was having a chat with Jai about Townsville's history as seen from an Indigenous perspective, that I was made aware that this was in fact a Mabo memorial, while we were sitting under the huge fig tree that also shadows the Robert Towns statue.

Taking a closer look at the sculpture, now knowing what it is, I see that the sculpture has a carved fingerprint on it, there is a large drum also a part of the memorial and there is a plack explaining how "Edward Koiki Mabo played a fundamental role in the fight for recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Native Title" (Monument Australia, "Eddie Koiki Mabo"). The landmark decision of the High Court of Australia in 1992 ended the legal fiction of "terra nullius" since James Cook's time, and is commonly known as the Mabo decision or the Mabo case (Daley 2017a). This sculpture from 2007 commemorates Eddie Mabo, this decision and Native Title. Monument Australia explains what the sculpture represents: the mosaic is "symbolic of the ancestral octopus that brought the laws of tradition to the people of Torres Strait Islands", where Eddie Mabo was born, the "enlarged playable bronze replica of a Warup drum carved by Eddie Mabo [...] represents the strength and continuum of Eddie's voice – resonating the connection between the past, present and future". The "large natural granite boulder positioned at the centre of the mosaic pattern", with the carving of a large fingerprint, is "symbolising the physical, spiritual and cultural connection between indigenous people and the land" (Monument Australia, "Eddie Koiki Mabo").



(<http://monumentaustralia.org.au/themes/people/indigenous/display/94350-eddie-koiko-mabo>)

During later conversations (in chapter 5) I will learn that this same river used to be the dividing line during the curfew times, when an Indigenous person was not allowed in the city center after dark. Placing the Towns statue and Mabo's commemorating sculpture on each side of the river represents the remnant of this division. When I meet Jai for a chat, I did not anticipate that this particular place held such a contrasting story. This is a place in the city that holds the story of past struggles for the Indigenous populations, inscribed in place, statues and sculptures, and also in name. I would later realize that by being in a particular place was often the first step in getting to know the story related to that place (Basso 1996), as if we were stepping into both a place and a story.

It is also here, by the river, that Jai tells me about skin groups and moieties that used to structure traditional Aboriginal societies. He explains this as a system that organised who could marry who, and as a system it protected the society from inbreeding and so kept the people's DNA strong. There is still some knowledge on these things, Jai says, Elders still know, although it is not like it used to be in the past since colonisation displaced people not only from their lands but also from their knowledge. It is important to know that not all is

lost, and Jai mentions the Rainbow Serpent, the Creating force and the Dreaming that connects all the Indigenous People's in Australia through its storylines (Radcliffe-Brown 1926). The diverse Dreamings from all over the continent, telling of Rainbow Serpents travels as it created the land, depicts the Creator as being in connection with water, often travelling through water as it created the land, or being much like a river itself. Like the colours of the rainbow, the Rainbow Serpent connects all people of all skin colours, because as Jai says: the colour of your skin is not as important as who you are in your heart. The theme of connection will continue to infuse what I am being taught in Townsville, even when the topic of conversation initially seems to be about brokenness and separation. Maybe this spot near the river can be a symbol of how the different sides of the story can learn to meet each other, listen, connect and create bridges where before there was division.

Mythical : The Dingo of Castle Hill

Castle Hill is a little mountain in Townsville. Actually the whole city of Townsville and its suburbs are located around it, which means it is visible from wherever you find yourself. Castle Hill is overlooking the CBD (Central Business District) and the Strand (beach promenade). As perceived from the CBD and the Strand, Townsville appears to be quite small and easily navigated by the ever visible Castle Hill, while Townsville's suburbs covers a large flat area on the other sides of it. On the first drive with Uncle Alfred, he tells me about the Dingo and Kangaroo story, after I ask him whether Castle Hill has another traditional name. He can not tell me the name, but he tells me the story:

There is a dingo chasing a kangaroo along the coast. The dingo has to be very careful and clever, since the kangaroo is much bigger and stronger than him. But the kangaroo is also clever, and he goes into the sea knowing that the dingo cannot follow. Once in the sea, the kangaroo lets himself be submerged by water, only keeping the top of his head, nose and eyes above water. Seeing this, the dingo sits down to wait next to the water, patiently observing the kangaroo. What the dingo is painfully aware of, is that approaching a kangaroo deep in water can prove to be fatal. The kangaroo is in full control and in no distress however dire the situation may look. Blocked from view by water, the kangaroo is prepared to counter-attack, standing on his long strong tail, with its powerful hind-legs extended and ready to perform

vicious kicks. These two animals are no strangers to each other, and so they remain frozen in a perpetual hunt, locked in a safe distance gaze towards the other. The dingo is now the rock formation known as Castle Hill and the kangaroo can be seen as the end of the Cape Cleveland peninsula – also the spot where the Bindal people experienced the first killings by Europeans (Loos 1993: 13-14).



Townsville's CBD as seen from Castle Hill, with Cape Cleveland on the horizon.

The overt lesson of this story is to never try and save a drowning kangaroo, since the kangaroo have gone into the water for his own reasons, one of them may be to launch a sudden attack upon the follower. Kangaroos are good swimmers, and it is “common for a kangaroo to head into water to defend themselves against predators”, or just to cool down on a warm day (wildlife biologist Dr. Bill Bateman in Morris 2017). Other more subtle meanings of this story might be a way of showing that things are not always what they seem at first glance, how some things can be hidden from view and one is wise to await an action until all the facts are known. Maybe it refers to the reality of the invisible realms. It can also mean that there exists mutual relationships between parts that are best kept at a safe distance. In any case this is also a mythical story of how the landscape came to be, which is a common feature of Aboriginal Dreaming stories where the actions of ancient beings created the physical environment - their shapes being visible to this day is a testament to their actions (Stanner 1953, 1962). Similarly, for the Pintupi people in Central Australia, “the existence of the lizard's hill is proof enough that the event occurred as postulated” (Myers 1986: 49).

My attempts at analysing this story, brings me back to a conversation I had with Sharon over lunch. Sharon advised me that in order to understand and write about Indigenous identity, I needed to understand the Dreaming. She also tells me that for Indigenous people, the invisible is just as, or even more, real as the visible in this world. The reasons for things we see and experience in our day to day lives, originate from the invisible. The invisible, spiritual realm is ever-present, and not separated from the mundane. This understanding of reality, and way of experiencing reality, has its roots in, and is illustrated by, the Dreaming stories. The Dreaming constitutes “the ground of foundation of the visible, present-day world” (Myers 1986: 49), and “the sacred knowledge, wisdom and moral truth permeating the entire beingness of Aboriginal life” (Hume 1999: 1). The Dreaming stories make out cognitive maps of the physical world, and “Aborigines gain knowledge of their own spiritual identity and interconnectedness with a specific geographical location or place principally from initiated elders” (Hume 1999:2). This knowledge and wisdom, focusing on place, has been termed “geosophy” (Swain in Hume 1999:2). This means that “the land-spirit-human interconnectedness is the essence of Aboriginal identity” (Hume 1999: 2).

This is the first story Uncle Alfred teaches me, while driving from the suburb Aitkenvale, following the Smoking Ceremony where we had been introduced. He kindly offers me a lift back to town, and like this I find myself in a car with the ceremony group that would later become my friends. It can be difficult to establish a relationship with a stranger, even more so when there is an interest in getting information for the purpose of doing anthropological research. At this first meeting however, I had decided beforehand to be myself first and foremost, and a student looking to do research second. This proved to be a positive approach, and as Uncle Alfred stated later, getting to know me as a person was the first step in being welcomed by him as a stranger to his *Country*. Now looking back, being offered a lift was maybe an extension of his responsibility as a Traditional Owner, and of course a sign of the general kindness and hospitality of Uncle Alfred as a person.

Intergenerational memories and practices

Knowledge and practices linking generations together, are embodied in *Country*. By taking

care of *Country*, *Country* will in return take care of its people and the ties between the generations. The practices relating to *Country* and living in a close relationship with the land, are ordering the flow of knowledge between individuals across generations through the authority Elders have over the juniors in the teaching of knowledge (Rose 2000: 108, 174-175).

During a *drive-about*⁵ with Uncle Alfred we make a stop and get out of the car close to Jazzine Barracks. Here, we have a view overlooking the bay between Jazzine Barracks and Pallarenda, where he remembers coming with his Elders as a boy. During ebb-tide they could catch fish in the traditional way, using fish traps and a plant poison that rendered the fish unconscious for easy harvest (see Highland 1993: 161-162). This used to be a gathering place for Aboriginal people. As we continue our drive in the neighbourhood closeby, Uncle Alfred stops the car to collect some leaves. These are the leaves of “the soap plant”, and he demonstrates the use of these leaves, cleansing his hands, “this is our traditional soap, how we used to bathe”. The leaves, when smudged with some water, produces white bubbles and a fresh scent, just like soap. This shows how “narratives bind events to an objective geographical space” and that “this spatial localization yields the basic symbolism of transgenerational continuity, since the sense of continuity over the generations is carried in the experience of the country as a network of objectively identifiable places” (Munn in Tilley 1994: 41).

Uncle Alfred is today an Elder, teaching culture and traditions to today's youngsters, one example being sea turtle conservation through a cultural mentoring program. The kids learn how in the past, the turtle was hunted to provide food for the families, whereas today, the “young warriors” need to learn to protect the turtle as it is becoming an endangered species. The spear of the past was for hunting, whilst today the spear is one of knowledge. “The turtles are a part of our culture and we need to keep our culture strong”. Through learning about the turtle, the youngsters also learn respect for their culture, traditions, Elders and *Country* (See Uncle Alfred's Mentoring Group 2015: “Strength in My Soul). In this way, also they learn how the landscape, their *Country*, is “filled with meaning and memories, redolent with the actions of the past” (Tilley 1994: 41), as they create new memories through actions of today – while the structures of meaning of *Country* remains, also with modern content.

⁵ A *Walkabout* is the journey undertaken by an Australian Aboriginal, usually on foot in *Country*, in order to live or learn about the traditional ways.

Visiting Gubulla Munda

One of our drives takes us to Ayr, a little town an hour south of Townsville. This is the place of a sacred burial ground and where a sculpture of the *Gubulla Munda* - Rainbow Serpent Totem is located.

Usually, Uncle Alfred shares his culture connected to place while we are on the move like this. On our way, there is a cluster of trees and the road has a visible curve going around them. Uncle Alfred points out the trees and tells me to look as we drive by. He explains that these trees have markings on them, from when bark had been removed a long time ago, in the making of shields (Flood 2006: 13-14). These trees are now protected as cultural relics, and the road has to circumvent the area. No signs are put up, and the markings are barely visible from the road. Without knowing what to look for it would have been impossible for me to see these trees as anything but trees. Numerous trees bear the signs of past activities, I am told, and some of them happens to be close to the road. Many others have undoubtedly been cut down in the making of pastures and sugar plantations. This is an area where Elders take young men to learn about the culture of *Country*. The youngsters spend time with their Elders out here, where they learn in which area and from which trees to make their own spears and clapsticks.

As we are getting closer to Ayr I am made aware of the huge areas of sugar plantations and the fact that Queensland is a major sugar producer. While driving through these fields, Uncle Alfred tells me that one of his foremother's had been brought here as a slave to work in the sugar fields, from the South Sea Islands. She had been married to an Aboriginal man from this *Country*. He is telling me this matter of factly, with no sign of shame or anger, and I perceive that it is simply to explain the connection he has to this place, as the history of this place intertwines with who he is.

We arrive at the totem of the Rainbow Serpent at dusk, located in a park area next to one of the main road crosses. The sculpture is in the form of a big painted snake made of steel and concrete. The length of its body on the ground is about 8 meters, with its head rising up about 3 meters above. Uncle Alfred had helped in its construction. "This is my Creator, this is my

Country”. At this site, ancestral remains found by an archaeology student in 1987 and other remains found since, have been brought back and received proper ceremonies. The first remains were that of a young female, buried in the traditional fixed position between 500 and 1000 years ago. These ancestors were put here under the protection of the most important totem, to finally be at peace in their own *Country*. One of the information placks reads:

“Gubulla Munda Dreaming

Gubulla Munda is the totem for the Juru Tribe of the Birri-Gubba nation. Gubulla Munda holds sacred, cultural and spiritual significance to the traditional owners. Gubulla Munda Dreaming comes from higher powers of Mother Earth. Gubulla Munda travelled through the waters, up to the dry land and rested, the perspiration of Gubulla Munda formed the hills, mountains, rivers and streams. Gubulla Munda travelled back down to the water and rested. As Gubulla Munda moved through the waters, the droppings formed the islands. *This is our sacred story of Gubulla Munda Dreaming*”

(Monument Australia, “Birriguba Resting Place”)



(<http://monumentaustralia.org.au/themes/culture/indigenous/display/90447-birriguba-resting-place->)

This is an example of how actions of the people in the past, historical as well as mythical, gives meaning to a place. "The ancestral beings fixed in the land itself, in the trees, hills, lakes, sand-dunes and watercourses, become timeless referentpoints for the living, outside the politics of daily life" (Tilley 1994:41). The world of ancestral activity becomes "part and parcel of their experience of place" (Tilley 1994:41), as well as and in unison with more recent historical events shaped by colonisation. Is it further a reminder that, "in Aboriginal terms [...] a place referring to death is not merely a site at which to mourn. After all, this is a cosmology in which identity and place are inseparable: human spiritual being emerges from a home place, onto the visible plane of life, and upon death is brought back to that place to be reunited with the ancestral forces. Sites imbued with memories of death are therefore also powerful sources of life and spiritual regeneration" (Strang 2013).

Not only lived bodies partake in the intergenerational dynamic of belonging to place, so do ancestral remains. The remains in Ayr, found by archaeologists or others, had been brought back to *Country* to be put to eternal rest in their homeland, under the protection of their Rainbow Serpent totem. There is a crucial interaction between body, place and motion, and Casey identifies three kinds of bodily motion in a place, the first being the most limited kind: "*staying in place*" (1996: 23, his italics). Even after death, a body partakes in the dynamic relationship with place both through movement and the meanings attached to place, and the rituals belonging to place. In this case, being moved back to forever stay in its rightful place through a burial onto sacred ground according to cultural protocols. The ceremonial reburial of Indigenous remains is also a part of contemporary Aboriginal identity construction, as this embodies community, belonging and representation of an identity "beyond 'whitefella' structures of recognition to define who they are and what their culture is" (Lambert-Pennington 2007: 313). This is also a symbol of "the changing relationship between Aboriginal people and government" as it speaks to the broader issues of "Aboriginal recognition, cultural identity and national reconciliation" (Lambert-Pennington 2007: 317), seeing that "returning remains embody the state's commitment to Aboriginal self-determination and national reconciliation initiatives" (Lambert-Pennington 2007: 315).

Personal narratives – Moments of personal change remembered in place

”Human activities become inscribed within a landscape such that every cliff, large tree, stream, swampy area becomes a familiar place. Daily passages through the landscape become biographic encounters for individuals, recalling traces of past activities and previous events and the reading of signs” (Tilley 1994: 27). The cliff, tree or stream can here be replaced by the familiar places of the Strand, a sister’s house or the rockpool – places through which the traces of past activities, events and encounters can be recalled. Myers write of the Pintupi in the Western desert, that ”the process through which landscape is assimilated to narrative structure is still active” (Myers 1986: 64), and as the story I am about to present, landscape or places can similarly shape personal narratives, showing personal stories inscribed in place. These are the types of stories that show that ”pasts as much as their spaces are crucially constitutive of their presents” (Tilley 1994: 27).

