

Article

Reading the Entrails: The Extractive Work of a Fence

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Abstract: This essay offers an evisceration of my troubled links to ‘cattle country’, seeking a truth-telling that responds to my mother’s romancing. I trace my family’s part in the cattle industry imposed upon Jiman Country and Wulli Wulli Country, drawing on stories populated with the hooves of cattle, the flight of emus, and the stare of a goanna. I find myself in uncomfortable territory, complicit in the actions of my settler relatives in this region of Central Queensland, but to not examine this informal archive of possession feels like a lie. The stories that shape me begin with the tales of Mum’s foster-mother, my great-aunt, about the dreadful murderous harms done during the early settler occupation of Jiman Country. My family’s later deployment of this stolen land is a related act of war. I see a related mode of violence in tales of terrified cattle in nearby Wulli Wulli Country, Mum’s girl-self perched on the back of a weary horse, whip in her hand. In all this, there is me, telling tales, like settler writers before me, caught in the writing act, exposed as a fence, dealing in stolen goods, part of the ongoing posts of making up and wires of making do. Nonetheless, I take up my extractive blade, sharpened by a field trip to this region, and carve into my family history, with its legacy of generational violence to humans, cows, waterways, and earth, exposing three extractions: the near-genocidal murders of the Jiman and Wulli Wulli people; the ongoing slaughter of cattle; and finally, there, on the kill floor, entrails exposed, the stories of my mother, laid bare for this critical reading.

Keywords: critical settler studies; extraction; intensive animal agriculture; frontier violence; fences; food sovereignty; rematriation



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1. Introduction

My mother’s father’s family did ‘well’, as the Scottish understatement would have it, by running sheep then cattle on Country tended for millennia by Jiman (Iman, Yiman) and Wulli Wulli communities. All this ‘well’ doing has brought me here, with my analytical blade at the neck of my mother’s stories, stories I have held close all my life. My mother, who I am inexorably becoming, has given me permission to tell her story in my way. She is brave, in ways that old age is sorely testing, and understands why I am going for the guts. Mum’s stories are tender vulnerable things; they shift and turn, moving as fast as free-roaming cattle being rounded up for branding or sale in a muster. I cut Mum’s stories to my chase, churning up regret, remorse, and remaking, as I work to enact the Uluru Statement’s injunction to get on with truth-telling ([National Constitutional Convention 2017](#)), no matter how much it hurts. I begin with this introduction, offering my method and the emotional drive for the project. I follow this with an introduction to the postcolonialist theoretical framework of extraction, working with this approach to then better understand the extraction of First Nation lives, the bare lives of cattle, and the resulting devastation to the possessive territory of my mother’s stories.

My discomfort with the disembowelment of the pastoral narratives of my past is inconsequential, compared to the hurts that this essay confronts. To tell this story of slaughters and fences, I follow, at a slant, the critical approach of sociologist Avril Bell, who mixes ‘genealogical methods to learn the details of family experience, and historical methods to explore the wider context’ of her familial background in a settler context

(Bell 2020, p. 4). As I draw on ethnographic oral history methods, bringing in poetry and fiction to inform my familial story archive, exploring the politics of imagination in the stretch and give of my situated past, with Bell, I see the 'value of critical family history as a method for making [privilege] visible' (Bell 2020, p. 3). To not write is to continue the damaging 'invisibilising', the strategic 'forgetting', that seems a lot like not telling (Bell 2020, p. 3). White lies. As Belinda Borell, Helen Moewaka Barnes, and Tim McCreanor have shown, using Kaupapa Māori methodologies, structural privilege crosses generations in the way that syncopates with transgenerational trauma (Borell et al. 2018, p. 28). The stakes are high.

To begin this de-'invisibilising', I first point to the privilege embedded in the temerity of these ten thousand words. Publication is part of the windfall of privilege, a windfall that is, as Bell points out, all about being situated to gather the fruits that fall (Bell 2020, p. 5). Privilege is not only economic security. Bell's analysis takes me to the factors Borell et al. enumerate as the inheritance of privilege: 'cognitive skills, non-cognitive personality traits valued by employers, income-enhancing group memberships, superior education and health status' (Borell et al. 2018, p. 28). It is not difficult to factor myself into this analysis. Universities are shaped for me, employers understand me, I am a member of various associations, have a PhD, and my life is likely to last for ten years longer than my First Nation counterparts. The structural support the colonial project creates for my whiteness, the fruits of my speaking position, are part of the 'cascade of mechanisms and effects of relative advantage and disadvantage' Bell describes (Bell 2020, p. 14). I give my mother voice, and through this, I silence, rather than amplify, Indigenous voices. In telling my story, over-speaking becomes inevitable.

Further, systemic white privilege underpins my writing. I cannot avoid its 'epistemic violence', that continued invasiveness noted by Palyku writer Ambelin Kwaymullina that coerces, intimidates, or manipulates (Kwaymullina 2016, pp. 441–42). A contribution such as this, to a journal such as this, reinforces the knowledge hierarchies critiqued by philosopher Martin Nakata, a Torres Strait Islander who has outlined the 'savage' work of the institution that frames my writing (Nakata 2007, p. 318). As Nakata points out, each word I speak reinforces the archive's 'particular knowledges'; I 'achieve legitimacy and authority at the expense of other knowledge' (Nakata 2007, p. 318). My words twist into established patterns of violence. Because of the nature of my analysis, I am positioned to fall into the 'settler apologetics' so accurately dismissed by Wiradjuri writer, poet, and academic Jeanine Leane in her patient request for settlers to 'stop appropriating our past for their purposes' (Leane 2014, pp. 13, 15). No matter my intention, my words, by their very existence, subscribe to what Leane aptly critiques as the 'alternative settler myth', an impetus that she traces to the 'great unsettling' of post-Mabo Australia (Leane 2014, p. 14). As Leane makes clear, settler/invasor stories have to be about more than telling; they must redress, not confess.

In short, this essay can do nothing to resettle my past while Indigenous sovereignty remains in legal question. Simply put, as long as sovereignty over the unceded land that was farmed by my family remains ruthlessly unacknowledged without reparation, the perpetuation of my privilege will continue to play out in the stories of my family that I offer here.