There was especially one occasion, where the telling of a personal story seemed to be patterned by a relation to place. The way in which Uncle Alfred came to tell me his personal story of him becoming the Elder that he is today, show a pattern of how stories are connected to place also in a personal and biographical way. This story serves as an example of how ”all locales and landscapes” are ”embedded in the social and individual times of memory” (Tilley 1994: 27) – or should we say places of memory.

We are moving around Townsville one evening. We share many conversations like this. This evening we drive along the Strand, to see what is going on at the Friday night market and to have a little sightseeing while deciding where to go for dinner. Many topics comes up while we are in the car, about his work in the Men’s Group and stories about the places we visit.

We decide to get dinner at a restaurant he often goes to, a few minutes drive outside of the city center. As we are sitting down at our table waiting for the food, I show him some pictures of my hometown and from an island in the north of Norway where I had worked as a teacher. In this island there is a music festival every year, and the festivalgoers mostly camp in tents around the island. The scenery of this little island group, far out at sea, is stunning with its mountain peaks. In one of the photos there is pictured a lavvo, a Sami style of tent,

similar to the Native American tipi. Seeing this tent, he realizes the tour we had taken earlier that evening actually followed the places telling the story of how his path had turned towards his role of today and changed his life, some years earlier. The places we had been driving past earlier that evening, and the course of our conversation and looking at specific pictures while sharing a meal, worked as peculiar set of pointers that steered us towards his telling of the story, and confirmed to us that it "is all about connection".

A block of buildings facing the Strand and the sea line were under construction, and as we drive by he tells me one of his sisters used to live there until a cyclone destroyed both the beach of the Strand and some of its nearby buildings. At table, Uncle Alfred realises how this was a point in place as well as time, where a new trajectory began unfolding in his life. It was in his sisters house he had met an older non-indigenous woman, who had become an important friend and catalyst for what would later happen. The evening when he met the woman, he had offered to accompany her to the rockpool. It was the last evening of her stay in Townsville, and she wanted to go for a swim. The safest place to do so is in the rockpool, and so they went. It was in the late evening, and the rockpool was almost empty except for two fishermen. At the rockpool they would get involved in a dramatic episode, where a polish man were about to drown. The friend of the drowning man could not swim or explain the situation in English. Fortunately, Uncle Alfred quickly sensed that something was wrong and hurried to help. When Uncle Alfred got to the drowning man he was already unconscious, so he performed life aid on this man until the ambulance personnel arrived and took him to the hospital. Uncle Alfred being at the rockpool that night effectively saved this man's life. He also told me how he visited the man at hospital the next day, first being turned down at the reception, since he did not know the man's name and as a stranger he could not be accepted to visit a patient. But a family member of the man saw him and welcomed him to the room, where Uncle Alfred would meet the man again and his family thanked him as the lifesaver. This was an important experience, set in motion by a new friend. Because of the circumstances of meeting her, he had saved a man's life, and he was left with a strong sense that it was a deep meaning connected to what had happened. This woman became an important friend, and a while later she asked Uncle Alfred to join her in a spiritual gathering for Indigenous people. She had wanted to join this gathering for a long time, but felt that she could not go alone. Uncle Alfred agreed to accompany her.

The gathering he was invited to by his new friend was an event for Indigenous people from all over the world. Different ceremonies took place over a number of days. He met Indigenous Elders from around Australia as well as Native Americans from the Americas and Hawaii. He would later join the same type of gathering in Hawaii. During his first time at this gathering he came to have a profound experience that would push him to realise his traditional role, a role that his personal life experiences had actually prepared him for but he had not yet realised.

At the dinner table, as we are having our dinner, he tells me how he was partaking in ceremonies at the gathering, some of them inside a tent much like a tipi. Hours were spent inside the tipi, where rituals and smoking ceremonies were performed. The sound of drums and didgeridoos created a transcendental experience for the participants. But not for Uncle Alfred. He was becoming increasingly angry. He told me how he stormed out of this tent after hours of ceremony, ran towards a tree and was overcome by emotion and rage. What then happened he himself has no recollection of, but he was informed afterwards by the bystanders. At this tree, the emotions of anger at the white man and how he had destroyed the country came rushing out of him in the form of a powerful monologue, while being completely unaware of himself or the other people present to witness it. His emotional monologue revolved around the pain and sadness of a violent colonisation history, the loss of Country and tradition, and the enduring difficulty shaping Indigenous lives. This was a cry to overcome and let go of the intense sadness and anger, a negative load much too heavy to carry and live with. As he came to his senses after a literal purging of negativity, some of the bystanders were in tears, some were kneeling to the ground and seemed to be praying. Some came up to touch him in reverence. At this point he could not understand what had just happened, he remember thinking "why are they acting like this, what is so special about me?"

At the last day of the gathering, in the closing speech by the Elders, they had said that something very special had occurred during this gathering: a white dove had come with a message of redemption and reconciliation. Nothing more was said about Uncle Alfred as a person, but he now understood that his life had meaning and purpose, and that he had a role to fill. The anger he had carried for much of his life had now emancipated and no longer controlled his mind and heart. He had been freed and made ready for the next step, as was his destiny.

The anger he had carried was not only his own, but that of his people and from the accumulation of hardship and painful experiences through generations. Now that he was free from this, he could become a positive force. As he often explained to me and figuratively emphasized by patting his chest, he lives through his heart and acts with the force of purpose. The way he comes off today, and the way I know him, as a profoundly serene, calm and cheerful person is a stark contrast to the anger he describes as being a part of him in his past.

Along our driving route that evening, we had passed his sister's house, the rockpool and also the former hospital, where all these significant events had taken place. This story was shared to me in the form of a private conversation, not as we moved from place to place but later, upon realising we had been travelling the route of the story earlier that evening. It was as if this story was resting in the places we had visited, waiting to be retold.

How this story was retold to me is in accordance with how the Native American writer Deloria (1975) explains accounts of tribal experience. Time is not the dominant factor in descriptions of reality, as opposed to how the Western preoccupation with history and chronology would produce a typical story in a linear fashion, because tribal accounts of past experiences indicates "that the story itself is important, not its precise chronological location" (Deloria 1975: 112). This speaks of an "orientation towards space in ordering experiences", and how places "serve to recall events in the past" (Barth 1975: 18) as "mnemonics for significant events" (Myers 1986: 54). By moving in and through places, significant stories and anecdotes come to the surface of our consciousness, they are remembered and put into words, because "travel through the country evokes memories" (Myers 1986: 54).

Also for the Aboriginal Western Desert Pintupi people is orientation in space a prime concern: "Even their dreams are cast in a framework of spatial coordinates. It is impossible to listen to any narrative, whether it be historical, mythological, or contemporary, without constant reference to where events happened [...] Not temporal relation but geography is the great punctuator of Pintupi storytelling." (Myers 1986: 54). It is places that provide the framework "around which events coalesce" and by listening to place we will see that "it is activity that create places, giving significance to impervious matter" (Myers 1986: 54).

Activity gives meaning to places (Myers 1986) – be it the placed events that shape a biographical story, the social activity that shape intergenerational relationships to both people

and place through memory and practices, or a people's historical story whose long time-span coalesce into place. Also in the Dreaming stories, we see that it is the activities of the mythical figures that give the Dreaming its meanings.

A pattern is forming in all these meanings of place – historical, mythical, intergenerational, and personal and contemporary: activities in relation to place exist as narratives. By understanding all these narratives as one “continuous entity” or through “the metaphor of story” (Myers 1986: 59), indeed an entity or story that is generated within and between people while also existing as a whole larger than its parts, we can begin to perceive the meaning of *Country*.

Being in *Country*



The view from the truck as Uncle Alfred takes me to some places in *Country*.

We are moving through *Country* in Uncle Alfred's truck. As he drives, he explains to me where we are, now in an area close to the airport. This is a part of the wetlands, so during the wet season it is impossible to drive on these roads. This is a vital area for local birdlife, even though the airport interrupts. Also a golf club and new villa neighborhoods are claiming their space of the bush out here with no regard to its eco-system or traditional use.

This is an uncompromisingly warm day, while the clarity of the sky is intensely blue, the ground golden brown. We are not far from Townsville, but the feeling of being in the bush, on a different ground, is resilient out here. The words of the English priest, Adam Ford, who explores mindfulness through walking, seems fitting:

“There is something about walking in the Australian bush that makes me return again and again. The sense of space, the big open skies, the clarity of air are unique in my experience; and the vibrant colours of the birds vie with the rainbow. The red earth is always richer than I remember and the sky bluer, hitting the horizon in a hard line. The land is marvelously ancient, making even my own Cumbria appear young” (Ford 2011: 41).

We leave the truck and continue on foot following a trail through the bush. As we leave the truck behind Uncle Alfred tells me that this area has snakes, and sometimes when you get back to the car you will find a snake in your seat or on the front of the car. But it is nothing to worry about as long as I am with him – maybe he is referring to his traditional status as a snake skin man here. He walks a few meters in front of me, I follow. No sound from the city is heard out here, no planes at this time. The blue of the sky can barely be seen from some patches of the trail. We walk a while in silence, surrounded by the ruckus of birds and humming insects, the sounds of the bush punctuated only by our steps.



We arrive at a group of little lakes. There is an old little hut for bird watching overlooking the lakes. When Uncle Alfred was young, people used to bathe in this lake, but nowadays there can be crocodiles here. Birds are flying around, floating in the water, sitting in the grass islets in the swamp, carrying on with their bird business. The beauty and serenity of the place is pierced by mosquitos in the air and the knowing of possibly dangerous creatures lurking beneath the surface of the water.

I vividly remember this day, because as we return to the car, I tell Uncle Alfred about an upsetting encounter I had with an Indigenous person I met while I was in Cairns. This person claimed to possess a lot of knowledge and wanted to share, but after a while began talking very aggressively towards me, my project and of the Aboriginals “to the south”. I was perplexed to witness how someone could call other Indigenous people in other regions “stupid”, “fake” and “full of bullshit”. Now being back in Townsville, moving around *Country* with Uncle Alfred, was a return to a sense of being safely “home” again. Uncle Alfred calmly explains to me that this person was acting from a place of pain and speaking out of fear. Alfred & Corntassel (2005) speaks of the need of a “spiritually grounded action” as the only way to “break the chains that bind us to our colonial existences” and to be freed from the “varied fears that colonial powers use to dominate and manipulate” (Alfred & Corntassel 2005: 613). Obviously, this was not as a surprising situation for Uncle Alfred as it was for me. He reassures me that the experience I had in Cairns illustrates the importance of being free from the anger and fear caused by oppression, and returning “home” to where one can act and speak from the heart. He bats his heart, and says that this is why he is doing this work and that “this is my passion”. This is not only why he is doing this work, it also shows how: by having talks of one’s experiences while being in *Country*.

Healing emotional pain that has led to destructive behavior is the main goal of Uncle Alfred’s work in the Men’s Group. Uncle Alfred meets with Indigenous men as they are released from prison. Some of them are not allowed to come back to their community: some of them grew up more or less in detention centers or in prison. They need help to get back in tune with their identity: they need tools to be able to heal. The first thing Uncle Alfred does when he receives these men is to take them out to *Country* at the beach in Pallarenda. Here, he tells them to take off their shoes and clothes if they wish, and to step out in the sand and mud and experience the *Country*. “This is yours”, “you are free”. These men have been

locked up in cells, with tiny windows with no view to the outside world. Now, they stand barefoot, naked and free at a beach, green fields and trees behind them, the rolling waves of the blue ocean and Magnetic Island sparkling in the sunlight in front. Uncle Alfred retreats to a big tree (his very own tree, he says) nearby and leaves the men to have their own experience. Most of them break down in tears: some of them roll around in the mud. This is a symbolic rebirth as a free person and a coming back to Country. This is an experience of how “one shares flesh with country” and “country, like the earth more generally, can be understood as a life-giving and nurturing presence” (Rose 2000: 61). Often, *Country* was likened to a mother, a Mother Earth. As a comparison, the Yarralin people in the remote Victoria River Valley in the Northern Territory have a ritual of rubbing babies with slurry or mud. This “cooking the baby” ritual will make it strong, healthy and grounded and is a way of “delivering it both from and to the earth as a complete (cooked) human being” (Rose 2000: 62). “This ritual seems to also autochthonise the person” as it is “born of earth, the infant becomes a person with specific attachments to country” (Rose 2000: 62). The symbolic resonance in this ritual also “replicates the process by which Dreamings emerged from the ground”, and through sharing flesh with Country in this way, the Country and the Dreaming will know the person. Further, “being born onto the ground, confer rights to place, expressed as rights to knowledge” (Rose 2000: 62). This is an important aspect of what *Country* is, as it reveals that “countries, or the Dreamings in country, take notice of who is there” (Rose 2000: 109).

The perspective Ford gained through walking with Dreaming stories in mind, speaks of this grounded spirituality:

“Walking here in the bush had helped me liberate my ideas about God. I like the language that speaks of God as the Ground of all Being. God is the source of ‘all *this*’, of everything I know about, and everything I shall never know about; the Power, the Life, the Mind, creating this whole, ancient, vast and evolving universe. He (for want of a better personal pronoun) is the Ultimate Reality that lies behind all that we see.” (Ford 2011: 50-51).



This is the place where men released from prison are given a welcome back and a rebirth to freedom and to *Country*. The tree in the picture is a special place for Uncle Alfred, where he spends time in silence as a communion with *Country*.

Connection to Country

The fact that “country expects its people to maintain its integrity”, is why “one of the roles of the owners is to introduce strangers to country”, so that Country will recognize this person, and this will keep them safe while they visit (Rose 2000: 109). “To take care of country is to be responsible for that country. And country has an obligation in return – to nourish and sustain its people” (Rose 2000: 109).

When I ask Uncle Alfred what *Country* means to him, he replies that “what Country means to me is Connection, Belonging and of course LORE, Land, Origin, Respect, Elders. It means Respect and Culture.” He also refer to the first time the two of us met, and how he asked me questions about where I am from and who my *mob* (family) is, as a way of making the

connection to me through knowing of my land and origin. He continues, saying "Elders you must Respect for they are the ones who pass our LORE down from their Knowledge and Wisdom" (Uncle Alfred, in email correspondence April 2017).

Country, embodies moral imperatives and responsibilities of different kinds. To be the custodian of the *Country*, you must take care of its places and stories, histories, knowledge, and also the animal and plant species living in *Country*. People, of course, is important in this respect, because "damage to people is damage to country", and in return "damage to country, and to Dreamings in particular, causes death and injury to people" (Rose 2000: 108). This is why it is of great importance to keep culture strong, since this will keep the land-spirit-human interconnectedness strong and balanced. Uncle Alfred's work in mentoring kids in turtle knowledge, and his work with the Men's Group reflects his responsibility and role as an Elder of his *Country*. The responsibility to deal with young people out of control, out of balance (in contemporary time this means being involved in drugs, crime, destructive behavior etc), is seen today in Uncle Alfred's role in empowering men, healing emotional pain, as a way of restoring balance to *Country*, which will further strengthen the families making up the *Country*'s people (see McMahon 2016a, 2016b). The responsibility to *Country* also includes learning and performing the right rituals and ceremonies (Rose 2000: 107), as will be shown in Chapter 3 and 4. As Uncle Alfred describes the importance of ceremony: "putting protocol back in place will cleanse the land", and so restore the relationship to its people. The reflexive and interconnected relationships between land and people, in its totality, is what makes up the *Connection to Country* structure.

Phenomenological approach to place

Casey explains a phenomenological approach to place as having "the advantage of honoring the actual experience of those who practice it" and that this approach "rejoins not only the anthropologist in the field but the native on the land: both have no choice but to begin with experience" (Casey 1996: 16). That "all our knowledge begins with experience" has a long philosophical history that can be traced back to Kant (Casey 1996: 17). Pink, in *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, assumes the multisensoriality of experience as the starting point, and in accordance with Casey she insists that "sensory ways of experiencing and knowing are

integral both to the lives of people who participate in our research *and* to how we ethnographers practise our craft” (Pink 2015: xi). By moving around *Country* as a way of sharing culture with me, I not only got to know my new friends and learn what Indigenous identity is based on, I also realized what will be the foundation of this thesis.

Knowledge of place is not ”subsequent of perception, but is ingredient in perception itself”, because, ”there is no knowing or sensing a place except by being in that place, and to be in a place is to be in a position to perceive it” (Casey 1996: 18). All this revolves around the fact that lived experience is always placed, and perception includes all the senses of the moving, living body. Casey also argues that although there is a primacy to perception, and that this primacy is of the lived body, this perception through the lived body ultimately becomes ”a creature of habitual cultural and social processes” (Casey 1996: 19). Perception then, is *constituted* ”by cultural and social structures that sediment themselves into the deepest level of perception” (Casey 1996: 18, his italics) through which one experience and acquire knowledge of place and identity connected to place. Also Connerton (1989) treats memory and knowledge as a cultural rather than individual faculty, in the way that social memory is incorporated in practices and bodily experiences, which are transmitted as traditions through the generations as cultural memory.

The way to get into place is by ”our own lived body” (Casey 1996: 21). Kant was the first Western thinker to connect the importance of the bodily structure to emplacement, as the body is essential for spatial orientation, and the body’s limbs and left and right side its orientational function. Casey takes this further by asking if it could be that ”the body is *essentially*, and not just contingently, involved in matters of emplacement?” (Casey 1996: 21). Maybe an answer to this can be the biomedically grounded term for a sense of motion discussed by Potter, an anthropologist of dance and dancer herself, namely the ”proprioception” (Potter 2009: 448). This term points to the reflexes of the nervous system and the mechanical strains and alterations of the muscles as they move the body by intent. It is a notion of ”muscle sense”. As opposed to the ”extero-ceptor” sensory receptor organs of the classical five senses, the proprio-ceptors lie in the deep tissues. This type of perceptory mode does not only play a role in the sense of the body’s position in space, it confers a sense of self as one moves. Dancers working ”to balance the internal connection with the external”, seek for this balance as ”a clear sense of self at the centre of the moment” and of ”each movement” (Potter 2008: 448-453). Maybe I am on to something. In any case, in order to

understand Aboriginal identity, Reinhard told me of the need to be really in the bush, not just in the surroundings of Townsville, to truly and totally feel what it is like to be completely in Country. However one wishes to theorize this, it is clear that a sense of self in this case is connected to the experience of feeling at one with ones surroundings, with the structures of Country – with the external nature being in balance with the internal. Uncle Alfred described this feeling of oneness as the way he and *Country* spend time together, what he is doing instead of a Christians prayer. This balancing of the external and internal — the experience of oneness through and with *Country* – is, I think, an experiential place of belonging where self, Country and spirit coalesce into one. It is thus an affirmation of how ”culture and self can be understood from the standpoint of embodiment as an existential condition in which the body is the subjective source or intersubjective ground of experience” (Csordas 2005: 181). Spending time in Country, means experiencing the communion of self, spirit and internal structures that emanate from the land itself.

The importance of movement was not only an integral part of how I got to learn about *Country*, it is also an integral part of the Indigenous conception of meaning of place itself, recognising ”the crucial interaction between body, place and *motion*” (Casey 1996: 23). Through moving in place, *Country* is related to, experienced and knowledge is passed on. This way of relating to place has to be understood through the perspective of the Dreaming, seeing that ”for the Aborigines the earth came into being as a result of the actions of the ancestors” (Tilley 1994:40), meaning the travels of mythical Beings creating the landscape and everything that exists. ”These ancestors continue to exist in spirit form, and in the era of creation they travelled the earth, and in their doings created the topographical features.” These ancestors, after their movements, went back into the ground, and the landscape still ”contains the bodies of the ancestors inside it and is also the metamorphosed form of the ancestors, the tracks they made and the imprint of their bodies” (Tilley 1994: 40-41). The landscape then, and the way it is related to as expressed through *Connection to Country*, is nothing less than a ”fundamental reference system in which individual consciousness of the world and social identities are anchored” (Tilley 1994: 40). It is in this system also the Welcome to Country (Chapter 3), the Smoking Ceremony (Chapter 4), and the Indigenous Empowerment (Chapter 5) is anchored.

3 Welcome to Country – Power of Words

This chapter will focus on a ritual that "constitutes one of the most significant cultural changes in recent years" in Australia (McKenna 2014: 478), the Welcome to Country⁶. This is a ritual that is a contemporary form of an "ancient Aboriginal custom" (McAuley 2009: 49), and is now gaining a firm foothold within the Australian state as a form of recognition of the Aboriginal culture. In this chapter I want to show some of the attitudes towards this ritual and how it is used by the Indigenous people to comment on those aspects of the Australian history and society that are affecting the Indigenous history and life today. The Welcome to Country ritual is both connected to ancient traditions within the Indigenous culture, and today it can also function as a platform where the Indigenous voice can be heard in the mainstream society. The content of the Welcome to Country speeches is self-determined, whereby opinions and experiences can be stated along with the declaration of prior ownership of and connection to the land. It is now a unique ritual since it both declares a relationship to land that goes beyond that of the settler state, as well as being a channel for uttering criticism on that settler state. No Welcome to Country is ever the same, it can just as well serve ceremonial, celebratory and educational functions regarding which type of event it is relating to. What every Welcome to Country include however, are the spoken word, often also in traditional language, which is why this ritual represents the "Power of words" in this thesis. Most importantly, this is a ritual that is directly connected to identity through place and traditional customs. It is a performative ritual, and a piece of traditional culture in a now contemporary social setting.

Pelizzon and Kennedy have coined the term 'recognition of Country' (2012: 59) which encompasses both events of Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country. This general definition serve as guidelines developed for the University of Wollongong: "a Welcome to Country ceremony can only be performed by a traditional custodian of the Country in question, whereby a traditional Elder 'welcomes' people not of that Country onto her or his ancestral Country. The act of *acknowledging* Country, on the other hand, is performed by those who are not the custodians of that Country but who wish to publicly

⁶ Capitalised in my use, as a sign of respect.

acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Country upon which the act is performed” (Pelizzon&Kennedy 2012: 59). Through the recognition of Country rituals, ”the relationship of Aboriginal people to the land is, thus, recognised and honoured” (McAuley 2009: 49). I witnessed in Townsville that when Elders did a Welcome to Country they would use the wording Traditional Owner, while in Acknowledgement of Country done by a non-indigenous person it differed between Traditional Owner and custodian. Whichever term is used, it is still an important change occurring in the Australian state as these rituals become a familiar and accepted part of social and cultural life, because it is a ”kind of quiet revolution occurring: recognition on the part of the settler community of the co-existence of different systems of ownership, of a deep and on-going relationship to the land that goes beyond legal ownership” (McAuley 2009: 49).

McKenna says that ”when attempting to understand the significance of the welcome and acknowledgement rituals, the most important questions have not yet been answered: from where and when did these rituals emerge and how have they rapidly gained such a firm foothold in Australian culture? What representations of place and history are embodied within them and to what extent is their use sustained by the support and cultural authority of Indigenous Australians?” (2014: 479). This is what this chapter will offer an answer to, with a deeper focus on the latter question.

Welcome to Country on ”harmony day”

The first performance of this kind that I experience during fieldwork in Townsville, is at a public event celebrating Australia’s harmonial and multicultural diversity, in one of the museums in town. (The specifics of the event I leave out, in order to maintain anonymity of the Aboriginal Elder I met with this day.) It is an incredibly warm and sunny Saturday morning when I make my way to this event, where people from a number of immigrant groups will showcase different aspects of their culture (food, history, dance, clothing etc). About a hundred people of every age are present at the museum, and a very diverse group indeed: about 20 different cultural groups from different continents are represented, mostly from Asia and Africa. At least a couple dozen of seemingly white Australian families have made this their Saturday outing. I am here to witness the Welcome to Country by a local

Indigenous Elder, the first post on the program, and my first experience of a ritual of this kind. After receiving an informational brochure and a sticker depicting figures of different colours holding hands in a circle, I find a seat in front of the stage area. A few other people are also sitting in the small group of chairs, whilst some participants of the event are still organizing their stands. Quite a few of the public are still walking around as the Aboriginal woman enters. She has three boys with her, aging between 10 and 20, dressed in green cloths and white body paint. It is a tall, dark woman, she looks a bit tense but her voice is calm and her wording casual. A little group of people, me included, has her full attention, while others are still moving about apparently unaware that the opening speech is commencing. I am annoyed at the lack of respect shown, especially since for me it is a grand moment to witness an Aboriginal Elder perform a ceremony like this.

Her speech begins by stating the importance of respecting the land on which we all stand at this moment. She continues by saying that on behalf of her people and Elders – past, present and future – she declares everyone welcome to this land and to this day which purpose is to share "a sense of belonging for everybody". She tells us that she belongs to one of the two clan groups who are the Traditional Owners of this area. Australia has seen an enormous change the last generations: many millions of immigrants have found a new home here. Also in her speech is a painful reminder of the atrocities her people has experienced: massacres happening until only four generations ago and the continuing social difficulties to this day – "I hope it will change soon". At this point, about ten people spontaneously start applauding and some take her picture, while still others in the room wander aimlessly about right between the stage and the group listening in. Fetching coffee at the kiosk is apparently more important to some, than a Welcome to Country ceremony. She continues on the topic of social trauma and difficulties as she brings up "the gap", saying that she fear too much damage has been done and that maybe it is too late be able to close the gap: "the gap is too big". Silence from the audience follows this remark. "Closing the gap" is the common parlance for the practical actions and policies concerning the Reconciliation (Moses 2011: 148). The formal aspect of the speech is getting to a close when the woman introduces her three grandsons. They are here to present three traditional dances and play didjeridoo for us. She explains that the men's dance group is usually more numerous, several of her sons and other family members are also a part of it but could not be present today because "somebody has to make a living". The eldest boy plays the didjeridoo while also using clapsticks to produce a wonderfully rythmic beat to the wholesome didjeridoo sound filling up the whole

room. The two younger boys start dancing. The last dance is the kangaroo dance, where they are jumping in a specific sequence of steps as to mimic the story of a kangaroo. Now, the performance has everyone's full attention and a number of cameras and phones directed their way. The Elder woman silently retreats into the crowd where she finds a chair from where she stays as an onlooker for the rest of the performance.

I manage to get a hold of the woman to have a chat with her and also one of her grandsons. She seems shy, her youngest grandson not at all, as we have some conversation at one of the coffee tables in the increasingly crowded museum locale. I start by asking about the kangaroo dance, and the woman can tell me that her young grandson has been dancing almost before he could walk. The young boy is quite talkative, and tells me the meaning of the Aboriginal flag, a subject that had just come up at his school. The black colour in the flag represents the Aboriginal people; the yellow circle in the middle represents the life-giving sun; and the red symbolises the red earth and red ocre used in ceremonies – the red is therefore also a symbol of the spiritual connection between people and land (Naidoc, "Indigenous Australian Flags"). The young boy can also tell me that there are several Indigenous kids in his class and that he enjoys talking about his culture at school. Although, as I have noticed earlier that morning, this woman and her grandsons seems to be the only Aboriginal people present at the event, and this she confirms. One reason might be that the Cultural Center has a meeting that very same morning. But it is rather strange in a significant way, since the theme of the event is to celebrate the nation's "cultural harmony and diversity". I ask myself, does an Australian celebration of cultural diversity include immigrants, while leaving out the original inhabitants of this continent?

After a while the woman is ready to leave and join the meeting at the Cultural Center, and she invites me to stop by later in the morning. When I meet her again she is more outspoken, relaxed and has changed from her traditional coloured shirt to regular daily wear. The meeting of the Cultural Center has been conducted at a sitting area overlooking the river marina, outdoors, and this is where I meet her again as she is still talking to a man that had been in the meeting as well. This setting outdoors, away from the crowd, is much more relaxed for the both of us. The conversation flows while we have a few cigarettes and takeaway coffees. She tells me that she feels she is often asked to hold Welcome to Country speeches like today just as an act of political correctness on the part of the organizers, that they do not really care at all about her or the content of her speech, and that she is not

welcome at the event after her speech is done and the organisers can check it off on their list of must-be-dones. As a matter of fact, even though her speech was the first point of the program, the official opening of the "harmony day" is held by the museum manager two hours later. This is the first time I encounter a term that puzzles me: 'tokenistic'.

This Welcome to Country illustrates the lack of respect and knowledge about Aboriginal culture and customs, and that as a ritual, it is not always understood by non-indigenous Australians, or it can be actively ignored of having any significance. As seen on "harmony day", the part of the ritual that most of the public were interested in and attentive to, was the dancing following the speech. By treating a Welcome to Country "as entertainment rather than communication means that we no longer seek to understand what is being conveyed" (McAuley 2009: 54). I believe that the sense of not being listened to, not heard, is the source of feeling as a token or a tokenistic part of this event. Being asked to "appear at the beginning of an event and then conveniently disappear" whilst the whitefellas do their serious 'business', has been likened to an iteration of terra nullius (Kowal 2015: 189). This was a Welcome to Country that vocalized the claim of acknowledgement of to which extent the occupation of Aboriginal lands and later how the structures of Australian society have caused social injustice and continued suffering for the First Peoples. This Welcome to Country vocalized the concern of a "gap" that is feared too wide to mend (Kowal 2008). What this speech conveyed on this day, can be said to have come from a "counter-hegemonic perspective": an opposition that insists "on identifying itself and speaking for itself", as well as "its determined demand for the transformation of the social structure" and "its refusal of the 'common sense' understandings which the hegemonic order imposes" (Moses 2011: 149). This speech on "harmony day" and the behavior of the public, rather than celebrating a sense of belonging for all, revealed the presence of a deep sense of disharmony.

A token of a hollow reconciliation?