None of this was clear to me as a child, listening to Mum's stories of visiting the cattle station in Central Queensland run by her father's cousin. Back then, I characterized Mum as a glorious tougher version of Norah Lindsay, from Mary Grant Bruce's Billabong series. As noted by white settler scholars Kristine Moruzi and Michelle Smith, who have done much detailed analysis of colonial fiction and its reception, the fifteen books that make up the 'Billabong' series were 'fixtures of Australian girls' reading in the early twentieth century' (Moruzi and Smith 2014, p. 193). It came as a jolt, decades later, to find out that Bruce's setting for books such as *Norah of Billabong* was Gunaikurnai Country, a territory down south known now as Gippsland (Bruce [1913] 2019). Nowhere near Central Queensland,

where Mum was born. I put my hand to the fraudulent wiring of my memory and feel the shock.

As I grew older, I started to hear, in Mum's stories, how she was set apart from her childhood years after the untimely death of her mother. She tells of an aged horse she was riding wandering off from the muster, seeking sweet grasses, her child-self giddy with the scent of brigalow, a plant I know as arcacia or wattle. Taken along for the ride, she is lost in the bush, until, at dusk, the horse, 'Old Urquhart', carries her into the sounds of cows being mustered toward the stockyard. No one noticed she was gone. I have always felt for my mother, this unmissed child. Now, in these station stories she tells with such *éclat*, I hear the sound of the brutal killing of Jiman and Wulli Wulli people, the breaking of horses, the penning of cows, and the gasp of land heading for 'desertification' (Massey 2017).

Two years after her mother's death, as puberty loomed, Mum was cut away from the bloody glory of the muster, forced down to the backwaters of Victoria's southwest, to be cared for by her elderly aunt. Mum's station stories were all she had to call her own. No longer the buddy for her widower father, a stoic man who wept when the last of his three children was taken away, she remade herself through her tales of the muster, for Mack, her new best friend who loved the Billabong books as much as Mum. A decade later, in their early twenties, Mack and Mum rode through the sweet smell of Wulli Wulli brigalow together. Mack said, 'I never thought it could all be true, but it is.'

Except Mum was no Norah. She might have lost her mother early, might have been able to ride a horse on a muster from a young age, but it is a social climb too high to position a town girl, one of three mouths to be fed on a council worker's wage, alongside the self-satisfied twelve-year-old Norah, primed for boarding school from birth. The closest Mum got to that social ranking was the other friend she made when she was sent down south. Perhaps it was the gilding on the lily of Mum's stories that attracted the friendship of this girl who shared her shop-bought sweets with Mum and Mack. This Western District girl with money in her pocket for such luxuries lived a life much closer to that of Norah. She had her family's name on the main street and lived on a homestead overlooking the lake outside town, on land that originally stretched out for 65,000 acres. Soon enough, she went to boarding school. George Robinson, 'Chief Protector of Aborigines in Port Phillip District' from 1839 to 1849, wrote of this family, after his investigative visit in 1842: 'White men first gave to the blacks taste for mutton &c and now won't let them eat it' (Clark [1998] 2000, p. 40). All of the violence of the colony was tied up in that gun-backed 'won't let' that builds fences, names roads, and puts spending money in a schoolgirl's pocket.

Those Billabong books. What did Mum think, what did Mack think, what did I think about that passage in the first of the series, where Norah calls eighteen-year-old 'Black Billy' her 'good boy'? (Bruce [1910] 2005) How could anyone believe Bruce's fabrication of mutual delight, where 'black eighteen grinned from ear to ear with pleasure at the praise of twelve-year-old white' (Bruce [1910] 2005). Did I really imagine my mother's family as *this* family, who expected 'Black Billy' to feed 'them night and morning' with the 'unquestioning obedience of a dog'? (Bruce [1910] 2005). Leane gathers such depictions together as part of a larger 'Black captive narrative' where the 'colonial Black savage' functions to create a 'civilised white European' (Leane 2014, p. 10). Small comfort, then, in Mum's story of her childish outrage on one of her first visits to the cattle station, when an Indigenous worker, a girl in her teens, was not invited to sit at the dinner table with Mum and her cousins. Mum was curtly told that the worker preferred to eat alone. There was probably truth in that young woman's need for time to herself, and behind that truth, stories of theft, intimidation, and violence that never got told. Mum sat at the main table, as was expected. She could have done less; she could have done more.

I do not know if Bruce's limitations were obvious to me when I read her books in primary school, but with the help of my paternal grandmother's bookshelves and the local library, I did read the whole set. I interrogate this early immersion in these texts following the directions of critical theorist Jacques Derrida, who explains connections through time,

with all their loosely jointed determinates, have some fluidity, an allowance for movement (Derrida 1994). While memory has a predefined scope confined by post-like systemic regulating ideas, the wiring of this regulation can be cut apart, or at least stretched, to create space for something new. It is disquieting work, pulling at these connections to see them for what they are. White settler and cultural theorist Lisa Slater has demonstrated the necessity of this effort, making it clear how her own positionality as a white settler, shapes her cultural studies framework. Guided by Indigenous thinkers, she describes the need to move from white anxiety to empathy and radical change, a work made possible by approaching settler stories ‘through rupture and forms of estrangement’ so racialized imaginaries might loosen ‘their claims’ (Slater 2019, p. 48). The force of the Billabong books within the way I hear Mum’s stories may never be lost, but perhaps their influence can be redirected.

To revisit my colonizing past in this way is to understand that it has not passed at all. My present is riddled with systemic ‘apparitions’ that can never be removed (Derrida 1994, p. 57). There is no reason I should be different to Bruce, every reason I should make the same mistakes. After the Billabong books dried up, Bruce wrote *The Stone Axe of Burkamukk*. In her introduction, she outlined her aim, presumed pure to her then, tarnished as it is now, to prove to her readers that the ‘old black tribes’, perhaps Gunaikurnai communities, were ‘not so unlike us in many ways’ (Bruce [1925] 2019). For Bruce, her stories were crafted to show the ‘thread of feeling for the nobler side of life, so far as these wild people could grasp it’ (Bruce [1925] 2019). The ‘old tales’ Bruce tells, ‘the tales which may still be had from some old blackfellow or gin’, offer nothing to show where community knowledge ends and Bruce’s imagination kicks in (Bruce [1925] 2019). Her knowledge is tightly restrained in ways that she is not positioned to see. Such are the enclosures of the racism inherent to white privilege, and I am held too, no matter how much truth I strain too loosen that post. In this, I share Slater’s work: I sit with my discomfort holding my ill-at-ease awareness at a distance from the white anxiety that works to disavow or displace Indigenous sovereignty. In detailing the ‘complexity of material encounters’ in the stories of my mother I seek a more productive radical political empathy’ (Slater 2019, p. xvii). This is part of the white work required for Indigenous sovereignty.