Conservative writers in Australia have attacked and mocked the recognition rituals, suggesting that they are fake and invented traditions, and even proposing that their performance is racist. "This ceremony is not part of any Aboriginal culture. It is an invented tradition, most probably devised by white academics", says Keith Windschuttle about the

Acknowledgement of Country. His "objective assessment" further says that these traditions, now a part of the public scene, is "disrespectful" of Aboriginal people and "utterly tokenistic", rather than being "a symbol of reconciliation" (Windschuttle 2012: 3-5). Pledge (2013) means that the acknowledgement rituals constitutes a neo-culture, that is "every bit as destructive to traditional culture as assimilation ever was (Pledge 2013: 7), and he doubts that these rituals really represent "the 'voice' of Indigenous Australia" (Pledge 2013: 6). Akehurst (2014) describes Welcome to Country as "one of those dreary things, along with walks of reconciliation, that do nothing to benefit any Aboriginal" (2014: 2). Akehurst proposes to treat Welcome to Country as plain entertainment so "everyone can have a happy time", and suggests that karaoke and mud wrestling would be a more wholesome entertaining experience (2014: 1-3). In regards to the first Welcome to Country at the opening of parliament in 2008, performed by Matilda House, Akehurst asks that "instead of being welcomed, why shouldn't MPs welcome the welcomers and lecture them on the number of massacres of Anglo settlers by Matilda's forebears?" (Akehurst 2014: 3). Barnes (2013) says that what truly matters is real action and decisive leadership on Indigenous affairs, like the intervention in the Northern Territory, "not waving about a few smoky gum leaves to salve Whitefella consciences", and further "a mature nation doesn't need artificial and insincere rituals to prove it cares about righting wrongs and fighting social disadvantage and discrimination" (Barnes 2013: 4). On another note, while expressing concern of how some Welcome to Country rituals "lacks heart", the head of Indigenous programming of Sydney Opera House, Rhoda Roberts (in Taylor 2012), has said that it is necessary to move beyond doing recognition rituals as an act of political correctness, because "now the next phase of it is to actually understand the spirituality of it" (Taylor 2012: 2).

I argue that these conservative assessments above, are a product of settler colonial structures (Veracini 2011, 2013) that does not recognise how these rituals can be spiritually meaningful and culturally empowering. Mickler (2010) has examined how Canadian and Australian conservative columnists alike, has advocated for "policies that range from outright abandonment of Aboriginal tradition and life ways to subtler mechanisms to achieve the commonly sought objective of assimilation" (Mickler 2010: 19). These ideas form a "part of a regressive discourse of neo-assimilation circulating in the media and public sphere more widely", meant "to defame Indigenous self-determination as a failed, anti-modern and anti-democratic ideal" (Mickler 2010: 1), and as a "failed utopian experiment driven by leftists, progressives and Indigenous political figures" (Mickler 2010: 19). These conservative

opinions reflect that the process of a settler state's structural violence is still active, maybe even an illustration of a permanent cultural violence (Galtung 1990). Galtung explains the different forms of violence as such: "direct violence is an *event*; structural violence is a *process* with ups and downs; cultural violence is an *invariant*, a 'permanence'" (1990: 294). "The structurally built-in repression" creates the category of "second class citizenship, where the subjected group is forced to express dominant culture and not its own, at least in public space" (Galtung 1990: 293). The settler colonial structure does still persist as a process, even though colonisation as event happened two centuries ago. If "the gap" in Australia is really a structural one, it will require a reconciliation process frank enough to also reconcile the settler state with the truth of its own structures (Veracini 2003). Knowing that "a violent structure leaves marks not only on the human body but also on the mind and spirit", a truthful reconciliation will have to mobilize an unrepressed consciousness formation in order to be successful (Galtung 1990: 294). Understanding the spirituality - traditional and contemporary - of these rituals will be necessary in this regard.

Welcome to Country on Murri Court Re-opening

The Murri Court in Townsville was established in 2006. "Elders and respected persons are the cornerstone of the Murri Court, serving as volunteers and providing magistrates with culturally appropriate advice in dealing with defendants, victims and witnesses." The Murri Court receives support from many government agencies and community stakeholders, and many of the volunteers of the Murri Court also "give their time in the wider community, working at times with police, the local community justice group, youth justice services, prison and detention centers, and local community organisations". The Murri Court in Townsville is one of the 16 of its kind in Queensland. (The Queensland Cabinet and Ministerial Directory, 2010). The Australian Institute of Criminology did a comprehensive evaluation of the Queensland Murri Court, and the findings revealed that "the court is highly valued among stakeholders involved in the program and that it has considerable support among the wider Indigenous community" and further that "the court improved court appearance rates among both adults and juveniles and provided greater opportunities for adult offenders to participate in rehabilitative programs in the community pre- and post-sentence" (Tomison 2010: iii).

After a time out of practice, the Murri Court will now re-open. This important event is celebrated with a ceremony, and I am invited to attend by Uncle Alfred and Brad, who are both Elders in the Murri Court. On this day there are many Elders, respected members of the Indigenous community and people from the juridicial system present. The ceremony is held on a lawn beside the courthouse in Townsville. A stage has been set up, and neat rows of chairs under a tent providing shade. Everyone is formally dressed, and the atmosphere is ceremonial. Several people will speak at this event, and an MC, master of ceremony, guides us through the ceremony. The MC introduces two women, each a representant from the Traditidonal Owners in Townsville, Bindal and Wulgurukaba, who will each hold a speech as a Welcome to Country.

In the first speech we are greeted by Bindal Elder Aunt Dorothy with the word *Waddamooli*, which means welcome in the Birriguba language. We are also explained that the word Murri, used in Queensland, means Aboriginal. Further we hear that Murri Court is a justice group made out of Elders and respected members of the community. The Murri Court is a part of the law system, but more precisely it is a part of Lore, as the Aboriginal lawsystem is know in the Aboriginal communiy. By guiding the defendants through a combination of the lawsystem and Lore, there is a greater chance they will be able to turn their lives around and get out of criminal behavior and being stuck in the justice system. A successful example of this line of work is also Uncle Alfred's Men's Group, where only 1% of the men fall back into crime and return to the courtsystem, she informs us. The role of the Elders in the Murri Court, through Lore, is of significant cultural importance in this work. The second Welcome to Country acknowledge the clan groups surrounding Townsville, aswell as pointing to the importance of being guided by the Elders and learning respect. She also mentions the genocide and oppression that led to the depression of today. As a closure of the Welcome to Country, a prayer is recited *in language* (meaning in Indigenous language) by an aged Elder woman. It is translated as she prays and the beginning of the prayer says: "Heavenly Father, you look down on us, you know what is in our hearts..."⁷

⁷ Here, I find it useful to make a remark on how it is not always a straight forward task to record what is going on, even when one is in the right place at the right time. On this occasion it was the burning mid-day sun that prevented me from being fully present. Unfortunately, as I was in the back of the seated area, I was not sufficiently protected by the shade and was feeling increasingly unwell. As a result, my attention covers only parts of the ceremony.

A judge now takes the stage. He informs us that Indigenous people make up 3% of the population of Queensland, whereas 30% of the prison population. To improve this statistic, the Murri Court is an important enterprise. Because of the Murri Court, the defendants will have to not only meet the justice system, they also have to communicate with their Elders. The judge says that this is not an easy way for the defendant, seeing that they must face both their Elders and the justice system as they take the necessary steps to change their lives. The judge declares the Murri Court officially open, and the director-general close the ceremony by acknowledging "the custodians of this land, Elders past, present and emerging". Before everyone is invited to join in on food and drinks in the building closeby, all the Elders of the Murri Court come to the stage. Each of them are given new sashes to wear in court, decorated with traditional Aboriginal artwork. The artwork depicts lines and rows of circles in specific patterns, which symbolize the path the defendant must take, the gathering of Elders guiding him or her, and then being able to find one's way.



This Welcome to Country, as part of a larger ceremonial setting in honour of the Murri Court, displayed a strikingly different attitude compared to the Welcome to Country on "harmony day". Obviously, this was an event in honour of an institution that is made up of Indigenous people and that works in unison with a court that already acknowledge the role of Aboriginal Elders in the community. Also, most of the public on this event was Indigenous, people connected either to the Murri Court Elders or as representatives from other types of community work. Also the non-indigenous people in this event were present to show their respect and support for the work of Murri Court. Although the backdrop of this event was the considerable social problem of crime and imprisonment, the character of this event was still one of respect, resourcefulness and hope for the future. The Murri Court as an institution, and this ceremonial event including the Welcome to Country ritual, represent the importance of acknowledging the role of Elders in Aboriginal culture today, a role that is as important now as in the traditional past. This comes to show that acknowledging the Aboriginal social structure is not only possible, it is an agent for positive social change (See also Le Marseny 2012 on "The Family Responsibilities Commission")

Contemporary practice – Traditional Protocol

There are differing views regarding the antiquity of the Welcome to Country ritual. Some texts mention the Welcome performed by Ernie Dingo in Perth in 1976 as the first ritual of its contemporary kind, a Welcome he was asked to perform by visiting dancers from Pacific Islands (Pelizzon and Kennedy 2012:59; Everett 2009; McKenna 2014; McAuley 2009). The practice is also linked with the Land Rights movement from the 1980's and the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation from the 1990's (Pelizzon and Kennedy 2012). When I ask one of the women performing Welcome to Country in Townsville, she tells me that it is connected to Native Title, as "Welcome to Country is usually a sign of respect to the Traditional Owners and this also comes after Native Title on a particular area". As of the last decades, the practice to acknowledge Traditional Owners and perform Welcome to Country at public events has become common in Australia. In Townsville I am told, "the recognition to do Welcome to Country started after the Apology from Kevin Rudd".

On February 12th 2008, at the opening of the 42nd Parliament, Kevin Rudd included Mathilda, House, a Traditional Owner from the Ngunnawal people of the Canberra area, to perform the first Welcome to Country at a federal level. For the first time in Australian history, the parliament was opened by an Aboriginal ceremony. This happening has been somewhat overshadowed by The Apology made by Rudd on the very next day, whereas he apologized on behalf of the Australian nation to the Indigenous people and to the Stolen Generations especially. In the spirit of reconciliation, The Apology intended to start a new chapter in Australia's history, by saying sorry, turning the page and start the work towards a future where every Australian is an equal partner with equal opportunities regardless of origin (Moses 2011: 148-150). Although The Apology got more attention nationally and internationally (Canada followed suit and made a similar apology later the same year), the Welcome to Country was seen as an important milestone among Aboriginal people. The "historic nature of the occasion" was described as "a highly significant political act" (McAuley 2009: 50). Bob Randall, Elder and Traditional Owner of Uluru and a member of the Stolen Generation, was interviewed concerning the Apology. He was more interested in commenting on the Welcome to Country ceremony that had deeply affected him, saying that this "changes everything. The colonisers remained colonisers until yesterday but now the Ngunnawal people have welcomed the parliament it gives us a responsibility for maintaining them as guests. This will bring in a new energy" (McAuley 2009: 54).

"Traditional protocols including acts of acknowledgement upon entering someone else's Country are well documented both within Aboriginal oral history and within ethnographic literature. Such protocols form the *traditional* basis of contemporary Welcome to Country practices" (Pelizzon and Kennedy 2012: 64; also Rose 2000: 108). The recognition of Country rituals as they are now, are naturally not identical to traditional customs prior to colonisation. Uncle Alfred says about the right to perform Welcome to Country that "it is about respect". He further explained that this is about a mutual respect, that establishes and maintains a relationship and that this core value of the ritual is the same as in traditional times. The relationship as of now might not be equal when it comes to political and legal power, but in any case it is an improvement from earlier years of "silencing the past" and assimilation policies when any kind of ritual practice was illegal (Stanner 1968). It is a step in the right direction, and symbolically a significant one.



The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Map of Aboriginal Australia based on language grouping. (<http://camra.culturemap.org.au/node/993>)

This map gives an idea of the great diversity of the First Peoples of Aboriginal Australia. The actual number of Aboriginal Countries is even greater than it looks here, since “the boundaries between areas are not exact, it represents larger language groups, within which diverse clans, dialects or individual language groups may well exist” (<http://camra.culturemap.org.au/node/993>). The fact that Bindal is represented on the map, while Wulgurukaba is not and is counted as part of the Nyawaygi language group, confirms this statement. Bindal *Country* is part of the Birriguba language area, of the Yuru (or Juru) tribe located south of Townsville. Both Bindal and Wulgurukaba are Traditional Owners of the area in and around Townsville, from north of Ingham going southwards along the coast past Ayr. “The boundary in Townsville is that Wulgurukaba are TO's north of Ross River, and Bindal are TO's south of Ross River”⁸, Aunt Dorothy tells me. As seen on the map, the

⁸ TO is short for Tradition Owner.

Bindal Country includes Townsville and stretches all the way past Ayr, which coincides with Uncle Alfred's explanation given to me when he took me to see the Rainbow Serpent totem sculpture in Ayr: "this is our Creator, this is my *Country*".

The exact borders between the two groups and Countries as it was in the past cannot be known anymore, although Uncle Alfred tells me that in precolonial times the Bindal people would move towards the hills of the inland during the wet season. What is now an urbanized area of suburbs was then a vast area of wetland. The name Wulgurukaba means Canoe People (see Townsville City Council, "Traditional Landowners"). The Wulgurukaba are saltwater people, and Uncle Alfred tells me that their Country includes coastal areas and Magnetic Island. It is possible that the borders between the two neighbouring people were overlapping and would fluctuate with the wet and dry seasons and the seasonal movements of the peoples.

Rose has a useful take on traditional borders, as we need another understanding of them than the Western. Borders between Countries should be seen through an understanding of connection instead of separation, as a type of tracks or borders that connect, and define differences in sets of relationships (Rose 2000: 52). Rose uses the image of the string figure, since "string imagery includes the concept that each node is its own centre of the figure. [...] To be a centre is not to dominate, but rather to have one's own perspective. Each country is, from its own viewpoint, its own boss. There are no 'orders from above', because there is no above. There are only interrelated parts" (Rose 2000: 55). Further, all "countries are autonomous. No country, however defined, is dependent upon any other country for its Law, its livelihood, its right to be" (Rose 2000: 55).

Traditionally, before colonisation, anyone who entered another Country would wait to be properly welcomed into that Country. The manner in which this was practiced varied widely across the continent, every Country and every People had their own protocols as to how strangers would be welcomed in rituals of hospitality and diplomacy. "This diversity is reflected in the fact that there is no set performance, although a spoken acknowledgement of ancestors and the land is a common element, and each region does it differently", says Richard Walley (in Penberthy 2016, 03.03) who was a part of the first modern Welcome to Country performance at the Perth International Arts Festival in 1976. He continues: "that's fantastic, because each place is different and each custodian has a different language and a

different outlook, but we're all firm believers that we're from the land, and that is what we pay tribute to, and all people call upon ancestors" (Penberthy 2016, 03.03). There is to this day no common Welcome to Country. As I was told by Uncle Alfred in Townsville, also regarding the Smoking Ceremony, "this is my *Country* and I know how we do it here. On someone else's Country it can be different". There are some common points of what a Welcome to Country entails: it is usually in the form of a speech, traditional words or language can make out parts or sometimes the whole of the speech; the colours of the Aboriginal flag can be worn; singing or dancing can be a part of the ceremony; a smoking ceremony can sometimes also be performed as part of the Welcome or as a cleansing ritual in combination with a Welcome. The only rule is that the Welcome to Country is done by an Elder or Traditional Owner of the Country in question. "Whatever the format of the speech, however, it always involves a claim to prior ownership of, and continuing authority over, the land on which the ceremony is convened" (Everett 2009: 56).

Acknowledgement and respect

The most visual function of the Welcome to Country ritual, is that it affirms Aboriginal social identity. After the Mabo decision and Native Title Act of 1993, the definition of "an Aboriginal person is someone who is of Aboriginal descent, identifies as Aboriginal, and is accepted by the community in which they live as Aboriginal" (Lambert-Pennington 2012: 134). By affirming this identity, anchored through ancestry and community, the Welcome to Country creates a space of cultural agency where "they actively differentiate themselves and their way of being in the world from settler society" (Lambert-Pennington 2012: 137). As each Country has its own name, people, customs and local colonial history, the Welcome to Country also "demands acknowledgement of the historical, social conditions that have led to Aboriginal heterogeneity", and it exposes the need for colonial history to be part of the "national discourses and Aboriginal policies" (Lambert-Pennington 2012: 142).

Kowal brings up the unsettling effect of Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement rituals as "an attempt at national healing" (2015: 188). As an affirmation of sovereign belonging to Country, the Welcome to Country can be a device for reflections on belonging and respect. By welcoming the settlers, and immigrants, who have made themselves welcome, it

encourages a sense of belonging also for non-indigenous people, through acknowledging the past and respecting the original inhabitants.

4 Smoking Ceremony – Power of Ritual

While preparing for the project in Townsville I went through literature on many subjects relating to Indigenous Australians. The Welcome to Country and the Smoking Ceremony⁹ rituals somehow evaded me during the initial research. Naturally, when I was invited to a Smoking Ceremony I was filled with anticipation as to learn more about this. Still to this day, I have not been able to find literature that describes contemporary Aboriginal Smoking Ceremonies thoroughly, except as a part of a Welcome to Country ritual. Therefore, in this chapter I will offer a detailed description of one of the Smoking Ceremonies I was lucky to experience myself, in combination with explanations from Uncle Alfred, Brad and William. I will also propose an analysis of this ritual. Since the Smoking Ceremonies I participated in also had a Welcome to Country, I will include this in the description since the two parts of the ritual belong together whenever they are performed together. The Smoking Ceremony was explained to me as being highly culturally significant, as it is not only a performance but simultaneously has an emplaced, embodied and ceremonial function in the culture. At the Murri Court opening, discussed in the previous chapter, a Smoking Ceremony was wished for by the Elders, but the use of fire was not accepted by the organisers. A Smoking Ceremony deepens what a Welcome to Country communicates.

The Day of the Smoking Ceremony

Sam had invited me to the opening of Red Cross' new offices in Aitkenvale, to see the Smoking Ceremony and also to have a chance to meet Uncle Alfred. On this day, I conduct participant observation over several hours. I do not make many notes or take any pictures, in order to be fully present in the happenings of this day. As Jai affirmed at the beginning of the day, "don't take any pictures during the ceremony".

⁹ As with Welcome to Country, I capitalise the words of Smoking Ceremony as a sign of respect.

On my way from the bus stop I run into Jai on the street outside of the building. We had just met for an informal chat the day before, and today I notice a definite change in mood. It seems as if I had surprised him while he was getting ready. Jai and the other men of the ceremony group are preparing themselves as I walk by. A white pick up truck is parked by the side of road, outside of the fenced in parking lot of the new Red Cross building. The doors of the truck are open, I can see bundles of bushes in the open trunk, and two of the guys have just changed into traditional wear and getting ready to apply body paint. Jai is talking to me in a hushed voice, "oh hey, there you are, I'll let Sam know you are here" and he walks off towards the building to find Sam for me. He disappears inside, and when I arrive at the entrance I am greeted by a young man, smiling. We shake hands and I tell him I was invited here by Sam, which the young man seems to be aware of already. He readily goes to find Sam for me as he welcomes me inside. Jai can peacefully get back to his preparations. Inside the entrance area I find myself a seat. Some people are going back and forth in preparations, while others smalltalk and wait for the official opening. The mood inside is light and filled with expectation as we wait, in contrast to the quiet concentration of the ceremony crew outside.

Welcome to Country before the Smoking

After a while there is time to gather outside the entrance of the house. The ceremony will begin here, in the open space of the parking lot. The Welcome to Country speech is held by Aunt Dorothy, Bindal Elder. Aunt Dorothy is Sam's mother, Uncle Alfred's oldest sister, and a former lecturer at the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Center at James Cook University. As the matriarch of her family, it is her responsibility to speak at events such as this. Everyone gather around her. She is facing the building, while the crowd is facing her and the view of the surrounding suburb and the landscape of low grassy mountains in the distance.

Aunt Dorothy is addressing the crowd in a calm, secure voice. Her back is straight, her gaze wander across the crowd, the building and its surroundings. Her hands are folded in front of her, at times pointing towards the building or towards the landscape. She seems comfortable

to speak in front of a crowd: her words are firm and coming from someone with a certain and clear self-confidence and self-respect.

Her speech begins with acknowledging the ancestors of *everyone* present, who led us all to this place and this very moment. At other events, I observed that a Welcome to Country begins by acknowledging the Elders past, present and future of the area's Traditional Owners, while today everyone's ancestors are included. Reconciliation, cooperation, courage, community, and a future for all is the overall topic in this particular Welcome to Country, which also addresses the work of Red Cross in this region. She talks about the former building holding Red Cross' offices, and explains that this was a "bad building" that used to hold cells in its basement where Aboriginal people were held captive in the past – "We can only imagine the many bad things that happened there". "This building had many bad spirits", and such a building is not the right place for the offices and the type of work Red Cross is doing. Also, Aboriginal people did not want to come to this building precisely because of the bad spirits and the bad history that lives on in that place and in their memory. The new building, on the other hand, will serve much better. Not only is it situated in a suburb closer to where many of Red Cross' clients actually live, it will also receive a proper Smoking Ceremony, which the old building never did. Aunt Dorothy explains to us that the place where we are now standing has been the country of the Bindal and Wulgurukaba peoples in many millenia. While the exact borders between the two people can not be known anymore, the Ross River is seen as a boarder today. She takes us along in thoughts about the antiquity of this place: perhaps this place, where we are now gathered, has been a place with special significance in the past. It might have been a specific hunting ground, a sacred ceremonial place, or a sacred place for women's business – maybe a birthing ground. This building may be built on a space with special or sacred significance for her people in the past, say 30 000 or 200 years ago. "We can no longer know exactly", her hands pointing out into the distance, as if she takes us back to a part of the history all but gone in memory but not in significance. She goes on to declare that this ceremony today creates a new path in the history of this place, for this building and the work Red Cross is doing for the people in this area.

The Smoking Ceremony

Approximately 50 people partake in the opening. The crowd has been loosely gathered in front of Aunt Dorothy during the Welcome to Country speech, now she informs us that the Smoking Ceremony is about to start. The crowd is thus reorganized into a large circle, holding hands at first, surrounding Aunt Dorothy and Pastor Brad. Aunt Dorothy explains to us that this Smoking Ceremony is open to everyone: all of us present are welcome to feel and experience the ceremony in our own way. She tells us to not be afraid to feel its effects, which can sometimes be emotionally strong and surprising. She also explains that the smoke is cleansing and nothing to fear. The smoke is good, we can safely let it touch us, safely breathe it in. This is a cleansing smoke. Pastor Brad is now standing by her side: she lets us know that this Smoking Ceremony will be "enhanced with the Christian faith". Pastor Brad then take the word and lead a Christian prayer adressed to Father. During the prayer, people fold their hands, bend their heads and look down. Many close their eyes. During the prayer, Uncle Alfred is outside of the circle made up by the crowd, as the prayer is finished he enters the circle quietly. Uncle Alfred is the Elder responsible for the Smoking. He is calm, quiet, not saying a word. He holds in his hands a bundle of short pieces of thin wood with pale green little leaves: this is sandalwood as he tells me later. He lights a fire on the leaves and shake them lightly for the fire to go out and let the smoke appear. A grey cloud of smoke builds up in the little "bush" he keeps in his arms at chest hight. Slowly he walks around the circle, face to face with everyone as he leads the smoke towards each and every one. Some of the people in the crowd "meet the smoke" actively with their hands towards it, one lady walk up to him after he has completed the round to meet with the smoke an extra time. Everyone is silent during the whole Smoking Ceremony, watching Uncle Alfred and following his lead. He has yellow clay markings in his face, and is wearing a brown kangaroo skin over his shoulders. When everyone has been able to meet and feel the smoke he steps out of the circle and moves towards the building. Jai is now creating a firm loud rythm with clapsticks, and William is playing the didjeridoo. Jai and William wear green cloths and white clay markings on legs, arms and chest. The circle of the crowd breaks up into a line that follows the three men into the building. William stays in the entrance room, where he continues to play the didjeridoo. Everyone is quiet, moving slowly. Within the building Jai starts to chant in language in a high-pitch powerful voice all the while clapping a firm rythm with the clap sticks, while the deep pulsating sound of the didjeridoo fills the whole building we are now

moving into. Uncle Alfred and Jai are at the front of the line, now moving slowly into the big open room with rows of office desks. The line of people stops, we are surrounding all the desk places standing as in the shape of a big snake. Standing still now, following Uncle Alfred and Jai with our gaze as they move around the whole room with the smoke, the song and the rythm. Jai's body is filled with the rythm and chanting, as can be seen by the way he moves. All the corners and walls are being met with smoke and chanting, the smoke and chanting is being sent in every direction. Every person in the crowd is standing quietly, still. Some of the adherents are moved to tears, faces have a serious and thoughtful looks. The sound, the pulse of the didjeridoo is especially powerful, like a presence surrounding everyone. The building has a different feel to it during this time, with the piercing chanting and clap sticks, the particular voice of the didjeridoo, the visual smoke and the fresh scent of sandalwood. After directing the smoke to every corner and side of the room, Uncle Alfred now turns to every person once again. He walks up calmly, following the line of people and hold the smoke close in between himself and each person, one by one. This round he completes twice. The smoke is suprisingly fresh to be close to, with a green woody scent, and not as dense as it looks. Words were not uttered during this part of the ceremony, and indeed words cannot completely describe this experience either. It was something else, not ordinary, powerful in a calm, deep way, as it filled all the senses in an unusual way. Walking into the building during the ceremony was like walking into a completely different space although it all looked the same as before.

After the smoke has been presented to all of the building and the people in it, and a moment of stillness, Jai's chant moves into a different type of high pitch note until it ends in a sudden quietness. The smoking is over and the cleanse is completed. It takes a few moments before anyone moves, and even then just some small movements of the feet, a discrete "shaking loose" and letting our eyes wander and meet. Still standing in the "snake" formation. Aunt Dorothy is at the center of the room, she is the one to tell us that the smoking is now over. The smoke has now cleansed the building and the ground on which it stands, as well as all the materials that it is made up of. The Elders did a tour around the building earlier in the day and noticed some materials clearly coming from other areas of Australia, meaning other people's Country. As you should never leave a Country with materials from that place, this material is now acknowledged, given thanks for and cleansed by this Smoking Ceremony. As an apropos, she mentions the computers in this room, "let's hope the smoke didn't disturb the technology too much" – a comment that puts a smile on everyone's faces.

After this, there was about thirty minutes set off to acknowledge (a word I found was being used quite often) and congratulate a woman who had been working at the Red Cross for the longest. She was given flowers and a gift, and she made a speech about the community and friendship she felt was an integral part of this work place, and the importance of which helped her in her work with difficult tasks. With the new generation of workers coming into the offices, she wished to highlight how this was very positive for the learning environment and general positive attitude of everyone who had this as their work place and also lifestyle. Several people had come to Townsville from the Brisbane Red Cross offices to help in the moving process, they were also being acknowledged and applauded. Over all, it was a positive, generous and joyous mood among the crowd at this point. Everyone was now being invited to come to the meeting room, located across from the entrance area, where a selection of sandwiches and soft drinks were being served. The group softly break out from its snake formation and move towards the meeting room, now talkative and energized.



After having some food and conversation, the Smoking Ceremony crew and me had our picture taken.

From the left: Jai, Brad, me, Uncle Alfred, William. Photo credit: Sam Savage.

Being there: the importance of experience

McAuley (2009), watched Rudd's Apology with the crowd gathered outside Parliament House on the morning of his speech. Her analysis on how it profoundly affects people to experience such an event with others, in a communal gathering place, relates with that of experiencing a Smoking Ceremony of the kind described here. The Smoking Ceremony is also a live performance "created in the presence of spectators whose presence and reactions form part of the overall event" (McAuley 2009: 60), and I add that this is a live performance where spectators are also participants experiencing the event with their own bodies, minds and emotions. McAuley writes that "the emotions on the faces of the people" around her in the crowd would "remain indelibly" with her, and that "there was also a more visceral sense of being at one with the huge crowd that manifested in moments of spontaneous applause and moments of utter silence, a kind of collective held breath" (McAuley 2009: 60). This visceral sense of being at one with the crowd perfectly relates to experiencing a Smoking Ceremony, especially by the holding of hands at the beginning of the ceremony and later moving in unison. As opposed to the "collective held breath" McAuley speaks of, in the Smoking Ceremony it would be more fitting to describe it as a collective breathing, by way of being in interaction with the same smoke while hearing the pulse of the didgeridoo, clapsticks and chanting together. I would even take it further than 'hearing', and describe the deep sound of the didgeridoo as an encapsulating presence, that together with the smoke fully enclosed all the participants through our senses in the same atmosphere or body, as it were. Since this was a part of the ceremony where words were not uttered, it evoked those visceral experiences that are more relating to deep inward feelings rather than to the intellect. By experiencing these inward feelings as a group, the ceremony took us to a shared capsule of beingness in the space created by the ceremony itself.

For McAuley, the Apology, as well as the first Welcome to Country on a federal level, "come with great symbolism" that speaks of the way Australia is trying to deal with the "complex and painful issue at the heart of our social, cultural and political life, namely the treatment of the Indigenous inhabitants" (McAuley 2009: 55). The issue involves "contested questions of land rights and native title" and "the way Australians think about the past" – issues that go "to the heart of settler Australia's sense of its own legitimacy" (McAuley 2009: 55; also

Convery 2017). In the Apology, Kevin Rudd used the metaphor of the book, talking about the Stolen Generations as a "blemished chapter" in the nation's history (McAuley 2009: 58). Not only did he avert from making a much bigger apology for the wider mistreatment of the Indigenous people during the last two centuries by focusing on the Stolen Generation especially, he also transformed the effects of the past into a narrative of which one can "turn the page" (McAuley 2009: 58). This "moving on" is perhaps a contemporary form of the preceding "great Australian silence" (Stanner 1968: 216). As a contrast, the need for truth-telling in the reconciliation process and fully acknowledging the past, is the central message vocalised in Welcome to Country speeches. Inherent in the Welcome to Country speeches are also the claims of prior ownership and sovereignty over the lands (Everett 2009), based on the Aboriginal cultural structures of *connection to Country*. The way I see it, a Smoking Ceremony as the one described in this case, can be a venue and a place for experiencing this cultural structure, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.