Yet I am held captive when Mum floods with storying. I play along with the shudders and gasps in her fast eddies of telling and do what I can to help dredge up the tributaries of her past, so they might flow joy through her body. As she talks, everything I think I know gets mucky with silt, truths become questions, loosening in the messy ebb and flow of remembering. I slide with the weight of it, lose my hold. A too-late push on my phone’s record button, a barely legible scribble, my clutching movements erode the little retained as I cling to the tangled roots of things retold in a different way each time. Mum jokes about it, terrified. ‘I hate being past my damn use-by date!’ It might be just in time. Her stories are losing currency in this unraveling climate. I could stay quiet, hold my breath, let it pass.

2. Fencing Extractions

Fence:

- (i) *a structure that divides two areas of land, similar to a wall but made of wood or wire and supported with posts.*
- (ii) *a person who buys and sells stolen goods. (Cambridge University 2021)*

In 2019, I travelled to Wulli Wulli Country in Central Queensland to add experiential weight to my reckoning of my family’s part in developing the cattle industries that are contributing so significantly to climate breakdown (Liang et al. 2016). The first morning there, and for the two mornings after, I got up at five, prompted by something that felt like a tap on my shoulder. Each morning, the sun was just rising, the vibrant reflections on the Dawson River were distinct, and the birds were present and rowdy. Barely a ripple, the river appearing to be as slow and quiet as the wind. Each morning, a willie wagtail with a message I was too white to understand, hopping from fallen branch to fallen branch

with the urgency of it. An ibis, playing the water like an instrument. This was Theodore at the Junction.

Some way north of the Junction, that watery heart of the town where my mother lived for the first twelve years of her life, the river's polluted flow connects to the Upper Dawson River, as best it can when regulated by a weir. My grandfather, in his role as 'water joey', was paid by the council to make sure settler farmers took no more than their allocation of this precious resource, managed through canals gouged out from the river to create this town. No care for the First Nation communities along the tributaries, watching their life blood choke up.

The town Theodore was a scheme of the Right Honourable 'Red Ted' Theodore, one of his grandiose plans, a manly gesture of White Progress marked by barriers, impediments and blocks, weirs, roads, and fences. Centuries of patterned movements, by foot, paw, fin and wing, forced to find some kind of work-around. Theodore's over-ambitious irrigation scheme survived but failed to prosper. Foreign investment did not flow, the plan was pulled back to the weir and canals, and my grandfather was employed to keep an eye on increments of water for a wage that paid better than catching possums and putting up fences.

The creation of Theodore epitomizes racialized corporate extraction. Following political theorist Cecil Robinson, who explains how 'racialism' will always 'permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism' (Robinson [1983] 2020, p. 2), socio-cultural scientist Macarena Gómez-Barris describes racial capitalism as being less a 'singular event' than a 'historically situated and ongoing' process (Gómez-Barris 2020, p. 2). For Gómez-Barris, extraction is foundational to these 'processes that historically subordinated African and Indigenous populations' (Gómez-Barris 2017, p. xvii). These reordering social structures are traceable in Central Queensland, where the 'social and ecological life' of the communities of Wulli Wulli Country and Jiman Country experienced 'dramatic material change' (Gómez-Barris 2017, p. xvii). The driving force of extraction was and is the core motivation for white settlers who enforce this shift in social power.

I extend Gómez-Barris' theorization of extraction, which focuses on mining, to animal agriculture, as a response to her call for scholars to work with 'submerged' perspectives that refuse the normalization of purposeful extraction (Gómez-Barris 2017, p. 11). This scholarly extraction—from mining to animal agriculture—may be a taking away from Gómez-Barris, if the abacus of careful give-and-take, made present through citation, is in action here. This is acceptable in scholarship, normal, but perhaps it is only as 'normal' as a farmer husbanding life to take it away. I would rather my trajectory be a scholarly infection, an intensification of the excessive gifting of the thought of Gómez-Barris, in the terms of the pure gift outlined by Jacques Derrida, where there is nothing owed nor due in an exchange (Derrida 1992, p. 11). In this intensification, I expand the 'space of solidarity' traced by Gómez-Barris, a space created by 'those who refuse the material and symbolic arrangements of racial and extractive capitalism', broadening the 'mediating capacity of solidarity' (Gómez-Barris 2020, p. 4). While there is mention of 'livestock' in Gómez-Barris' analysis, her work stops at the felling of trees. My inclusion of the animal agriculture industrial complex (Twine 2010) in the conceptual field of extraction focuses on the pasturage created by this deforestation. Gómez-Barris theorizes the route beyond racial capitalism as holding a 'nonstate state', where human and more-than-human relations are so paramount that extraction becomes unacceptable (Gómez-Barris 2017, p. 138). Gómez-Barris makes it clear that there is nothing normal about the 'colonial Anthropocene' driving most of the species known to humans, including our own, to the brink of extinction (Gómez-Barris 2020, p. 7). I add that there is nothing normal about treating intelligent nonhuman beings as if they exist only as a resource for human use. In my extension of Gómez-Barris' intersectional framework, breeding an animal for their death is no more normal than digging into the earth for fuel better left in the ground.

I am supported in this extension by the Afrofuturist work of Aph and Syl Ko. This way of thinking 'allows us to imagine beyond the confines of the dominant system', producing

‘a new conceptual terrain’ which leads to ‘newer ways of approaching oppression and liberation’ (Ko and Ko 2017, p. 132) This perspective makes evident the links between animal exploitation and racialization. The cruelties involved in cattle farming are enfolded in the systemic racism that is still killing Indigenous people. It is a double bind. This is not about comparing the oppression of humans to the oppression of nonhumans, a comparison that is a violence in itself (Ko and Ko 2017, p. 19). In a compelling video presentation by Syl Ko, she states unequivocally, ‘if you want to get rid of these racial ideas you better be interrogating the question of the animal’ (Ko 2019, 43:09). The work required is to point to the ‘common source of oppression, which is systemic white human violence’ (Ko and Ko 2017, p. 11). When such oppression is no longer taken for granted, there is a stronger opportunity for change. The kill floor is a place of blood, of massacre. The righteousness of those operating the blade holds a mirror, for me, to the slaughters of humans, utilitarian deaths that shaped Indigenous Country into farms. My re-routing of the terms framed by Gómez-Barris towards animal agriculture reveals this farming process as a mode of extraction that holds the destructive logic of racial capitalism seen in mining and other industrial development. I will need a sharp blade to ‘turn the gaze’ back on this extractive industry (Gómez-Barris 2017, p. 34). It is inevitable that I will cut myself.

It is a festering cut, my exposure as part-descendant of the Central Queensland cattle barons. About two years ago, I read Xavier Herbert’s canonical novel *Capricornia* (Herbert [1938] 2013) to think with my students about how this cornerstone text has been knocked loose by Waanyi writer Alexis Wright’s blistering respondent novel *Carpenteria* (Wright 2006). The assimilationist politics in Herbert’s novel, alongside his cultural ‘appropriation’, have been convincingly critiqued by cultural studies settler scholar Fiona Probyn-Rapsey (Probyn-Rapsey 2007, p. 168), but at the time of writing, Herbert saw his voluminous work as a radical critique of ‘cattle barons’ such as the Shillingsworths: land-grabbing criminals riding roughshod over Indigenous Country, so they might wear the light-colored pants of those who oversee while others work. Leane notes, in her survey of settler representations of Indigenous lives, that of all these writers, Herbert was ‘the most critical of settlers’. The damnation of faint praise.

Herbert’s story is set in the lands around Larrakia Country, a long haul from Central Queensland, but I see parallels in Mum’s stories. These are different comparisons to those I made reading the Billabong series as a young girl; now, it is the structures I recognize. Herbert’s novel was published three years after my mother was born in Central Queensland, not long before she was first put on a horse at muster time out near Isla Gorge. Mum’s involvement with the cattle industry brings close my family’s part in helping to perpetuate the cultural ravage that underpins pastoral success. Mum’s stories, as with those of Bruce and Herbert, are an enactment of the ‘possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty’ as described by Indigenous studies theorist Aileen Moreton-Robinson, a Goenpul woman of the Quandamooka people (Moreton-Robinson 2015, p. 192). As Moreton-Robinson puts it, ‘whiteness accumulates capital and social appreciation’ because ‘white people are recognized within the law’; they are ‘property-owning subjects’ who are ‘heavily invested in the nation being a white possession’ (Moreton-Robinson 2015, p. xix). The option is to turn from capital accumulation, which is to turn from white social supremacy. This movement is required for resurging Indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous sovereignty, as defined by Moreton-Robinson, ‘is embodied, it is ontological (our being) and epistemological (our way of knowing), and it is grounded within complex relations derived from the intersubstantiation of ancestral beings, humans and land’ (Moreton-Robinson 2008, p. 5). To turn from capital accumulation is a turn that Bruce’s Lindsay family did not imagine, and that Herbert’s Shillingsworth family saw as impossible.

From where I am positioned, decumulating capital and reorienting towards Indigenous sovereignty is not only imaginable and possible, it is essential. Climate recovery through Indigenous sovereignty requires rematriation as conceptualized and practiced by Eve Tuck, an Unangax’ researcher in education and Indigenous studies (Tuck 2011). Rematriation involves an elevation of First Nation ontologies, a vitalization unbounded

by white patriarchy. As Tuck makes clear, the spiraling pathways for this turn are held within the imbrications of ancestral remains and descendent futures. Rematriation calls for returning and strengthening songlines, remarking and remaking old pathways that have the practical spiritual strength that comes with knowledge that is always and already imbued in the materiality of land. The ongoing presence of this ontology confirms there is nothing normal about cattle barony, with its property titles based on feudal law. As Moreton-Robinson puts it, property law is 'regulated by race' to ensure the only ontology with recognizable power is masculinist and white (Moreton-Robinson 2015, p. 193). White property is marked by fences, and in white cattle farming communities, the cost of these 'legal' fences is shared. The cost of their existence should also be held equally. My family's settler theft, my white privilege, is maintained in posts that stand because of calculated murders and ongoing theft. Indigenous sovereignty requires nothing less than cutting down the ideological wiring that maintains these bloodied boundaries.

3. Extracting and Eviscerating Life from Land

The Dawson River, confluent with the Upper Dawson River, is a waterway that runs through Jiman Country, where the infamous Hornet Bank Massacre took place in 1857. The marking of this historical event, the Hornet Bank Massacre, does not memorialize the deaths of hundreds of Jiman people but rather refers to the deaths of eleven settlers and one displaced Indigenous man who were occupying Jiman Country at that time without local permission. The word massacre in the title of this historicized event, all its capitalization, attempts to silence the other story of murdered men, raped women, stolen children, poisoned dogs, and all the pain of the white violence that preceded and followed this inevitable confrontation.

Marcia Langton, one of this country's most revered and respected scholars and activists, has Yiman sovereignty. She has spoken of the 'horror stories' carved into the recent generations of her ancestry and has taken her family to Yiman Country to see the graves of her executed ancestors ((Trenoweth 2020). Her grandfather 'belonged to the Yiman people' and was born 'on the banks of the Upper Dawson River' (Robb 2011). This is far too close for comfort.

Jane Atkinson writes of a dream that is part of her Jiman heritage, as she opens her description of the traumatic fallout that comes with a century and a half of attempted theft of her family's Country. An epigenetic pain, imprinted in Atkinson's dreamscapes, is sounded 'from the very depth, the very core of our being, rising up through our throats as a wailing, as a song, as a prayer to the earth and the wind and the sky and the sea' (Atkinson 2002, p. 2). The work Atkinson does, in her dream-response to the massacre of her Yiman family, amplifies the 'informed imagination' that Leane describes, one made from 'bits and pieces of archival information and snippets of story and memory from loved ones', as well as 'transgenerational blood memory' (Leane 2017, p. 250). This is the 'practical application of Aboriginal memory politics' that Leane calls 'docu-memory' (Leane 2017, p. 248). Atkinson's scholarly research goes on to position the situation clearly: 'stolen lands, deprivation of food supplies, the killing of hunters, the poisoning of waterholes and—the final trigger for the Jiman attack—the sexual violations of young Jiman women' (Atkinson 2002, p. 89). Atkinson embodies and describes how these murderous decades are 'locked in the psyches' of the dispossessed (Atkinson 2002, p. 90), from the escalation of war crimes that led to the Hornet Bank bloodshed, to the ensuing years of semi-legalized killing that created the opportunity for fences to be built by my mother's family, fences that hold the horror of Atkinson's dreams.