Smoking Ceremony as a metaphor of and means for Indigenous Empowerment

The group of people I got to know in Townsville were all involved in the cultural and social project of Indigenous empowerment: Being sovereign in one's identity, culture, controlling one's destiny, healing the wounds of the past, recreating a stable foundation and better prospects for the future for the Indigenous people. Part of this project was to share and teach about the past, for Indigenous people to know their own history and also for non-Indigenous people to understand. The reconciliation, or decolonisation as it was most often referred to, needs for Indigenous people to start from within, starting with knowledge about what really happened in the past, who you are besides being a colonised people, learning how to heal yourself and your identity, and making peace within (see further in Chapter 5). Silencing the past has been the policy in Australia, so in order to have a true reconciliation also on the part of the non-Indigenous people there is a need for the mainstream to learn about what actually transpired during the "settling" of the land. The actual events that led to the birth of Australia as a nation, has until recently not been taught in schools and left out when the history has been written and told. The Indigenous perspective has been actively overlooked or misunderstood, to the point where long term effects of colonisation is simply being

understood as being in the nature of the Indigenous, which in turn has created internal turmoil, pain and hopelessness in the Indigenous individual – ”a psychological terra nullius” (Collis&Webb 2014: 493). The Indigenous empowerment works to end this demoralising process.

Indigenous empowerment begins with the internal focus of decolonising the mind and the self of the Indigenous person, through healing the self, and acquiring knowledge and understanding of the ideologies shaping the past. The Indigenous empowerment continues with the external focus of decolonising the mainstream society, through getting Aboriginal protocols back in place and becoming a normalised and respected part of the larger society in Australia, examples being the Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony. The Smoking Ceremony is of significant value ”as a highly culturally important ritual”, described as ”cleansing the land” which will return the spirituality back to its place, and heal the Country.

This particular Smoking Ceremony represents an example of this social project of strengthening and awakening the original Indigenous soul within the people and this place, and making a venue for it to be experienced also in the wider social space of mainstream Australia. It is a corporeal metaphor for the same project, the cleansing smoke moving within the people present, and moving outwards cleansing the place as well as its history. This ceremony is starting with acknowledging the past and the authority of the Traditional Owners through the Welcome to Country speech, bringing us into the experiential present where the smoke is cleansing each person from within. The smoke works as a collective cleansing breath, shared by all, as the smoke moves inside all the bodies present. Emotions may arise in a ritual of cleansing, as this is an internal cleansing and healing. All participants breathe in and out the same cleansing smoke. As smoke is being breathed out, all the individuals are cleansed, the bodies and exhalations are now clean. Then, the cleansing smoke as well as the cleansed exhalations merges, as the surrounding will be cleansed. First, the cleanse is directed towards the bodies and souls. Then the cleansing smoke is directed at the surrounding environment, ground, materials, representing an external cleansing of the physical and social space. The totality of a place is cleansed in a Smoking Ceremony.

”Since the 1970’s, strategies of self-determination have meant that indigenous groups have been urged to take control of their own affairs”, also resulting in the Native Title Act of 1993 (Magowan 2000: 313), the Mabo decision. Since then, ”the awereness of indigenous

presence” has been strengthened, and Indigenous voices are now being vocalised, if not acted upon. ”Often in these contexts, dance is being used as a tool of empowerment and the focus of a participative arena” (Magowan 2000: 313). As seen in the previous chapter, the problem of dance following a Welcome to Country is that it can be perceived by the mainstream as nothing but entertainment, and the empowering message is not necessarily heard. How can traditional rituals be a part of the mainstream, not as a ’token’, but as a respected and integral part of the society? Maybe through the ”healing power of ritual” can the nation and non-indigenous people ”share in an indigenous cosmology” through experience, and perhaps engaging in a Smoking Ceremony is one means by which reconciliation can be manifested between Indigenous and non-indigenous people (Magowan 2000: 319), as the empowering message is not only there to be heard but also felt.

Power of Ritual

This takes us to the power of ritual, beyond what the ritual might represent in a social or political context. Uncle Alfred and William told me that the form of this ritual is always the same, although its content, feeling and meaning relate to each specific moment and place where it is done: in a wedding or funeral, cleansing new houses or removing bad spirits. It is the meaning of each ceremony that drives it, as they do not plan ahead but let the feeling guide them in acting out the ceremony. What this means, is that ”it is in the structures of practice that the significance of the ritual events is revealed”, and that ”the rite does not develop from logic so much as it generates it in its practical motion” (Kapferer 1997: 176). It is by the rite’s internal dynamics it ”effect changes in its embracing context” (Kapferer 2004: 43), in the way it slows down the chaotic dimension and tempo of everyday life and exposes through the virtuality of the rite what is ”thoroughly real” (Kapferer 2004: 48). Although the representational and symbolic perspective continues to be important, viewing ritual as ”a dynamic for the production of meaning” enables us to understand how ”the virtual of rite is a means for engaging immediately with the very ontological ground of being” (Kapferer 2004: 49-50). This is my basis for claiming that a Smoking Ceremony can be a place to experience the cultural structure of *Connection to Country*.

5 Conversations about decolonisation, healing and *Tomorrow Warriors* – Power of History

In this last chapter I want to bring together a collection of important talks I had with informants in Townsville: talks that all point in the same direction. Also in this chapter I will offer some thoughts and explanations on what I regard as the connecting thread in this thesis, and more straightforward: what is the message in this story? Inherent in these last points will also be the answers as to what it means to be a *tomorrow warrior* (to be someone who embodies decolonising perspectives and processes (Alfred & Corntassel 2005). In a closing chapter, it seems reasonable to look back at recurring themes as well as to look ahead towards a conclusion or at least a musing on the most important questions and answers. Looking back at the past, and ahead towards the future, was also the common point in the talks I will present in this chapter. Tales of the past and visions about the future are all present in the here and now, and in this last chapter we will see how it is so for Indigenous people in Townsville today.

Talking with Brad about history

One particularly fresh and blueskyed Monday morning Brad calls me. We had been talking for a while about meeting for coffee and a *yarn* (conversation), and now he is in town and ready to meet up. It is one of those May mornings where the tropical temperature suddenly seems to have dropped into a rather refreshing one, which means "winter" is around the corner with milder, fresher air instead of the smothering hot and humid. Walking the short distance from my apartment, following the net of straightly lined streets towards the center of town, I notice there is an upbeat gait in my step as I no longer have to run from the scorching sun above and hide in the shadows along the road. I meet Brad at Coffee Club, right in the middle of Flinders Str, the main street of Townsville's CBD (Central Business District). This

place has an outside patio with a view towards the opposite side of the road where there is a walkway, tourist information center, and an interactive screen and hang out area beneath a few lush and shade-providing trees. The traffic is not disturbing us here, and it has an urban feel to it with its people-watching possibilities. We get some coffee and find a free table outside, in the shade.

Brad is the pastor in a Baptist church and he works at the watch house where he meets people as they are brought in to arrest. This is a man who is used to talking to a great variety of people in any life situation. His manners are friendly, mild, patient, always ready to listen and understand, and he is most often seen smiling. He has a gentle yet strong sort of charisma. Also his memory is excellent, and several times during our talk he would ask me to put down a number of points in my notebook, and he would continue explaining one by one while supervising my writing. By now, I had known Brad for some time and we had met on several occasions where he had been part of Smoking Ceremony performances, and I had also visited Brad in his church where I had met some of the churchgoers and some of his family. One Sunday afternoon I had helped out as the group were doing some renovation and cleaning work in the church locale. Brad was by now a friend, and ever since I had visited his church he called me "sis" or "sister", all the while he also understood the nature of my studies and so he wanted to share some information with the purpose of providing data to this thesis.

On this day, the topic of conversation would include Aboriginal history, colonisation, healing and identity. In these conversations we will see that whenever talking about Aboriginal history in general, personal stories and family memories are never far away. History is not just in books, history is personal, and it is felt and experienced by real people. In Australia, colonisation is a part of Aboriginal history in a not so distant past. Race relations in Australia continue to be haunted by the shadows of events in the past.

Understanding oppression to decolonise the mind

"Do you know who Willie Lynch is?" Brad asks me. I can not say that I do, and Brad tells me that he is the name and man behind the term "lynching", and that Willie Lynch wrote a letter/speech in 1712 where he explained his principles of "The Making of a Slave". "Lynch

was a British slave owner in the West Indies. He was invited to the colony of Virginia in 1712 to teach his methods to slave owners there” (Lynch 1712). Brad knows this text very well, and I write as he speaks: There are three principles in this text: fear, envy and distrust, which are fundamental to create and control a slave’s mind. As I later look up this text myself, I see that Lynch described his method as simple and foolproof, and he guarantees that if his methods are used correctly ”it will control the slaves for at least 300 years” (1712: 1). In Brad’s words, the methods of Lynch worked as a process of self-prophecy, and when Australia was colonised the British had this method in mind as a fear-mongering tactic. The main Lynch procedure was to instill a deep distrust among the slaves, young against old, pale skinned against dark skinned, male against female, so that the slaves would only be able to trust, respect and completely depend on their slave owner. Lynch promised that these methods would work after one year, after which the slaves would remain in a ”perpetually distrust of each other” so that the “indoctrination shall carry on and will become self refueling and self generating for hundreds of years, maybe thousands” (1712: 1).

Brad wants me to understand that it is important to know history, not only to know what happened but also to understand why it did, and that it is crucial to come to terms with it. He suggests I should read up on Australia’s colonial history. In recent years there has been released books that tell the actual story of some of the violent events, killings, and massacres that were perpetrated against Australia’s First Peoples. The re-writing of Australian history, where the focus is shifted from the solely white domination point of view, characterised by completely leaving out the Indigenous people, to the focus where the Indigenous perspective is at the center, has been labeled “Black armband history” (Reynolds 1999: 153). This “breaking the silence” has not been easy, seeing how “historians, anthropologists, broadcasters and museum curators were attacked from the highest levels of government” for retelling the other side of history, a clash labeled “the history wars” (McAuley 2009: 59).

Missions and reserves, assimilation and segregation

As Brad and I continue our conversation, he gives me a quick overview of the events that shaped, and still shapes, the experience of Australia’s First People. In the 1880’s and 90’s religion came, with the Church of England and the first mission stations being created for

Aborigines. This is how the segregation policy first came into action. This was being seen as a way to save the Indigenous people from a life that the colonisers perceived as “savage” (Stanner 1938, 1968) and by Christianising the original inhabitants of the new colonies the missions would actively be able to ‘kill the culture and save the man’ (Wolfe 2006: 397). The Australian Aboriginal peoples were either perceived as being a dying race, up until the 20th century (Stanner 1938, 1968), or seen as an economic potential. By indoctrinating/assimilating those who did not perish into the invading culture and religion, the idea was to incorporate them into a working class of the new state and its economic system (Wolfe 2006; Stanner 1938: 15; Strang 1997). Mainly, it was the “half castes” that would be assimilated, while the “pure breeds” would be segregated and relocated to reserves as a means to keep the race alive but not mix with the white population (Stanner 1938). The power to define who was wholly or partially Aboriginal was that of the state, and this mind set continued into the 1970’s and was also the triggering factor behind the Stolen Generations (Murphy 2011).

In the 1890’s the Australian state began creating reserves. Brad tells me they would “put people there from all over”, and in Queensland this was in Palm Island, an island off the coast from Townsville. There is a story of one of the first foremen of the Palm Island reserve, that suffered from syphilis and was “straight from the yaddaman’s mouth”, meaning he acted crazy. In the early days it was not unusual that the reserve officials were mean and mistreating of the Aboriginal people. They would be in control over any money that the Aborigines earned, and controlled also much else: “until the 1970’s Aboriginal reserves, whether government or church controlled, were closed institutions in which the Aborigines were inmates dominated by white staff (Loos 1993: 26). Brad tells me that the Aborigines were not mistreated in all the reserves and missions however, and in some cases it was in the missions that they would find meaning in the new religion, become Christians and learn how to pray. When I met with Sharon at the James Cook University campus, she explained a possible reason as to why many Indigenous persons found comfort in Christianity and are devote believers still today, to be because both Aboriginal tribal religion and Christianity share a common ground: “they both believe in miracles”. On a different occasion, while talking with Jai, another common point came up: the practice of pilgrimage in the Christian tradition and the Aboriginal walkabout as ways of transcendental moving, as the mode to be communing with ones spirituality and creator/creating forces. Perhaps being spiritual is the common denominator here, and as Brad told me: in the tribal past everyone was spiritual.

Indigenous Christianity is not without controversies, but this is not a topic for this thesis. Suffice to say, as seen in the previous chapter describing the Smoking Ceremony, Christianity is now a part of the Indigenous reality – at least for some.

From dog-tags to citizenship

“Do you know what a *dog-tag* is?” Brad tells me that Aborigines who did not want to live on a reserve would be given an exemption certificate. The exemption certificates were created in 1943 by the Aborigines Welfare Board under the Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act, and these certificates “allowed Aboriginal people to argue that they should no longer be constrained by the provisions of the Aborigines Protection Act and to access social security benefits that other Australians received, including family and old age pensions” (New South Wales). However, there were some constraints, Brad informs me: it was illegal to meet family and even visit the reserves, it was illegal to congregate or dance, and it was illegal to speak your language. The exemption certificates were a part of the assimilation policy, as it inhibited people from seeing each other and continuing traditional family ties and practicing their culture, while giving Aboriginal people “the rights and privileges of white society so they could eventually blend in” (New South Wales). The need to show these documents to police officers regularly was humiliating and so it came to be called *dog-tags*. For any misdemeanor the certificate would be taken away, and people could even be shot for breaking the certificate’s rules. Many people who left the reserves ended up living in the outskirts of town, Brad tells me. Here they would stick together. After dark it was curfew, which meant an Aboriginal person could not be in town and had to get back on the right side of the “boundary street”. In Townsville, this boundary used to be the river, just a block from where we are sitting as Brad is telling me this. It was a time of separation, Brad says. And it was a challenge, especially for Aboriginal women working for white families in town, as maids or cooks. On their way back home in the evening it was not safe, and stories of rape, violence and also police violence were not uncommon in these “curfew times” (Reynolds 1993c: 156).

It was not until 1967 that the Aboriginal people received full civil rights in Australia. Until then, the Indigenous people were not even counted as people but were officially a part of the flora and fauna of Australia. With the referendum in 1967, in which 90% voted yes, the

Indigenous people became citizens with the right to vote (Collis&Webb 2014: 497). This also abolished the dog-tag certificates. I am somewhat shocked over how casually Brad can talk about these things, that have affected his people. He is very focused on the importance of becoming educated. Also, I am surprised at how recently Australia was so far from what we perceive to be modern. I express how crazy I find this to be, and then we share a laugh about it.