The bloody work of a massacre is written with a scalpel to the heart in Leane's poetry. First, the pain of Country. 'Whirling water weeps. Fish flee a different meeting from times past/by brown water' (Leane 2010b, p. 6). The pain of the bereft. 'Women wail, babes howl. Elders groan and cringe' (Leane 2010b, p. 6). Massacre leaves its mark. 'Spirals of blood stain the creek' (Leane 2010b, p. 6). This is what it looks like. 'Men dead, women raped and ravaged, elders slaughtered/babes captured and slaughtered' (Leane 2010a, p. 6). The

'colour of massacre' is 'blood red', as Leane writes elsewhere, bled out in 'syllables in time—/full of sound and fury, punctuated by/blows, blood and screams' (Leane 2016, p. 113). These sounds are differently enacted in the verse novel of Yankunytjatjara and Kokatha poet Ali Cobby Eckermann in the chop of the syllables, their 'hack/hack/hack' (Eckermann 2012, p. 10). As Eckermann says elsewhere, 'There are big stories. These are the stories that live in the land.' (Eckermann 2020, 19:12). Leane makes the same point: there is 'blood everywhere in the archive' (Leane 2017, p. 250). Part of that archive is the stolen land that is written in the shift of my mother's stories. Land that holds the raw of the kill floor.

Mum's father was born and bred into this legacy. He lived and worked on occupied Jiman Country, before he married and moved to Wulli Wulli Country, the region where my mother spent her school holidays on his cousin's station. He would have known of the Hornet Bank Massacre, but *how* he knew the story is unknown to me. I do know that his sister had an opinion. My great-aunt, who moved to southwest Victoria as a young woman, who built a home there that made motherless Mum welcome, told Mum hushed stories of community afternoon teas for the well-to-do of Taroom. She said they talked as if 'butter wouldn't melt in their mouths', these rich people who had relatives in the past who had poisoned flour as part of their doing 'well'. The shame of it. Perhaps she was passing on the confabulated story of an unnamed Taroom family, a family who was pointedly not the 'us' telling the story, a family who were said to have given poisoned Christmas pudding to the Jiman people. Setter historian Gordon Reid writes of this incident with caution, using terms such as 'it is believed' and 'apparently', citing two newspaper articles written a century after the incident, together with an interview he conducted, and goes on to state he does not think the Hornet Bank Station family would have done such a thing (Reid 1982, p. 54). Mum does not tell if my great-aunt made the point that these murders facilitated the building of her own family's fences. My great-aunt probably knew it, she knew more than most. She knew language, spoke it with my grandfather, old words taught to them by the children they played with on the station. Language they used when they did not want Mum to know what they were saying. Perhaps in their shared childhood play, my grandfather and great-aunt learned old truths about the deaths haunting Atkinson's dreams. I have no way of knowing the stories held in these old words, just as there is no way of hiding from the fact that my grandfather and his sister profited from their family's fences.

Stories such as these, profits such as these, are why families such as mine, and Herbert's Shillingsworths and Bruce's Lindsays, have been rightly charged of theft by Indigenous leaders. Stories such as these are precisely why I am personally addressed by the words of the visionary political strategist Kwementyaye 'Tracker' Tilmouth, a community leader stolen as a child from his Arrente family. In Alexis Wright's skillful compilation of interviews with Tilmouth, alongside those who worked closely with him, he tells her about the harm of cattle barony to his and Wright's families' sovereign homes:

We moved through the land and we took what we needed from it. That stopped. That stopped when white blokes turned up and said, Well! You can't come across here because I've got a barbed wire fence and I want to run cattle over here, so I don't want you blokes burning the grass. So everything has changed dramatically. (Wright 2017).

Mum's family, my family, built those barbed wire fences to contain and facilitate the extraction that goes with 'running cattle' for profit. When my mother was a child, this invasive occupation was called progress, a word used to elide the fact that the livelihood of my mother's family could only be forged from Central Queensland's white occupation. As Moreton-Robinson makes clear, my family's farm was yet another white holding, a cattle barony built from white apostrophes and possessive nouns: Mum's stories of *her* family's station's fences holding in *their* cattle. Such a chill in the way these words form in my mouth. Butter would not melt in it.

4. Extracting Livelihoods

Along the secondary roads that lead into Theodore, cattle wander along the verges, where the grass is greener from dew that flows off the roadway's sealing. It is only the rattle of the cattle grids that make the fences apparent. In 2019, I drove, with my family, through these out-paddocks that are required for an industry built on the brutal extraction of lives. We drove slowly, not wanting to hurry the deaths of those thinking creatures fattening into meat.

I saw another killing in motion every morning I was in Theodore at the Junction. The Dawson River carries a deathly load, a toxic burden formed from the ongoing attempts to violently reframe living relations as 'commodities' (Gómez-Barris 2017, p. 5). A group of cows emerged each morning, across the water at the river's other edge. One cow white, one cow black, one cow grey, one cow red. They waded into the river, through the thicket of introduced weed, and drank the water, murky as it was with blue green algae, making a start on the 70 liters each of them needed to drink on those hot days (FutureBeef [2011] 2021). I saw the beauty of the cows, slowly emerging through the river mist. I saw their certain grace as they ripped through the weeds. I saw how hard it was for them to drag their thirsty bodies through the grey-brown slush beyond the weeds, necks craning for fresher water in the deep. They were quenching a thirst that comes after foraging over ground previously managed for smaller softer-footed creatures. Then, off they went, away from the river to plough their cloven hooves through the scrub, eating all they could, flattening the habitat needed by little pied bats and the brigalow scaly back and golden geckos (Queensland Government 2013, p. 6), working their way to putting on enough weight to be loaded into a truck headed for the kill pit. Just another resource, this cash crop, grinding down fragile plant species, taking away space for the lives of other animals. Cattle farming is a livelihood that smashes the possibility of other lifeways.