From oppression to healing

“Now, let me tell you about the colonisers five principles.” Brad tells me to put five points on the page, and he proceeds to give me the five principles as the colonisers first seek to establish control. 1) Look for the wealth of the land, and find resources to exploit. 2) Access the women and children, while men, being protectors and providers, will be fought and killed. Later, put up reserves. 3) Teach them the colonisers language, literature and history, so that the colonised will be a people without their own history. 4) Change their diet and make them dependent on the colonisers food, such as sugar, flour, tea, and also tobacco and alcohol. As a matter of fact, Brad informs me, 10 out of 12 dialysis seats in Townsville are every day taken up by Indigenous people. The change of diet as a result of colonialism has had serious consequences for the Indigenous health, with the Indigenous population suffering from a range of previously non-existent illnesses. Indigenous people have shorter lives than that of non-indigenous, by more than 20 years (Queensland Government 2016; Cameron 2017). The introduction of new foods, such as sugar and flour, also changed cultural practices quite abruptly, since the availability of flour made the native flour indigenous to Australia obsolete, since processing each kilogram of native flour required approximately 8 hours of hard labour (Flood 2006: 23; see also Pascoe 2014). The introduction of these items effectively created new ways of trade and dependency since the days of the first colony in Botany Bay (Flood 2006: 41). Principle 5) is: Change their names. Names, traditionally, would signal the connection to ones Country, origin and identity. By changing the names of those who lived in reserves or in missions into English names, the meaningful cultural ties would be cut. The surnames given would often be the name of one of the officials working at the reserve or mission. Brad tells me that his own grandmother was born and grew up in a mission, and it was impossible for his family to find out where she came from exactly and

whom she was related to, since her name had been changed, and with it her connection. For this reason, many people growing up on missions became tied to the mission instead of their original *Country*. Removing traditional names was an attempt to strip people from their history and ancestral past, connection and culture – another aspect of cultural genocide (Wolfe 2006).

“When you’re under oppression you’re always looking to the oppressor for answers”, Brad says. Now this is changing, because there is a way to “help undo this, learn to let go of the pain from your family’s history”. How Brad has just been teaching me about colonisation in Australia is a part of a program called the Red Dust Healing, which “give the tools to carry on” (Red Dust). One of Brad’s nephews is a Mentor in this program. Learning about the past to understand the pain of today is a family matter and Brad says, “we need to go in and heal the family”. By using the healing tools that this program offers, “we can start to rise” Brad insists. The specific tools of this program Brad does not share with me, but learning about the colonial past and present is an integral part of it. In Brad’s words, this program is meant to “bring healing back”, it will enable people to “become comfortable with who you are” and “learn to walk in equality with one another”. As is stated on the website of the Red Dust Healing, it is “a group program for Indigenous men and women that examines the intergenerational effects of colonisation on the mental, physical and spiritual well being of Indigenous families and encourages individuals to confront and deal with the problems, hurt and anger in their lives” (Red Dust). One of the outcomes of the program is “understanding the impacts of colonialism and oppression and then learning tools to overcome those impacts” (Red Dust). This is a program that operates from an Indigenous perspective, and it is “targeted at the heart and not the head”.

When I later meet Reinhard, knowing what Brad and I talked about earlier, he says that “reconciliation” is a policy coming from the government and this is precisely why it is not working. Because, he says, “we can help ourselves, we know what to do”, and being told what and how to do things from outsiders with more political power, ie. government officials, is not the right way to go. “Sometimes you need to learn the tools to help yourself and your family, and the whole community, to make things right, and this cannot come from the outside”. Reinhard talks about change happening from the inside, from the heart, and it is a change that has to be chosen. It has to work from willingness within, not imposed from above. The key words *culture*, *choice* and *control* are inherent in what I have just been told

by Brad and Reinhard, and by listening to Uncle Alfred explaining his work these key concepts will return with increasing effect.

Uncle Alfred's Men's Group – a path of healing and empowerment towards becoming a *Tomorrow Warrior*

The work Uncle Alfred is doing is in the same spirit as the Red Dust Healing that Brad speaks of. After having met Uncle Alfred on two occasions where he was leading the Smoking Ceremony, we arranged to meet so that he could tell me about the work he is doing in the Uncle Alfred's Men's Group.

I had been told about Uncle Alfred and the Men's Group weeks before actually meeting him, when I was introduced to his nephew Sam. As his nephew, it was Sam who prepared the proper introduction between me and Uncle Alfred, him being an Elder in the community. Upon explaining Sam that I was in Townsville to talk to people and learn about Indigenous culture, he agreed to help me. Sam also told me "it is a survivor story of our people, the last 200 years. Cook set foot on our land, "discovered it" [hand gesture]. We survived colonisation". Sam also mentioned the blood quantum measurements of the past, how the authorities would define the Aboriginality of a person in terms of being "pure breed", "full blood", "half caste", "quarter caste, "octoroon" and so on (Maddison 2013: 289). He pronounced this as a custom of the colonisers, and a thing of the past. Maddison defines this regulation of Indigenous identity as an aspect of structural colonial violence: "One of the most powerful technologies of settler colonialism has been to name and contain the original inhabitants of the colonised territory" (2013: 289). Being a people who survived despite colonisation is indisputably a part of the Indigenous identity today. During my conversations with Uncle Alfred, as well as with Brad and Reinhard, I learn that it is a story not only of survival, but also of taking matters into their own hands. It is a story that portrays what it means to be Indigenous, given the colonial legacies while maintaining the true Indigenous heritage from within.

Uncle Alfred runs a volunteer cultural group for men, meant especially for young adults who are caught up in the justice system, all the while any Indigenous man is welcome. Uncle

Alfred Men's Group will support the men to re-engage with their community, culture, family and *Country*. The group's aim is to give people a second chance, reduce crime and unite families. Their focus is on cultural mentoring, with participants engaging in art, craft, music and dance to express their experiences, release their anger, break the negative cycle and lead to their healing and empowerment. The rap-song "Spear of Destiny" from 2013 express how the cultural mentoring of Uncle Alfred is about "reclaiming your spear and taking responsibility of yourself and your family". Some of the lyrics communicate how "the blood of the warrior beats in my chest – my spear is my knowledge", and "I represent the father, the role model, the Lore maker, the leg shaker, the ground breaker" (Uncle Alfred Men's Group 2013).



Scene from the music video (Uncle Alfred's Men's Group 2013), posted in Townsville Bulletin (2016).

Uncle Alfred was granted a place on the list of Townsville's 50 most influential people, playing a part in "shaping Townsville and its future" (Townsville Bulletin 2016).¹⁰ Also in 2016, the Uncle Alfred's Men's Group received a grant from the Australia Post Our

¹⁰ See also Appendix 1.

Neighbourhood program, which is a program that “aims to build healthier, more vibrant and more inclusive communities across Australia (Australia Post 2016).

Uncle Alfred tells me that during the last year approximately 400 men have been attending the group, and only 1% has returned to prison. The group meets once a week, and in the previous week 79 men had been present. The work he is doing in this group is classified as *men's business* in the Aboriginal tradition, so I will not be able to visit and observe the actual group meetings. Towards the end of my stay in Townsville however, I was invited to accompany Uncle Alfred and one of the men involved with the Men's Group to see the locale where they meet if they do not meet outside *on Country*. The walls were filled with art work made by the men, illustrated information placards about Indigenous history in Australia, news clips of recent events and reminders with words and images on what it means to be a good warrior and a good Elder – among other things, like the big sea turtle shell in one corner.

Respect and Lore

The first time I see Uncle Alfred to talk about his work, we meet at the Cowboys club where there is a rugby union league game, and Townsville Cowboys are winning over the Sydney Rabbitohs. After the game he illustrates his work by guiding me through the model he use with the group and with individuals. The teachings Uncle Alfred's Men's Group is based on is of course much more comprehensive than I can be able to present it as here, nevertheless the general framework and the most prominent patterns will suffice for the purposes of this thesis.

Respect. This is where we begin, and Uncle Alfred writes this word in the middle of a blank page. With his group he normally uses a whiteboard while talking, now it is my notebook. Respect, this is where it all has to start, and he asks me “Where does respect have to begin?”. “With yourself, that's right”. Respect is the foundation of his teaching, and it has to start from within. If there is no respect within, there cannot be respect for others either, and without respect there will be problems in someones life, then in the family and so in the community. The lack of respect within is a catapult for many problems that may materialise in different

ways depending on the individual and on the circumstances, but the problems of the men in the Men's Group often has one or more of these aspects: criminal behavior, addiction, gambling, depression, anger, grief, suicide, domestic violence. A man's success in the Men's Group will result in a better life not just for him, but also for his immediate family and the wider community. Especially after being imprisoned, it has a significant impact to receive guidance from an Elder, to learn how to return to the innate feeling of respect and taking responsibility.

From here we continue by envisioning the difference between "white law" and "black Lore". These two modes of law are seen as opposites, the first aspect being that white law is written while black lore is unwritten – and as the word "Lore" implies: it is a type of knowledge based on oral tradition, passing from one generation to the next within a community. Further, these opposing modes of law creation and law enforcement are visualized through an acronym, where each letter of the words "law" and "lore" is shown to stand for qualities describing each type. The written, white LAW: legislation, attorney, Westminster. The unwritten, black LORE: land, origin, respect, Elders. Westminster refers to how the white law stems from the British throne and parliament in Westminster, London. In this type of law there are professionals working with its enforcement, based on written documents. As a clear opposition, black Lore belongs to people through belonging to the land. It is a type of law that has come into existence through time, through origin, and intertwines with the culture of each Country and its Dreamings. The ones possessing the knowledge about Lore are the Elders. Knowing and upholding this type of law entails respecting one's Elders, one's land and origin, which all exist within an intertwining of relationships. Black Lore functions through this set of relationships. Some of the problems of today are interpreted as originating from this law/lore difference, by having to deal with a cultural (and legal) system not your own, and not based on your people's traditional value system. The black Lore-system is not only rules about lawful conduct, it comprises an all-encompassing code of how to be in the world. Rose describes it as such, with a capital L to accentuate the Indigenous meaning behind the word law:

"Law is often expressed as rules about behavior. But what Law seems most fundamentally to be about is relationships. Dreamings determined sets of moral relationships – country to country, country to plant and animal species, people to country, people to species, people to people. Individuals of any species come and go, but the underlying relationships persists. Law is a serious life and death business

for individuals and for the world; it tells how the world hangs together. To disregard the Law would be to disregard the source of life and thus to allow the cosmos to fall apart” (Rose 2000: 56).

The Kangaroo - Decision Pouch

Now, Uncle Alfred proceeds to draw a big U-shape on the page, symbolising a kangaroo pouch. This is a visual tool that the Men’s Group is actively using, called the Decision Pouch. The pouch is used to identify ones problems and how to deal with them, and again we have the acronym to guide the process, as the word “pouch” stands for: problem, option, u (you), choose, how. The “U” in the pouch encompasses all other steps on the way, to showcase how every kangaroo pouch is unique and representing the person. The pouch as a visual tool will create and hold a path for the person, from identifying the problems this individual is facing to clearing up a route of options, resolutions and finally how to put it to practice, through discussing it with his Elders and “brothers” in the group. The symbolic depth of the kangaroo is also at work here, since the kangaroo is an important totem animal and a prominent figure in traditional stories. Uncle Alfred, and the other men in the ceremony group, wears kangaroo fur coats during rituals such as the Smoking Ceremony. I was told that when a warrior dies, his kangaroo fur coat accompanies him in the grave. Also, the ritualistic eating of kangaroo meat in specific ceremonies can be used to enhance one’s sense of sight. The kangaroo pouch as it is used here is not only connected to a traditional symbolism and value system, it is also working as a cognitive and therapeutic method to acquire knowledge and understanding about one’s own empowerment and healing process. Brad informed me that the pouch-model is also used in the Red Dust Healing.

A number of symbols are used as metaphorical healing tools, symbols that resonates with the traditional worldview of *connection*. Other symbols I was told about include the fish, the bird and the tree. Although Uncle Alfred did not go into detail about the fish and the bird, in different ways and through learning about species specific to Aboriginal fauna and stories, each of these are symbols that teach the lesson to “control only what you can”, and realise in what manner you perceive the world and your problems. The model of the tree however, Uncle Alfred talked about on a number of occasions. Also, I could observe him in action at a family day organised in the park next to Ross River, where he explained to a group of

listeners what the Men's Group is all about. As was his style, he would teach and explain the methods directly by using his own life story as an example. He later told me that by teaching by example and sharing his own experiences, he would not only impart to his listeners something to relate to but also how to own one's personal life story. As a listener myself, I can attest to the fact that this is an effective way to learn and to realise general patterns that can apply to anyone's life stories. Being a role model that leads by example is also one of the principles of being a good warrior and Elder.

Life Story and the Tree

Uncle Alfred draws up a tree as he is speaking about life. The roots of the tree reaches into the ground, the ground being the culture a person is born into. The culture is what holds the nutrients that will become a part of that person, like the soil under a tree enables it to grow. The roots of the tree support it, like a person's immediate family of parents, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters and cousins. A person needs the love of his or her family like a tree needs water. Here, Uncle Alfred reflects on his own family, the love and support he had from his parents and his many brothers and sisters. His roots were strong. As he grew up he had different phases and experiences in life: a happy childhood and active school years of playing sports. Each of these phases are the lines drawn in the tree trunk as it grows larger and taller – stronger. Just as Uncle Alfred's tree was branching out to include the experience of having a family and children of his own, he drifted into a dark period of losing himself to alcohol and gambling. Experiencing this painful time in struggle is now part of the tree trunk as a dark patch, and then a fall. This fall is drawn into the picture as a line falling from the top of the trunk and down to the ground again. Without his culture to catch him when he fell, and the continued support of his family, he would not have been able to get back up. But he did, and now this fall and the effort to get back up is also a part of his life story and the make up of the tree representing him. "This is the rainbow of my tree, not yours", he says. Now as an older man, he is able to see his life story from a higher perspective, and he is also able to branch out to include others and help them in their effort to become stronger.

The tree, as metaphor, encapsulates a vivid sense of duration, as the tree is both fixed, in space, and transient, through seasonal changes (Ingold 2000: 204-205). Ingold writes of the

tree in the landscape that by its mere presence “it constitutes a particular place”, because “the place was not there before the tree, but came into being with it” (Ingold 2000: 204). Also, “in its present form, the tree embodies the entire history of its development from the moment it first took root”, and that this “history consists in the unfolding of its relations with manifold components of its environment” (2000: 204). The tree as metaphor in this case, reflects the experience of how a person is fixed within a web of relationships.

Culture, Choice, Control and the *Tomorrow Warriors*

Talking casually with Uncle Alfred on many different occasions, about topics such as family life, friendships and relationships, work, future aspirations or day-to-day experiences, “the three C’s” would often come up. “The three C’s”, or the three mantras, infuse all the metaphorically rich healing models at use in the Men’s Group, and the C’s stand for “*Culture, Choice, Control*”. These mantras reveal that empowerment and healing are surely based on culture – but just as important are the person’s own decisions and habits. Becoming proficient in applying the three C’s in all areas of life, and acquiring the knowledge about one’s personal path to empowerment and healing through the models such as the pouch, the fish and the tree, will lead you to the fulfillment of becoming a *Tomorrow Warrior*. A *Tomorrow Warrior* is the embodiment of *Culture, Choice, Control*.

With the notebook at hand, Uncle Alfred writes and draws on the page as we delve into three different characterisations of the warrior: the *yesterday warrior*, the *today warrior* and the *tomorrow warrior*. The three categories of the warrior are illustrated on the page along a continuum of *strong, lost* and *stronger*. The yesterday warrior being strong, and the tomorrow warrior being stronger. The today warrior is the lost one, the category of the people today who need to get back to their true culture of respect from within, and for whom this work is being done. The goal is to live like a tomorrow warrior: this model is created to help actualise this change, and give people the tools to act it out in their everyday lives. The continuum of *strong – lost – stronger*, is not only reflecting the history of being Indigenous, it is just as much a reflection of the life stories of most men in the Men’s Group. As such, it is a conflation of personal experiences with the wider, impersonal historical context.