The harmful extraction I watched, across the compromised Dawson River, need not stay in place. Tilmouth saw this, as he saw most things, with clear eyes set on white capital decumulation. He spoke from experience drawn from his time as a young stockman, from his time as the inaugural chair of the Central Australian Aboriginal Cattlemen's Association, and from his lifetime of listening to his elders. All this history, informing his argument that 'the best contributor to the economy', at least in the Northern Territory, Herbert's *Capricornia*, Wright's *Carpentaria*, 'is actually horticulture': 'the mango farmers and the fruit and veg farmers' put 'more money in the Territory coffers than the live exports combined', and in contrast, the 'beef industry is not there' (Wright 2017). Tilmouth's analysis can be aligned with scientific measures of the unsustainable negative environmental impacts of the cattle industry (Liang et al. 2016). This is difficult terrain. Contemporary cattle farms include properties managed by Traditional Owners seeking the economic advantage that leads to the positive health indicators and further education that my body represents. In a good season, there is money to be made.

Yet, often these communities are farming damaged land rarely capable of offering a bare subsistence, returned like a wrung-out rag. A different mode of thinking is required, and thinkers such as Tilmouth have plenty of ideas. Tilmouth's redirections can be situated in the context of the sovereign food rights movement. As white settler and social and political scientist Christopher Mayes points out, with the weight of history supporting his argument, First Nation 'ontologies and epistemologies' need to 'set the terms and conditions of food sovereignty' (Mayes 2018, p. 140). This is what repatriation looks like. My work here is not to offer a solution. I do not hold the sovereign decision-making rights. It is the First Nation communities who will decide how to manage the cattle industry, as they rebuild their rightful sovereignty. What I can do is to accept that the extractive cattle industry, which the body of my family has benefited from, has not been, in any way, sustainable, or fair. The work my family did to extract the livelihood and lives of the Wulli Wulli and Jiman nations, the damage still being done in extracting the lifeways and the life of a river that cannot support the bare lives of condemned cattle; all this claiming of 'resources' is part of the stark violence that haunts Atkinson in her dreams. Mum's

stories, her memories, cannot be excised, but, as with Bruce's *Billabong* books, I hear them differently than I did as a child.

Mum's stories began to change for me when I was not much older than Mum was when she came to Victoria. I had gone, with Mum and Dad and the youngest of my three older siblings, to the station that Mum had told us about all our lives. I knew her stories of rounding up cattle on the back of a horse, breaking to eat sandwiches of corned beef, as well as I knew myself.

The road we traveled was rough, as much grass as it was gravel. Mum probably told her story of 'holding on for dear life', bouncing around with the other kids on the back of a one-ton 'ute', a utility vehicle with thin tires that ran along old ruts made from the wheels of carts dragged by horses that probably followed older tracks made by bare feet that tread in stories so much more deeply than these white man ruts.

Mum was agog but nothing felt different to me. Flat paddocks, a few bare trees. The same as I had seen on the long car trip to get there. The brigalow bulldozed before I was born. Then, we passed some emus. As they raced alongside the car, the four of us now alert with delight, Mum cried out, 'Stop.' Then, her voice more urgent, crankier, 'Stop! I said bloody stop.'

Dad stopped, as he does, not that quickly. We were heading to lunch.

Mum walked us back to a goanna, two meters long, winding its way up a tree. It dug its claws in and gave us an unblinking 'piss-off-why-don't-you' look. I knew that glassy stare through one of Mum's odd turns of phrase, part of the body of language she had brought down from the north as a girl. These were the glimpses of language known by my great-aunt and grandfather. The private boondie, the stones and bark of gibbagunya, the deliciousness of belboudjerie. There were English words used differently too, port for case, ice block for icy pole, togs for bathers. On angry occasions, there were oddly emphasized words, such as *goanna eyes*. On the road to the station, the meaning of that cutting slur became as real as the grey dirt at my feet. Mum, livid with the older of my sisters. 'Don't you dare give me those *goanna eyes*'. My oldest sister, as defiant as Mum, as stubborn as Dad, resenting this mother without a mother, staring into her temper with a flat stare. 'Get the strap.' A job best done slowly, to cool down the heat of Mum's anger, tail between the legs, not the insolent slouch of my sister heading to her late teens. 'Get a bloody move on or you'll get another one to go on with.' Mum's father's belt, a strip of Queensland cowhide slung on the door of the kitchen cupboard. The slap of one animal's skin against the skin of another.

When we got to the station, Mum's father's cousin was waiting for us, a bowed old man, brother of the hero cowboy in my mother's stories, a man with a penchant for lairizing, Mum's admiring word for making a show of yourself to be noticed.

Sometimes, between eating lunch and drinking tea, someone would sneak out and turn a saddle back to front. One day they did that to me. I said, 'I don't care, I can ride a horse the other way.' I got on and wasn't comfortable but I stayed there, lairizing. Those horses weren't ponies, they were stockhorses. My horse bolted. [The hero cowboy] got on his horse and galloped after me and lifted me off like I'd seen done in movies. I thought it was the most exciting thing that could have happened, but he gave me a real dressing down. He was probably worried about the horse breaking the reins. He was usually a really easy going fellow.

The brother of Mum's rescuer stood in the shade of the veranda, next to his aproned wife. Our trail of dust settled behind us. In we went.

In that small worn house, Mum was nothing like hoity-toity Norah of Billabong. It was not just that the place had seen better days. Mum had always talked about her mother as a governess, or as the station owners' daughter's best friend, but here my grandmother, that loving mother who died too young, was a cleaner, a babysitter, a bottom wiper, a dish washer, the child of an unknown father. Mum, reduced to a distant town cousin born of a scandal-surrounded station hand.

That was in no way the worst of it.

Finished with lunch, the old man flicked a look at the small windows of the kitchen and suggested a walk. His wife stayed inside, out of the heat. My sister walked ahead with me, to the grey sand of the dry riverbed. There, in the hot bright air, the past rushed in with the high color of Mum's stories.

I was horse mad. We'd ride into the bush for the whole day, lairizing. The creeks had big banks when they were dry and we did deeper and deeper jumps down to the sand, daring each other to go further. I did one jump that was fifteen feet down. That's how big the rivers were when they ran.

Fifteen feet is about five meters. If a house is three meters high, that is a story and a half. The riverbank near the house was not that steep, but any horse, given a choice, would keep a distance. I looked to the range, as far as Mum used to ride, and let Mum's bold girl-self gallop into its blue distance.

Behind us, Mum talked about the smell of brigalow, and the old man talked of drought. The space had made the old man as loquacious as Mum. Dad had taken shade under a nearby tree and was rolling a smoke. A farmer too, on a dairy down south, he had his own drought to deal with. If Mum had not gone back to teaching, a privilege granted by her education, we might not have had a farm to farm. My sister and I were asked if we would like to see the old house. We walked towards the small building, Mum and her father's cousin in step behind us.

The old house's hinge-loose door was jammed into the concrete step. To the side, kerosene drums, broken chairs. The old man scraped the door open and stepped back. My sister and I dared each other with a look, entered the dark room. Cracking saddles, rust in the stirrups, spider-webbed bridles, an iron bed with a ticking mattress, its black-lined cream reminding me of my great-aunt's pillow.

There were two weak shafts of light from two holes in the wall, shown by motes of dust. A flicker of light, perhaps a cloud passing, then the light shone stronger through the holes. A slow click of understanding, a violent turn in my guts. That round hole at chest level was the size of a gun barrel. The other, higher, was just the right size for an eye to peer out. I looked at my sister and she got it as well, and we turned, saw the old man watching us, his brown plaid flannel shirt tucked tight in his high-belted grey workpants, blue heeler at his side. Mum's last photo of her father, come alive.

Mum's stories jump up in anxious denial. My grandfather, the only white man in Theodore to dip his hat and greet the woman reviled for her temerity in living in town as 'a half-caste'; shamed for marrying a white man. My grandfather, the only white man who did not cross the street to avoid her. 'Dad's respect was so palpable for us.' My grandfather, the only white man invited to fish at the black camp, a man who could tell the weather by the turn of a leaf and who ate bush tucker. Bush tucker is a term used to describe food harvested by First Nation communities since before white invasion. It saved white lives during early colonization. The term is now often appropriated without any consideration of sovereignty, part of a process that Araluen describes where 'our language, culture, and country circulate as commodities' (Araluen 2017, n.p.). Here my grandfather was, standing in the bloodlines of a man who took us to see a house built for killing. This was not the station I had expected, but it was, without doubt, the station of my family, the station that I was born to, the station held by my blood. I cling to Eckermann's words, 'not everyone back then was a murdering bastard' (Eckermann 2020, 33:34). Faint praise. Damn. Butter wouldn't melt in my mouth. I let those words go.

I went out to the station a second time, during my field trip to Theodore, again with my parents and sister, and, this time, my other sister and my brother came as well. My siblings, like me, are middle aged, our parents are old, there were no *goanna eyes* between us. It was a rare chance to be together, listening to Mum's stories.

This time, the road was well graveled, well traveled, but the land was just as dry, another drought, and it had been going on for years, the land, playing dead. Mum said, 'When you have a real drought, the grass isn't brown, it's grey.' This was the grey of the

sandy desert we were driving through, towards the station of Mum's stories, and it was not the worst that Mum had seen.

The worst drought I ever saw was in 1948. The cattle would go in the creek trying to get the water and because there was no feed they were weak and they'd get bogged. And because this drought had gone on so long, there was no money, so they couldn't afford to shoot them. So they'd just go up to the cattle, and between their horns, you'd dig straight into their brains ['with a pocket knife']. You'd cut a triangle and that was the quickest way to kill them . . . that was the best way to kill them because they were starving . . . They went round all day, where there were dams or creek holes or wherever there was any water, just to kill the cattle. They were starving and in the mud. It was horrible, just horrible.

Such horrors, and still these creatures bred and killed on this land. Like the land, it seems like there is just no end to it.

In Mum's station stories, there is always horror under the verve. 'My very favorite book when I first came to Victoria was *Man-Shy*, probably because of Little Cow.' Frank Dalby Davison's first novel, written four years before Mum was born, is a gentle work written from the perspective of a free-living red heifer who resists capture (Davison [1931] 1961). Little Cow was 'the calf of our house cow, Betty', who also had a mind of her own. Only Mum could convince Betty to come into the hold of the milking bale. Little Cow got big, the neighbor's loaned paddock had too little grass, so she was put on the station to become meat.

Then, at muster time, I saw Little Cow. We'd brought the mob in the night before and the men were busy, branding and drafting. We kids were looking on. I saw Little Cow, jumped over the rails and into the thick of the cattle. I wasn't worried, the cattle were scared of humans. We had whips. Not that I would have jumped in if there were bulls.

The terrified cows return me to Atkinson's dream, where the slippage of her dream self, 'from human to animal', has stayed with her; it is the shared 'terror of our flight' that helps her 'understand the terror of massacre' (Atkinson 2002, p. 3). Mum knows how to crack a whip. In she goes, down in a leap from the rails that she and the rest of the kids could run on, five feet high and no thicker than my flat hand.

I said, 'Little Cow.'

She did a standing jump, a foot away.

I was devastated. 'Oh, Little Cow.'

She shuddered.

'Little Cow.' I touched her. She shuddered again.

I kept trying until a few minutes later Little Cow was letting me cuddle her.

I begged Dad to take her back.

It didn't happen.

Little Cow, a rangy creature now, penned as beef instead of fenced as a pet. Little Mum, a child who knew mothers and daughters rightly live together.

About halfway into the drive to the station, three emus rush from the approach of the car. As we stop and step onto the dry dirt, they hurl themselves over a fence and melt into a dusty haze. Emus do not jump fences, they tumble over them, pick themselves up, pick up speed again. Perhaps they are following old tracks. Sometimes they spill their guts on the fences and die. We had chased them to this potential death by interrupting their drinking from the few puddles of water left in a dry creek. I walk over the rough bridge, imagine the wall of high waters approaching at a rush from the hills after rain, cracking the air with a sound like thunder. It has been a four year-long drought and this place looks like it needs a break.

We arrive at a high fence around a titled homestead that is nothing like I remember, but the sign is clear, this is the same cattle station in Wulli Wulli Country, run by the same people who share a modicum of my blood. My grandfather's cousin and his wife are gone,

and now Mum's second cousin is in charge. We are met at the house gate by his son, my first cousin, twice removed. At least, I think that is the right description. In white families such as ours, nothing is as simple as the all-encompassing uncle or cousin, easy belongings that other cultures around me use to refer to their extended family. In my family culture, we attempt precision in these gradations. Perhaps because there are inheritances to consider, to squander.