To be a *tomorrow warrior* requires you to be stronger. Whereas in the past, culture and tradition was something you did and identity was who you were within the *mob*. Now and in the future, culture and tradition is something you fight to keep, and identity you fight for to continue to become, to be and to pass on. *Tomorrow warriors* fight to validate the pains of the past, fight to heal, and fight for a future of cultural strength, pride and purpose. The fight begins inside, by being brave enough to respect one's self and by starting the work of healing one's self. *Tomorrow warriors* are not trained for combat, they are trained for a cause – but still, and forever, the purpose is to protect – the community, the *mob*.

The image of the warrior is based on a cultural symbol with traditional values attached to it, albeit the category of the *tomorrow warrior* is a contemporary concept, one that is designed to deal with the enemies (problems) of today which have a different character than the enemies of the past. The form of the warrior remains and the content is changed. The *tomorrow warrior* is a cultural and spiritual warrior. The depiction of the *tomorrow warrior* as being *stronger* brings to the fore how this model is all about cultural and spiritual regeneration through empowerment and healing.

Historical trauma – historical healing

Becoming educated on the history of colonisation, and the logic behind it, is an important part of the work in the Red Dust Healing program that Brad talked about, and in the work Uncle Alfred is doing in the Uncle Alfred's Men's Group. Hacking away at the logic of early colonisation is a way of creating Indigenous liberation from this part of history, as it reveals how lies have been placed where cultural ties have previously been. The North African anti-colonial writer Frantz Fanon writes:

“Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.”

(Frantz Fanon 1963: 210, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York, Grove Press in Alfred & Cornthassel 2005: 602).

By placing the problems caused by invasion and settler colonialism within a historical context, the group can collectively find empowerment. Working with history and cultural empowerment in this way, the work Brad and Uncle Alfred are involved with can be linked to the concept of historical trauma, which is defined as “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including the lifespan, which emanates from massive group trauma (Brave Heart et al. 2011: 282). This is a theory that “frames lifespan trauma in the collective, historical context, which empowers Indigenous survivors of both communal and individual trauma by reducing the sense of stigma and isolation” (Brave Heart et al. 2011: 283), and as such it is a theory that describes what is being practiced in the Indigenous community in Townsville today. As opposed to stigma and isolation, this healing work is a refocus on the *connection*, community and strength that can be found and emanates from the Indigenous tradition itself. Research in Aboriginal communities in Canada and the US has shown that “there is clear and compelling evidence that the long history of cultural oppression and marginalisation has contributed to the high levels of mental health problems found in many communities”, as well as the wider societal problems such as substance abuse (Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo 2003: S15). “Healing of intergenerational trauma at the individual level must include family, community and nation, [and] traditional Aboriginal healing practices” (Menzies 2008: 41). The increased awareness of historical trauma and sharing these affects with others in the traditional context would provide cathartic relief (Brave Heart 1998: 287), as would “strengthening ethnocultural identity, community integration and political empowerment” (Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo 2003: S15).

Confronting the logic and lies of colonial history is crucial for Indigenous resistance and empowerment, as it reveals the true story of who they are apart from who they have been told to be by outside forces. The message Brad shared in our conversations is that understanding the events that shape history, and so shape people’s lives, are important in the deeply healing work he is involved with. Understanding history means knowing what happened, and also why and how it happened and what its effects have been and continue to be. The message Uncle Alfred shared in our conversations is the importance of freeing yourself from what happened, and regenerating an authentic self: What had happened is not who you are. Knowing who you are and strengthening the culture form within will reverberate into the community, and beyond. These two men, with many others, are a part of a catalysing change of claiming an Indigeneity that is no longer defined by the oppressors, but by the Indigenous

people themselves (Alfred&Corntassel 2005). By healing intergenerational trauma, within the framework of their own culture and tradition, an authentic and strong Indigeneity is regenerated.

Healing as a form of resistance

The process of decolonisation found through healing and empowerment can be understood as a form of resistance. Keesing examines the concept of resistance of the Kwaio people in the highlands of the Solomon Islands: “The Kwaio traditionalists follow their ancestral religion and customs [...] not out of isolation but out of struggle” (Keesing 1992: 4). Keesing illuminates the fact that resistance for “subaltern peoples or classes” is not always of the dramatic sort and in overt confrontations. Resistance can also be less dramatic, “expressed more or less covertly in hundreds of everyday acts”, and “expressed indirectly, deflected in symbolic and religious form, when overt political action is impossible” (Keesing 1992: 5). This is not to say that armed resistance has never been a part of the struggle. People in Townsville reminded me numerous times that Aboriginal tribes did not let go of their land without a fight like the myths of peaceful settlement depict (Reynolds 1999: 135). Based on his study of historical archives, Reynolds estimates at least 20 000 Aborigines died in the years of the Frontier Wars in Australia while defending their territories (Reynolds 1999: 151).

Keesing show that there is a continuity in the focal themes and symbols of the Kwaio struggle during the last century, namely “law, taxation, sovereignty” (Keesing 1992: 5). Drawing on cognitive linguistics on the internal structures of categories and the metaphoric nature of semantics, Keesing show that the concept of resistance has to be flexible enough to include the “less dramatic: tangled skeins of personal motivation, hidden schemes, private ambitions, as well as conceptions of collective struggle” than what the image of resistance as the “comrades standing together on the barricades” often impart (1992: 6). Keesing says, “if the concept of resistance is to serve us well, it will have to be through its flexibility and metaphoric richness, not its analytical precision” (1992: 6). To this I will argue that there is a conceptual resonance to the way Holm et al. (2003) defines the concept of peoplehood, and to the manner in which I understand and use both these concepts in this thesis. Holm’s concept

of peoplehood bestows the foundation of Indigenous sovereignty while Keesing's concept of resistance describes a subaltern people's struggle to defend it, both concepts are flexible and metaphorically rich, attesting to internal structures as well as overt actions. Furthermore, Alfred & Cornthassel's (2005) concept of Indigenous regeneration can be seen as an extension or as an applied potential for both peoplehood and resistance, as the Indigenous regeneration is an ultimate act of resistance and an utmost confirmation of peoplehood, the culmination of both being cultural survival.

Keesing conceptualize Kwaio resistance as "building on cultural models of separation and containment" and by "compartmentalizing external dangers" (1992: 203). An example of this is the cultural model of the separation between male issues and female issues such as the taboo of menstruation and childbirth, which is to be dealt with as proscribed by the ancestors. The Kwaio people lives separated from their Christian cousins and other peoples in the lowland and on the coast by mountain walls, walls that has been crucial for the upkeep of "cultural fences" (Keesing 1992: 206). Even so, the discourse of resistance for the Kwaio traditionalists has been shaped by structures of culture, because "culturally defined dangers are controlled by being walled off categorically and behaviorally" (Keesing 1992: 203).

Keesing's understanding of Kwaio resistance, used here not as a direct comparison but as a theoretical model, reveals how the structure of culture (*connection*) shape the discourse of resistance (*healing*) also in today's Townsville as it is explained to me by Brad and Uncle Alfred. A model of separation and containment is in some areas of life also a part of Aboriginal culture in Australia, as seen in how men and women have their separate rituals, referred to as *men's business* and *women's business* (Rose 2000: 49). However, the cultural idiom of *connection* that is prevalent in today's Indigenous Townsville, can best be analyzed as a set of relationships, intertwining strings linking the related parts together in a whole. Rose's take on the string concept (2000: 52-56) illuminates the workings of *connection* as a cultural structure. By examining this concept, we will not only see that a cultural structure such as *connection* are "metaphors we live by" (Johnson&Lakoff 1980), they are also metaphors that shape the way a people resist, heal and become empowered. As such the *Connection to Country* is a conceptual system, as it structures experience as well as thought and action (Johnson&Lakoff 1980: 3), from its basis in physical and cultural experience (Johnson&Lakoff 1980: 14).

The string concept explains the specific types of boundaries that form the basis of the Aboriginal maps through the Dreaming tracks. The Aboriginal worldview of differentiated peoples, belonging to and taking care of their different Countries, cultures and languages has come into existence by the conditioning of the Dreamings. The Dreamings are depicted in stories, song and ritual in the culture, and as tracks and places in the landscape. “Unlike European maps on which boundaries are lines that divide, tracks connect points on the landscape, showing relationships between points” (Rose 2000: 52), as well as relationships between Countries and the people who belong to them. This is a type of uniting boundary, since the tracks demarcate “the relationships which connect by defining the differences that divide” (Rose 2000: 52). The Yarralin people in the Northern Territory use the word “string” to explain these tracks or boundaries, as in a web of connections. Rose compare this to a string figure, and how “a single string can be formed into any number of different figures”, where “the particular figure one sees depends in large part on how one defines the context of looking”. Further, “as these strings are also songs and stories, the particular figure depends too upon who is singing or telling, who the audience is, and what the purposes of the performance are” (Rose 2000: 52-53).

The string concept here is a useful imagery to understand the structures of *connection*, often referred to as *connection to Country*, which is a fundamental and essential part of the Indigenous vernacular in Townsville. The string figure visualises how the connections are flexible according to perspective, person, and place, all the while holding together the whole. *Connection to Country* as a structure is accommodating of each perspective possible while never losing its wholeness, this also applies to the perspectives of past, present and future. The strength of *connection to Country* to persist is inherent in its structure, and it is this strength that the healing and empowering work also relies on.

Conceptual categories, the metaphors we live by, are also related to phenomenology: perception and the human bodily experience. Because, “very often, the conceptual core of categories is not only iconic but related directly to bodily experience and orientation, especially spatial orientation” (Keesing 1992: 218). This is also true of the concept of resistance, as the sense of resisting metaphorically implies producing a physical counterforce: “as with electrical or physical resistance one can impede an impinging force by immobility or slowing down; or, by invoking the image of a force drawing the experiencing entity irresistibly toward a vortex, resistance may lie in digging one’s heels in and holding one’s

position” (Keesing 1992: 223). Understanding the concept of resistance metaphorically clarifies an important aspect of the healing project at work in Townsville: that it is really about holding one’s ground culturally and standing firmly spiritually. “Control only what you can” and becoming a “stronger *Tomorrow Warrior*” speaks of this resisting process, with the goal being to protect one’s culture from within, as the “internalisation of your culture into your body becomes a means of preserving and owning the basis of your own identity” (Lattas 1993: 259). The *Tomorrow Warriors* of Townsville do not have mountain walls to help in the upkeep of their cultural fences as the Kwaio people did – the *Tomorrow Warriors* have to construct these walls from within, and so they do based on a structure that is already there: the *connection to Country*.

***Connection to Country* – Empowerment embodied**

This brings us back full circle, to the notion of embodiment and the relationship between people and land inherent in the concept of *Connection to Country*. Tamisari writes that “the phenomenological significance of the body and notions of embodiment in the relationship between people and land” has been overlooked in Australian Aboriginal ethnographic writing (1998: 249). I believe Tamisari’s exploration on the notion of embodiment can shed more light on what was meant by the term *Connection to Country* and how it relates to Indigenous empowerment. Tamisari explores how the image of the footprint with the Yolngu people of East Arnhem Land functions “as a synthesis of living body, vision and movement, perception and intentionality, embodies the dynamic and creative nature pertaining to the fashioning and negotiation of group identity” (1998: 249). In Townsville, Uncle Alfred showed me how contemporary images were used in the work with the Men’s Group, for example the kangaroo pouch. This was an image that, albeit not a synthesis of the living body, embodies intentionality and problem solving on both an individual and a collective level, and it shows the creative nature in fashioning and negating group identity through symbolism. Uncle Alfred’s work with the Men’s Group is an example of how notions of embodiment is at work in contemporary Indigenous life, healing and empowerment. Not only are images used in a creative way within the framework of the community, knowledge about the past is taught and traditional values are passed on from the Elders in the fashioning of group identity. *Connection to Country* is an embodiment of place and of the knowledge belonging to place, and the Men’s Group work is an extension of the same principles: it is an embodiment of

knowledge, and of respect. Respect is the first moral imperative. It is the glue holding *connection* together, it is needed within the self first, then outward to others and it entwines with and emanates from place: *Country*. When respect is embodied in the self, so will group identity become a part of the self. As is shown, this is not only a philosophical system embodied, it is also a pragmatic one. I would argue that this notion of embodiment, this *connection*, is the dynamic that the peoplehood matrix (Holm et al. 2003) is a model of and what is essentially patterning contemporary Indigeneity.

The cultural structure of *connection to Country*, is not only a metaphor you can live by, resist through and heal by, it is also a bodily experience of Indigenous empowerment. When *connection to Country* is restored, healed, and lived through, it will instil the experience of belonging, which is both a mental state and an embodied experience. Belonging will give you a sense of knowing and feeling your place in the web of relationships that make up *Country*, it will affect how you perceive and orient yourself, how you behave, and most importantly: belonging will give you peace of mind, a proud and strong spirit, and purpose from the heart. It is from this empowered and rightful place you can “walk in two worlds” (Uluru Statement From the Heart 2017).

6 Summary – Power of a People

This thesis demonstrates how the Indigenous Empowerment in Townsville is built on the traditional structures of *Connection to Country* as it deals with contemporary challenges and possibilities. Country shows the Power of Place and how place functions as a living repository of stories and memories, knowledge and practices, which are crucial for the Aboriginal understanding and experience of identity. Also, the structure of Country works as the link between past, present and future, and so functions as the anchor between ancestral traditions, Indigenous spirituality and contemporary modes of being. Welcome to Country shows the Power of Words as a venue where the ancestral tie to place as sovereign peoples is being communicated to the mainstream society of Australia. Although this message is understood or actively ignored by some, the Welcome to Country ritual is an important continuance of traditional customs of responsibility to Country. The speeches of this ritual demands acknowledgement for the colonial past and present, as well as the future respect as Traditional Owners of the land. The Smoking Ceremony shows the Power of Ritual, and in this respect deepens the message of the Welcome to Country with its experiential force. A Smoking Ceremony cleanses people and place. This is a culturally significant act which not only regenerate spiritual balance between Country and its First People, it is also welcoming of non-indigenous people to experience the *Connection to Country* structure within the space created by the ritual. Conversations in the final chapter show the Power of History: how understanding the colonial history which has shaped Indigenous lives for two centuries, is crucial in the collective and personal healing. Even more important is knowing the Indigenous peoples' own history as sovereign peoples, connected to their land and culture through thousands of generations. Living with this knowledge: *Being Indigenous* (Alfred & Cornthassel 2005), is an Indigenous resurgence of empowerment from within. This empowerment and healing is fundamentally and essentially built on the structures of *Connection to Country*, as seen in the way Uncle Alfred as an Elder helps those who are struggling with severe social problems affecting Indigenous people in a settler colonial state.

This thesis is a testament to the Power of a People, of their will to not only survive but to thrive. By the cultivation of their own structures of being, relating, learning, knowing and problemsolving – *Connection to Country* – will they continue this story as a First People of Australia and proud keepers and sharers of a culture and a peoplehood that have prevailed since antiquity into modernity.

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Appendix

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