We talk of the drought. Years of it. The creek down from the house is mostly stone and sand, with a few pools of still water. The land around us is hard and grey. As we chat, an old man arrives from somewhere over a rise beyond piles of rusting farm machinery. It is Mum's cousin, the boy she remembers riding a horse at four years old. Tossed off, barely a lisp of complaint. Pride his main hurt. He laughs at her story, embraces her, there are tears, it has been a long time. We are taken under his son's house for afternoon tea. Tea in hand, the old man tells his stories like Mum. The first is of a flood that took the river head-high over where we sit.

The precarity of their lives is a revelation.

Then, the old man tells another story. I miss most of it because I have been called to watch the children be watered on a trampoline, but I know the story from Mum. It is from the old times, before Mum or this old man were born. Mum does not know who it was and nor does the old man, but the story is the same. In its doubling, it gains a stronger truth. In Mum's words, which are all I have, this unnamed relative nearly shot one of his friends.

In the distance, he didn't know who it was. He was thinking it might have been a marauder. He might have seen one out and thought more behind. He's out there, miles away from anyone. He's the only one in the place.

He was part of my family, this man who nearly shot a friend for walking up to the house, unannounced. My relative, 'the only one', his visitor, dark in the shadows, on foot, when he should have been weighing down a horse. It is a story with fear and silence and shame and gung-ho guns at the ready. My distant relative, ready to shoot. I hear, in this story, others who do not count as friends, others, unbound by fences, others always present as a threat. This is a story that goes way back. Such irony in the way the old man uses the same word as Mum, 'marauder', the one who raids, who extracts, who takes what is not theirs to take.

Encouraged by my interest, the old man describes stealth attacks along the creek, making the relations I infer transparent. He tells a story from back in the days when the water always flowed and rarely flooded. The 'blackfellas', he says, as if telling a ghost story, were preparing to attack the house, moving under the brown waters, breathing through a reed, as hidden as any fish in water. Did my family shoot at these people? Perhaps they did, they did enough to hold on to what they called *their* land. There was a family fight at this station so serious that there was, for a time, a fence that divided this old Queenslander's yard in two. The kids, accidentally on purpose kicking a ball over the fence to have a play. Fences marking out property and push.

I am given a self-published family history and take snaps of lifeless people I do not know. My grandmother and grandfather are nowhere to be seen despite the photos of their marriage that Mum and her siblings hold. I ask about the old house, am told it has fallen down, am invited to have a look and so I do. It looks like bleached bones, this pile of tin and wood with too much history to cart away. A small herd of scrawny cattle, pressed against the stockyard in the distance, are lit by the late sun into a fleeting glow of gold. They, like me, are out of place. Here, all the better to be gone.

5. Extracting Lies

This fragmented account of my family's actions, with its denormalization of the cattle industry, hinges on the ongoing theft of Indigenous Country. This truth takes a great deal from Mum's stories. I bare her heart and history, story her heroics into villainy, and Mum comes along for the ride, despite the hurts in this narrative shift. She gives me permission to write, reads my words and barely makes a change. Some would call her bravery reckless.

I say she is a woman of political will who understands it is better to say something than stay within a harmful self-silencing that does nothing at all. I am my mother's daughter, taught not to tell lies. Two straps from my grandfather's belt, one for the misdemeanor and one for the untruth.

In the weeks leading up to our family visit to Theodore, Mum read Bruce Elder's settler account of the Hornet Bank Massacre (Elder 2003). Reading it made her 'sick at heart'. It is a familiar sickness, this ache, and writing this account is part of the work of an embodied repair, creating the hurt needed for any kind of healing. I gather up all that Mum spills from her gut and read the entrails, making up my kind of truth. Yet, even with my best effort, I cannot wrench out the post of my privilege, cannot cut the wire of how I see things. Fences taint my blood as green algae taints the Dawson. Mine is just one kind of truth, told with a hope for the best, holding the wires of what I know open, perhaps making space for something to pass through the boundaries of my history. Perhaps room enough for other kinds of knowing.

Twenty-two appropriative and ruthless white tropes have been deftly exposed by Bundjalung poet and editor Evelyn Araluen, and the one this work risks most is the appropriative surface-level desire for the token, the trophy, the white hunger for virtue signaling, 'available for purchase in a range of hand-dyed linens' (Araluen 2021, p. 33). To hope I have done otherwise is, literally, a vain hope. My failure is demarcated by a 'they' Leane describes, a 'they' who inescapably include me. 'Their pens brand us so deep it stains us to the bone, / Filled with ink that flows to pages like / our blood on our land / white history always / writes us wrong.' (Leane 2010a, p. 13). As I hear Leane's counsel, another of Araluen's tropes enters, that of white fright, 'it's getting dark now', and in the shadows of my uncertainty I yearn to retreat, to 'turn back' (Araluen 2021, p. 33). I write on, knowing I will be writing it wrong.

The truth-telling in the poems of Leane, Araluen and Eckermann, in the dreams of Atkinson, in the grief of Langton, in the plans of Tracker Tilmouth, call me to respond with as much truth as I can, no matter how fraught and risky it might feel. Yet, so much space is occupied by my writing. An essay such as this extracts the potential for other knowledges to be heard. Space that belongs to the storytellers of Wulli Wulli Country and Jiman Country. No matter my intention, my voice is preset for extractive ingress. My white skin in the game. reinforces the relations that harm Wulli Wulli families and Jiman families, no matter how hard I try to write against this grain. I am writing through my academic training, and, as Indigenous rights scholar Sheryl Lightfoot puts it, speaking from her position as Anishinaabe, a citizen of the Lake Superior Band of Ojibwe, universities are 'extremely extractive' (Lightfoot 2019). My settler university, that has partially funded this work, has coffers fueled by the eugenics research that supported the removal of Indigenous children, like Tracker, from their families My training is a wire held tight by the post of my privilege. Bruce was the same and so was Herbert. I keep writing when I could be listening.

Yet, on I write, hoping to tell truth enough to avoid the cut of the family strap, knowing that in doing so, I sustain the system. My family stories are part of the structures I work to make strange, but as I write to pull the posts down, barbed, I am held tight to the wire. I cannot give away my past, held still, yet still I write, working to deregulate my future.

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